



Each month PeerSpirit offers an illustrative story of how someone is effectively using circle practices and principles to change or enhance a gathering, team, committee or other group in business or personal life. This month's story is by Elly Erickson of Clinton, Washington.

## **Circle Tale #4, January 2000 Jury Duty**

Driving into the parking lot of the courthouse, I assured myself this citizen's duty wouldn't take too long in a rural county. Climbing a long flight of stairs, I found my way to a small table where a woman was greeted me with a smile and assigned me a juror's number directing me to the door on the left. Looking around, I found a seat in the middle of the room. Still optimistic that I might be dismissed, I looked around the room and began to think about all of us gathered here to do our civic duty and help find truth and justice. A man stood up in the front of the room and began speaking about procedures, prejudices and presentations. It became obvious that we were going to spend the day learning how to be jurors so we could be in the courtroom tomorrow.

I spent the next eight days in that courtroom. It was a long process. We saw piles and piles of evidence, listened to many witnesses, heard examinations and cross-examinations. I was totally exhausted. We were all worn down and tired. It was difficult to stay open-minded and objective. Finally, we were sent into our jury room to come to consensus.

As we walked into that room, a blanket of chaos surrounded us. Immediately words began erupting from every corner of the room. The words piled up all around me—higher and higher, until I didn't have a sense of who was saying what. In desperation I raised my hand. For ten minutes my hand was ignored. Finally, an elderly woman from our jury said, "I believe the young woman has a question." (I was the youngest person on the jury.) The lead juror turned my way, my hand went down slowly, holding with it the attention of everyone. "I must say I'm feeling challenged to not be hearing, I mean really hearing what each person has to say. We sat and listened to others for eight days. I think we owe it to ourselves and the system to listen and be heard now. Please, for just a minute, think about why we are here. Then I'd like to make a suggestion." At that moment, in the silence, I went to the kitchen and grabbed a salt shaker and proposed we use the salt shaker as a talking piece. I explained this meant that the person who has the salt shaker has the floor. That means that each person has the opportunity to speak their truth and to be heard, uninterrupted.

"Please hold your comments until everyone has spoken. Please respect and honor the person speaking." The group nodded their agreement and the process began. No one spoke until they received the salt shaker. We came together with a decision in less than two hours. Many thanked me for the experience. A few wanted more information and I recommended reading ***Calling the Circle*** by Christina Baldwin. As I drove off, I looked at the crisp, snow-covered mountains around me. In awe of the beauty, I dropped into prayer, thanking spirit for the gift of the talking piece and the opportunity to share it.

*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.*