



This month's circle tale is excerpted from the reports of Marianne Knuth, who has created a learning village based on circle principles in her home country of Zimbabwe. We know Marianne from our work with From the Four Directions. With her permission, we have left this in her voice as much as possible.

## **Circle Tale #34, September 2002**

### **Kufunda Learning Village**

July: TOMORROW the learning village will welcome its first inhabitants, moving into its first stage of becoming a real learning community. Tomorrow afternoon 17 wonderful young people arrive from high density townships and rural areas, coming to spend 3 months at Kufunda.

Our work is happening with a sad and worrying political and economic backdrop. The latest is a law in our country that 2900 (primarily white) commercial farmers cease all farming activity by June 30, and to leave their farms by August 15th. This in a country where people are dying of starvation. It makes me cry, it makes me angry, but mostly it makes me more determined to create in Kufunda a space where we can develop the insight and the skills to grow creative and sustainable communities. Now more than ever people need to learn to create their own livelihoods in a sustainable manner. What else Kufunda may bring for Zimbabwe I don't know, but I feel that we are an important part of what is being born in this country.

August: A poem by Bev-- The planet has turned, the thrush has changed her song, the days grow longer, hotter, drier. This is not a comfortable season it is what comes before the yet distant rains.

The Kufunda community has traveled a long journey from defining themselves from a place of poverty. They have begun to claim their wealth.

They have made soap, and body lotion, made compost and permaculture, painted their rooms, polished their floors, welded hangers, made tables, cooked, made fires, written their stories, brought water from the well, sung, danced, played drums, and mbiras and marimbas.

They have moved from looking at themselves, to looking at their communities, to looking at their traditional cultures, and back to themselves.

In the first week they had written up a list of agreements on how to live together. It contained all the right ingredients for a community to work:

- \* respect - for others and the nature around them
- \* responsibility
- \* equal job sharing
- \* listening without judgement
- \* working with love and caring
- \* honesty
- \* punctuality

Last week they heard, from three of the elders of their traditional culture, that all of these agreements are an integral part of their tradition. In a circle where three and a half weeks ago people were finding it hard to speak, they are now firing ideas back and forth with confidence and humor.

On Tuesday we went back to their agreements: for when building a new community the foundations have to be sound.

Were they realistic?



We made a list of those that had been the hardest to keep and those that had been the most important. (I knew I was in Africa when the most difficult one was punctuality!) Should we throw it out? - A resounding no!

They spoke about how hard it was to listen without judgement

- \* about what they had learned about respect
- \* about gender equality
- \* the difficulty of honesty
- \* the importance of responsibility
- \* the importance of community

Wednesday, August 21: We worked with Gandhi yesterday. In smaller groups they started out by sharing what most inspired them from their reading, and then they went deeper into trying to understand Gandhi's ideas, and beginning to look to what his ideas might mean to us and our situation. I had a sudden moment of realization: here we are a small group of people, at the village, all thinking together on what Gandhi's ideas mean, and what they could come to mean to us.

The dream becoming reality. And yes we still have a long way to go. We live in a country that is collapsing. Rapidly. Disastrously. But we are on the road. An unusual collection of people: our ages 17-54 (including facilitators). Mostly people from backgrounds radically different from my privileged life. People whom I am coming to appreciate and admire. And I am beginning to have a sense of hope for where we might go on our journey into the future, though I still have moments of doubt. The two co-exist, the hope and the doubt, in an on-going tango. First one leads, then another.

On the first morning after our two week break I realized just how far we have come in the last month. My greatest joy came from listening to their reflections on their main learnings from the month before. They weren't about soap making, permaculture, etc. although I know this practical knowledge is key to them. No. Here is some of what they shared as their key learnings:

- \* The surprise at the power of working in groups and learning from one another;
- \* The morning check-in (we do circle check-in every morning) and how it nurtures the participation and acceptance of everyone;
- \* The realization that women are born free and with the same potential as men (and the comment came from a man);
- \* The importance of the type of learning available at Kufunda: Conventional education focuses on individualism, but here we also focus on other people, on co-operation and on the society we are a part of;
- \* The equal importance of mind, body and spirit.
- \* The notion of multiple intelligences, that we all have something to contribute, though different things. You don't need to be an academic to be Intelligent;
- \* The power of morning silence and the morning bell.

I was surprised at how much of it was process oriented, and happy that they are aware and conscious of how a big part of what is making this experience what it is, is *\*how\** we are coming together. We are a community in circle.

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If you would like to support the continued efforts of building Kufunda, you can find the information of how to do so at <http://www.kufunda.org>.

*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.*