

The Global Intercultural Circle held its first retreat on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State from August 9 - 12, 2016. We were hosted by our dear Circle member Adele Berg Layton who had a family home near Sequim on the Kitsap Peninsula and a shared cabin near Sequim. Sequim is located within the sunbelt on the northern side of the rain-forested mountains of the Olympic Peninsula across the strait of Juan de Fuca from Victoria.



We traveled from our respective corners one by plane - ferry - automobile others simply north by automobile and found our way first to Adele's family home for our Opening Meal, Greeting Ritual and Framing for our retreat. After stocking up with groceries to prepare intentionally selected menus for our 2 days of retreat, we then traveled onward to the cabin in Sequim.

The theme for this first retreat was "Expressing our Intercultural Journeys". Our intention was to experience together and develop additional tools for expressing and unpacking our intercultural journeys. Through our monthly calls we had been talking about these experiences and several of us had been writing about them. We wanted to explore other means through art, music, cooking, story-telling, movement and meditation. We envisioned one of the cornerstones of our time together would be two morning workshops on creating and illustrating a journal and then writing or illustrating these journals with reflections on our intercultural journeys. For those of us who gathered, these intercultural journals -- which we bound with our own hands -- became the repository of reflections from which we would draw for future gatherings.

Christa's experience in creating the journal.

Mary Ellen had brought for us all of the supplies that we would need to create journals and had everything laid out for us on tables on the front porch. It was a beautiful sunny morning as we settled into onto places after a wonderful session of yoga and breakfast. I had never bound my



own journal before and so was intrigued by the process. The binding that Mary Ellen had chosen to teach us made it possible to have a hard cover and 8

sections of plain card stock with lined pages between them. Once bound it was up to us to decide how we were going to illustrate each section and what we wished to write within. After all of the effort of creating the book, I was quite hesitant to pick up the paint brush and begin painting. I did not want to “ruin” the book. What did come to me more quickly though were the titles for the sections. I was inspired by my natural surroundings to work with the words and then eventually the imagery of planting seeds. It came then to me through the combination of the natural setting and this new medium of creative expression, that my global intercultural journey began with “Seeds of Curiosity.” Hence the acorns on this card stock point to the seeds of curiosity that I chose to write about on the soft pages between.

Another cornerstone of our retreat time together was to discover the natural beauty and ground ourselves in place. With Adele as our guide, we followed a path from her cabin through fields of wild grass which opened up to an ocean beach full of driftwood and other evidence of ocean life. Looking out from the beach across the strait of Juan de Fuca, we could see the shores of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada situating us in our broader global intercultural space. For another afternoon excursion, we put on our hiking shoes to venture along the river which fed the fields downstream and picked blackberries which are abundant throughout the region. Yet another treat awaited our senses when we visited a lavender farm. Remembering that we were just a few miles away from a rainforest just on the other side of the mountains, it was quite miraculous to discover these fields of lavender which traditionally grow in warm, sunny climates.

As we drove through Sequim after our afternoon excursions, we tucked into the best bakery and butcher in town to gather ingredients for the meals we were cooking for each other. It was through this combination of experiences that we imagined together the concept of “meals of place.” One of the planned menus for this retreat was ratatouille. Each of us had chosen a meal from our culture of origin or one of the cultures with which we identified closely. It so happens that the Mediterranean vegetables and herbs that one would find in the south of France and are ingredients for ratatouille are also grown in Sequim -- the sunbelt of the Olympic peninsula. Going forward this idea of grounding ourselves with meals of place as we arrive to a new place has become a ritual for our retreats. This idea has also pointed us to thinking about other ways that we can become more grounded in a given local.

Expressing ourselves through music was another cornerstone of our time together. Adele had gathered for us a songbook of music from diverse cultures. Drawing from her professional background in teaching others to discover and lift up their voices in song, Adele led us in song at different moments throughout our time together. With her we enhance our capacity to sing so that we could move beyond listening to the music of others to experiencing how this music comes to expression. This experience of feeling through new rhythms that vary from those we are familiar with or pronouncing words from languages other than our first language and then putting this together into the actual creation of music -- is a form of intercultural work. It's another tool that we have available to us for fine-tuning our intercultural sensitivity and expressing ourselves as intercultural people.