



This month's circle tale features stories from Ann and Christina about their April/May journey to Germany, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. For additional photos please go to the Circle Practica page of our website.

Circle Tale, June 2007

A Circle Tale in Three Countries

Germany

On April 14, 2007, we landed in Frankfurt, Germany to begin a month-long PeerSpirit teaching journey. Invited by Matthias zur Bosen, through his company All-In-One-Spirit Consulting (<http://www.all-in-one-spirit.de>), we spent our first week offering a circle practicum to 16 participants from 5 European countries. This group, comprised of dynamic consultants and teachers, worked to integrate PeerSpirit circling into already sophisticated careers. We felt honored, challenged, and thoughtfully engaged. One participant is translating our booklets into German, another has asked us to contribute to his next anthology on group process, and others are deepening their use of circle in working with major corporate clients, educational systems, and community organizations.

Our lasting impression is of an awareness among these Europeans that now is the time for bold leadership and for experimentation with processes that can bring forward new ideas and increase collaboration. While this awareness lives in all the people who come to our work, we enjoyed their thoughtful urgency and high energy. In response, we made some adjustments to our practicum design that we then carried to our African groups, and look forward to sharing in our upcoming circle practica. We are delighted to have met these fine people and look forward to hearing their stories of circle work.

We enjoyed bicycling and hiking around the retreat site area, grew fully acclimated to the 9-hour time zone shift, and on Sunday, April 22nd began our great north/south flight to Africa.

Zimbabwe

Current newspapers and magazines carry discouraging and frightening news about Zimbabwe. Newsweek magazine (June 18, 2007) reported, "Mugabe's rule is increasingly taking on the outline of the worst dictatorships—another Burma, or even North Korea." A country once considered southern Africa's breadbasket is now facing increasing food shortages. Extensive HIV/AIDS infection has dropped average life expectancy to 38 years. Inflation is estimated at near 19,000%, making commerce nearly impossible. Yet we felt determined to support the learning center of Kufunda Village.

At Harare International airport on April 23, we were met by a young driver in an old pickup truck. It cost \$10,000 Zim dollars to get out of the parking lot. We were then transported to the village half an hour's drive outside the city. For the next five days we were largely sequestered on the village's forested farmland, which is guarded by immense granite boulders.

Our friend, Marianne Knuth, a young visionary of Danish/Zimbabwean heritage, founded Kufunda Village in 2001 on fifty acres of her mother's farm. Marianne brought home a decade of international education and business experience and called together cousins and friends in an experiment of hopeful living. Marianne and her fellow Kufundees used PeerSpirit circle process to establish village governance and keep refining their decisions and goals. In 6 years they have hand-built 8-10 small houses, a preschool, a community kitchen, an office, and a teaching space. They have planted permaculture gardens and reached out to surrounding communities to teach circle governance, the construction of ecotoilets, and the creation of herbal tinctures. (See the full story in chapter six of Christina's book, **Storycatcher**: <http://www.storycatcher.net>, and on the Kufunda website: <http://www.kufunda.org> .)

PeerSpirit was invited to assist twenty members of the leadership councils to host challenging conversations about AIDS, health care, leader transition, and travel. We held council in the open-walled teaching space. We



shared stories around the campfire under the vast African sky. We ate corn meal, potatoes, and cooked vegetables prepared in the community kitchen. We walked the sandy farm paths along with children and farm workers. And we honored the courage of these men, women, and children determined that **"in the midst of a vicious downward spiral, we and others like us are walking in the opposite direction."**

South Africa

South Africa calls itself the Rainbow Nation—a country of racial, tribal, and economic diversity. Apartheid officially ended in 1994, so every adult carries memories of repression and segregated privilege, profound governmental shift, and broadcasts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Every citizen continues to live in an ongoing state of nation building that is full of tension and hope. South Africa is a complex, volatile, inspiring, and sometimes terrifying national and personal experiment. As outsiders, we would not pretend to comprehend it through a short visit, but we were humbled and touched by the stories and experiences of the South Africans we met.

The Cape Town circle practicum managed to bring significant diversity (English, Afrikaner, Xhosa, and Indian) into one small circle. We met in the coastal hill country at a retreat site we highly recommend (Stanford Valley Conference Centre and Guesthouse – <http://www.stanfordvalley.co.za>). In our first check-in we dove into deep heart space and stayed there. We were held together by the reliable structures of the circle process and the courageous authenticity of every person.

The group was comprised of corporate consultants, human resource professionals, a university administrator, and a young Xhosa man and a midlife English woman who are both vision quest guides. We practiced speaking to the center, saying our stories to the fire without blame or judgment. Because of this, we were able to hear each other with sympathy and see the struggle of all South Africa's communities to build an honorable society.

We rested for several lovely autumnal days exploring Cape Town with our friend Kerry Sandison: Table Mountain, Cape Point, the botanical wonders of the Fynbos, craft markets, and beaches.

We then flew to Johannesburg for our last teaching, a one-day seminar titled, "Creating Conditions for Conversations that Matter," hosted by Dunne and Debby Edelstein's Quality Life Company (<http://www.qualitylife.co.za>). In an upscale conference venue with exquisite gardens and guinea fowl providing backdrop to our meeting, we taught basic PeerSpirit circle structure to 23 managers from national banks and insurance companies. Again, we were impressed by people's courageous search to utilize collaborative conversation to address social issues in the South African workplace. We made some good business connections and rested the following day, trying to absorb the wealth of human interaction we had enjoyed in the past three weeks.

We spent the final four days on a tent safari at Kruger National Park enjoying close encounters with Africa's spectacular menagerie—elephants, giraffes, rhinos, etc.

It is now five weeks since our return. We are immersed—but not the same. We are still just beginning to integrate this amazing journey. We are thankful for our safety, our welcome, and the reception of our work.

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.*