



This month's circle story comes from Anna Jones-Skeide. How she discovered PeerSpirit and circle work is artfully told below, and her tale is intercultural and international in scope. We thought this expansive view of circle work would provide inspiration as we head into the new year. Thank you Anna.

## Circle Tale #47, January 2004 A Circle Tale from Germany

I am in awe of the magic of the circle. I have just returned from a most amazing circle experience. I learned that I really can trust the circle and I believe that something very special has been set in motion as of today.

Let me backtrack for a moment.

I am an American living in northern Germany. Through a chain of events, I became a member of an intercultural women's organization. From the very beginning of my association with this organization I was aware of the tremendous potential for groundbreaking intercultural understanding and growth among the women who were already members. At the same time I was aware of a high level of negative energy and sometimes total chaos within the group. There was much unresolved conflict and many members were becoming so disillusioned that they resigned their memberships without even trying to stay and work through the difficulties. Meetings almost never started on time and once they got going they could drag on for hours without ever accomplishing a thing. Even the most enthusiastic and motivated women became despondent, but for some reason that I really can't explain, I stuck with the organization.

As I became more and more involved, I was asked to take on a part-time position as coordinator, office manager, and PR person. Realizing that I needed inspiration, I contacted my long time friend and mentor, Cathy Scherer, who lives on Whidbey Island, WA. I asked Cathy if she could recommend some good resources for intercultural teambuilding. Cathy immediately emailed me with the advice to get a copy of **Calling the Circle**. When I started reading, I couldn't put the book down.

Several weeks after first reading the book, I called a small circle of three women from the organization to test the method and begin working through some of the chaos. The women were amazed that we could conduct a meeting, start on time, end on time and come to mutual conclusions without having a big argument or power struggle.

I continued spending many hours meditating, journaling, reflecting and reading *Calling the Circle*.

Whenever I had the opportunity, I talked about PeerSpirit Circling to various members of the group and to generate interest and curiosity in how this could help us to become more effective in our work and in our working relationships. Part of my problem was (and still is) that **Calling the Circle** is not available in the German language and German is the only language that we have in common in our multicultural organization.

Finally, I persuaded the members to let me conduct a weekend teambuilding workshop. In preparation for the workshop, I translated the circle agreements into German and mailed them to each of the participants along with three basic questions: What do I expect from this organization? What do I want to accomplish as a member? What can I contribute?

The workshop convened on a brisk October weekend in a lovely youth hostel in one of our city's most beautiful wooded parks. There were nineteen participants from ten different countries. We started after dinner on Friday evening. We were all tired from the workweek and many participants were totally skeptical about this "PeerSpirit" stuff. I could feel the negative energy, resignation and skepticism as we entered the conference room.



We started by pushing all the tables against the wall and arranging the chairs in a circle. I placed a candle, a stone, my copy of **Calling the Circle**, and a copy of our organization's charter in the center of the circle. Native American flute and drum music were playing in the background. I opened the circle by lighting the candle. Next, we spent one minute of silence and followed with the Three Breaths. Then we all held hands and sent an energy charge three times around the circle by alternately squeezing hands. Each participant in turn checked-in by stating what she hoped to glean from attending this workshop. In storytelling fashion I told of the First and the Future Culture and reiterated the PeerSpirit agreements. I also discussed the principles of the Star Team, which I translated from Cathy Scherer's book, *The Internationalists*. After a bit of discussion about the next day's agenda we closed the circle with another minute of silence and squeezing hands.

The atmosphere was calm and peaceful and in spite of our initial weariness, we spent the rest of the evening in the lounging area of the hostel just talking and getting to know each other better. I must admit that I hardly slept a wink on Friday night – something like stage fright for the coming day. Although I would normally have been exhausted after an almost sleepless night, I was up and about long before the other participants crawled out of bed. I went up to the seminar and set the stage for the day's workshop by opening all the windows to let in the positive energy of the rising sun and the invigorating autumn air. This time I pushed all the chairs against the walls and lugged up huge sofa pillows from the lounge to make sitting on the floor cozier. The room felt filled with the right spirit.

After a few moments of quiet meditation I went back to the round up the participants for morning gymnastics led by one of the members. This bit of exercise was just what we needed and after a hearty breakfast buffet we were ready to start.

In a large circle with a candle and the music of Enya, we sat quietly for a few moments. After the check-in round, we reviewed the Circle Principles, Practices of Council, and the Four Agreements. We stated the questions that we wished to answer in our day's work and then separated into three smaller circles, one for each corner of the room. We agreed that each circle would have a guardian and a scribe to record the outcomes. We also agreed to rotate the participants in each circle after working on one question for a set time. That way we would have a better chance to get to know the other members. It worked beautifully! In three hours we had scrolls upon scrolls of input ready for presentation. After lunch, we reconvened in the large circle. This time one person from each group presented their group's "answers" to the questions. We elected a team to act as the planning committee for 2003 and this team was given the scrolls to use as a basis for developing the program for the coming year. Never before had we been able to accomplish so much in such a short period of time with total focus and harmony. I went to the window and looked out at the waning day and wept for joy.

We were fortunate to have a member who led us in a most refreshing session of relaxation exercises and a dream journey. It was the perfect way to wind down after a long day of concentration. When we drew back into the large circle for our final segment, no one really wanted to leave. Before check out I read the poem "Community" by Starhawk from Chapter 4 of **Calling the Circle**, which I had translated into German. Spontaneously several other participants had inspirational poems and thoughts to share as well. Then each person in the circle made heartfelt positive closing statements for check out. The hugs and the enthusiasm were genuine and heartrending as we parted our ways.

That was October 19, 2002.

It's now October 28, 2003.

Our organization has gone through many struggles and challenges. We have made some tremendous accomplishments, which are being recognized and acted upon in the local and state government. We have come up with some innovative ways to effectively bridge the gap between immigrant citizens and the establishment. For example, we have established parenting and early childhood language development programs; a volunteer mentoring program; and a series of effective communication seminars.



Things haven't been perfect by any means, but the times when the members have agreed to use the circle, things have gone better. When they have chosen to reject the circle, things have gone awry.

Most of the women in our organization are "multipliers" – group leaders in their own ethnic or religious communities. I hope that they will become inspired to use the circle in their families and in their groups so that we will have harmonious, productive circles spinning all over the globe. No matter what happens next, I am still in awe of the power of the circle.

Many thanks to my friend and mentor, Cathy Scherer, for telling me about the Circle. Many thanks to Christina for writing **Calling the Circle**. It has changed my life.

*If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.*

*For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at [www.peerspirit.com](http://www.peerspirit.com) and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter using the subscription mechanism at the top right of the page. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*