



Cathy McKenzie, a Canadian teaching colleague, writes this month's circle tale. Cathy has been Associate Faculty in the Classic Graduate Program at Royal Roads University for three years now. She teaches in the online courses, the summer residencies and is an academic advisor. She provides ongoing mentoring to learners who are interested in using circles as a methodology for their research and she has seen the practice of PeerSpirit Circle grow exponentially since 1998!

Circle Tale #44, October 2003

Circles Inside the Uniforms

In August of 2001 I was asked to be a guest speaker at Royal Roads University, in a Graduate Program in Leadership and Training (MALT) in New Westminster, BC. I was a new graduate of the "classic" MALT Program in Victoria, but the "pilot" program I was to address was targeted to a specific learner group: administrators and leaders in Law Enforcement, Corrections and other Emergency Services.

I had been asked to speak to this cohort of 44 learners, most of who were men, because I have a background in emergency services having worked as an ER Nurse, a Coroner and as a civilian in the police field. I also had a reputation at the University for sharing circle concepts and had used circles in my research project.

Once I had accepted the invitation I had the rather momentous task to guide and facilitate the group in "building a learning community". The only problem I faced was they had offered me ONE hour to accomplish all this!

So, I stewed, fretted, planned, over-planned and basically swirled around in my own "circle of chaos" until on the morning of the session when I said to myself, "Cathy, why not trust that these dedicated and service oriented people will come into the circle"? I paused and listened to this "quiet" voice and began the session by sharing the PeerSpirit Practices and Principles. I asked for volunteers to join me in a 20-minute practice circle in the center of the room while the others learned by witnessing from the outer rim.

On the previous day I had attended their class when they co-created their Vision and Values and I asked each of the learners to bring an object/metaphor that would help them explain, "who they were as leaders." The objects they brought to express their leadership stories ranged from baseball mitts, to photos, to canoe paddles! So after the demonstration circle I invited the whole cohort to self-organize in small circles of 4 or 5 and share their stories, which they totally embraced!

The community-building "Circle Inside the Uniforms" was one of the richest hours of my professional journey to that point. Actually, it was not really an hour; it was a collection of profoundly meaningful moments all strung together like soft music. As I reflect back, the highlights of the experience for me were the faces and voices of the volunteers in the center practice circle, the tears of the police officer who was missing his wife and newborn baby, the compassionate listening that emerged in the room, how intuitively the leaders within emerged and the power of witness and wonder.

I heard often from many of those learners how much impact that one precious hour had on their entire 3-week residency. They continued to use circle practice throughout!

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 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.*