



This month's circle story is by Ann Linnea of PeerSpirit.

## **Circle Tale #49, March 2004**

### **The Art of Hosting**

"What is the 'art of hosting'?" asked a colleague from Juneau, Alaska. "In a town that gets 600,000 tourists each summer I have visions of practice in setting tables and proper etiquette." We chuckled, but the question prompted deeper dialogue because this art of hosting, developed by our friend, Danish consultant Toke Moeller, is about how to facilitate meaningful conversations.

A month ago PeerSpirit co-sponsored an Art of Hosting workshop with several colleagues we met through Berkana Institute's From the Four Directions project. Our intention was to create a three-day, participatory experience for teachers, consultants, coaches and other leaders with passion for creating space that fosters authentic conversation.

We chose the circle as our core way of being. We then branched out to use and/or discuss conversational techniques: Open Space, World Café, PeerSpirit and Appreciative Inquiry. Led by Toke, Tenneson Woolf, Teresa Posakony, and the two of us, we hosted the space and design and opened training and facilitation to all participants. Twenty-eight women and men, from youth to elders, came from Canada, the U.S., South Africa, and Russia to share their experience and wisdom. Topics included: Nature as Host, How chaos and order create Chaordic Space, Matching methodologies to situations, Holding the container for challenge, and more.

The workshop was inspiring. Christina and I have spent a decade honing the practice of circle and helping mainstream it into the world. This is not always an easy task. We got clear affirmation of the circle as "the mother of methodologies" and we had great experiences integrating and experimenting with different conversational techniques, many of which we have used in various ways over the years in our consulting work. And for me personally it was incredibly affirming to see that the design that emerged from this workshop included a central time slot entitled Nature as Host. Rather than seeing time outdoors tacked on as a free-time offering, we held an outdoor learning session that focused on nature as teacher/nature as metaphor.

Some harvested insights include:

- People who are leading others are in great need of reflective space to tap their own creativity and learning.
- Spacious scheduling is crucial to bring forth the "burning" questions.
- Trust the questions to come from the group.
- Trust the place between chaos and order--thank you, Toke.
- Hold the beacon for deepened conversation, especially if others don't think it's necessary.

In closing, here are a few quotes from other hosts in the circle:

Tenneson Woolf: "People support what they create. I learned this long ago through my colleague, Margaret Wheatley. It is a simple belief that defines how we try to accomplish the things we care about and what is really important to act on."



Toke Moeller: "If there is no meaningful question at the core of a gathering, there should be no meeting!"

Teresa Posakony: "The Art of Hosting embodies our deep knowing that genuine connection wants to come more fully into our consciousness."

One of our Canadians replied, "I experienced one of those precious times in life when the pieces which have been worked on consciously and unconsciously over many years come together in the right environment, at the right time. An opening appears and in walking through, one's life is altered."

Another woman checked out with great gratitude saying, "I expected the leaders to be brilliant, but I was not prepared for the rest of us. For the whole circle to be so brilliant, and present, and full of heart."

It will take more months to keep integrating this experience, both for us, and I think for many who were present. We are already letting the art of hosting influence our art of circling... and the next place we will practice it is in Juneau, Alaska, in May. Our colleague will have the tables set, and we'll open the circle from there.

*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.*