



This month's circle tale is written by Joe Perlman, of New York, who was a participant in our Costa Rica adventure last February. He tells the story of applying writing and circle... thank you Joe!

## **Circle Tale #32, July 2002**

### **Other Circles**

Back in February of this year, I spent a wonderful week in the rain forests of Costa Rica at a writing workshop led by Christina and Ann, under the auspices of the Omega Institute. We formed a circle to discuss writing and the concept of 'story'. We explored the environment, wrote about it and our reactions to it, and shared some our writing with each other. It was a luminous experience for all of us. One of the many lessons that I learned was importance of the circle concept and the sharing of our writing, since we had all written beautifully about our experiences of the week but from very different points of view and in very different ways.

My father-in-law, a prominent judge, lawyer and legal scholar who had been terminally ill before I left, died within a week of my return home. The original plan had been to have a small private funeral for the family, followed by a public memorial service at a later date. My wife comes from one of those modern loosely connected families that is a mix of whole, half and step siblings and spouses. They are all well educated and highly verbal on most occasions. Both my twenty-two year old son and I readily volunteered to speak at the service, assuming that we would be two of numerous relatives fighting for the privilege. To my surprise, both of our offers were accepted.

That night I sat down and wrote a personal reminiscence in the form of a story entitled "Lawyers Asking Questions". When I was finished I asked my son to read it over for me, and we began to discuss what I had written. He remarked that I seemed to have a certain style whenever I wrote these types of pieces. I agreed and said that, for me, story is essential to the way we remember people, and the best way to pass down those memories to others, for story is the careful selection of anecdotes and memories woven together to form a small germ of truth about another person's life.

When we arrived at the funeral home, I discovered that this was not a small private service for the family, but a standing room only highly public event. We were quickly ushered out of the throng and into a small private chamber for the relatives. One of my sisters-in-law handed me a piece of paper with the list of speakers, and their order of appearance. I quickly scanned the list: a law school dean, a Constitutional Law expert and frequent New York Times op-ed writer, two prominent experts on International Human Rights, then me, then my son. We were the only two members from the family who had volunteered to speak. My knees started to shake. I had never anticipated having to read the piece that I had written before such a large, prominent crowd, nor had I anticipated having to follow such distinguished, articulate speakers.

In a few minutes we were ushered through a side door to the front of the chapel for the memorial service. I peered over my shoulder scanning the huge crowd for familiar faces but they were few in number. When the speakers began, I started listening to them and the more I listened, the calmer I became. Some were rather formal, while others sprinkled their remarks with more personal anecdotes.

As I listened, I thought back to my time in Costa Rica and I realized that a memorial service can be a form of a circle, and the truth and richness of a person's life is not found in a mere listing of accomplishments or anecdotes from colleagues about one's professional life, but in a multitude of stories from all different points of view, including family. Thus, with those thoughts in mind, I arose from my seat, walked up to the podium, looked out at the audience, and calmly began to read my version of his story.

*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.*