



This month's circle tale comes to us from Ann Linnea of PeerSpirit.

Circle Tale, August 2006

The Circle and the Tree

It was a cool, foggy morning—typical August weather in the Pacific Northwest and day two of our annual Whidbey Island circle training. Eighteen men and women ranging in age from 37 to 69 gathered in a circle beneath an immense Douglas fir tree. The 3-foot diameter tree towered 100 feet above the meadow and the people. No breeze had yet risen to stir its mighty limbs. The people and the tree were silent.

I stepped forward to share stories and information about the tree. I spoke of its hundred-year presence in the Maxwellton valley since the first white settlers arrived to begin farming the bottomlands of the salmon bearing stream nearby. I also spoke of the tree's great service to this place—holding stability of the soil; transforming the global warming gas, carbon dioxide, into life-giving oxygen; and providing shade and a sanctuary for storytelling space.

For the third summer, I am coming to our August practicum still carrying the wild edge of the Elderquest in my body and heart. (The Elderquest is a 10-day vision quest experience offered by PeerSpirit/me and Wilderness Rites/Anne Stine in the Inyo Mountains of eastern California. See our Wilderness Adventures page for photos of this year's journey.) So, while I'm still adjusting to even the level of modernity on Whidbey Island, I'm grateful to this tree and the pastoral setting of the Aldermarsh Retreat Center for helping me bridge what I know about the stories and energy of nature and the stories and energy of people.

"If we are to greet another creature, we must know its story and understand its language," I said. As the circle of people watched, I moved closer to the tree, bowed, and then came to rest with my back leaning into the strength of the deeply ridged trunk. "Trees are the masters of energetics. Every moment this tree is pulling energy and sustenance through its millions of rootlets from the earth. Similarly its millions of tiny needles are constantly transforming the sun's energy and carbon dioxide into food for itself. If I listen nonverbally to all that is going on within this great trunk, my own body can learn to pull energy from the earth and the heavens. I become a more alive human being."

I come indoors reluctantly. All my training before PeerSpirit was aimed at introducing people to nature. When Christina and I began blending our fields of study in the early 1990's and creating PeerSpirit, I made a commitment to the wild things to keep working with people to reawaken their connection to the natural world.

After meeting this great, lone fir that stands at the entrance to the Marsh House, I invite people to scatter and greet other nearby trees, to notice metaphors for living that their tree offers, and to practice truly being with creatures different than themselves. When we returned to the hexagonal teaching space of the Marsh House, we continued our learning with a session on the energetics of circle. People, like trees, transform energy. When we sit in circle, that ability is encouraged and called forth. While we remembered and practiced these capacities in ourselves, the sentinel tree towering outside the Marsh House continued cycling nutrients and energy. And all of us—the people and the tree—were connected in the great circle of 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 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.*