

For our August 2017 retreat, we were inspired to shift from the west coast to the east coast and traveled to Squam Lake, in New Hampshire. One of our members had dear friends with a lovely home on Squam Lake which they regularly rent to others in the summer when they travel. This time they generously left their beautiful home to us without charge as they resonated with our mission and were intrigued to learn more. Our home-hosts were also generous in grounding us in place as they introduced us to the natural beauty of their lake community.



For one of our afternoon excursions, they took us out on their boat noting how intentional the community had been in ensuring the lake shores were as pristine as possible with very few homes visible from the lake.

For another outing, they shared with us one of their favorite walks along one of the rivers in a local forested preserve not far from their homes. They also introduced us to other members of their family who invited us into their historic farmhouse, shared their family stories and gathered with us around an evening fire-pit for more



story-telling and connections. Through their gentle engagement with us, we moved between intense introspective work as individuals within our Circle and more outward engagement.

This lovely natural setting provided us a peaceful space to address our chosen theme and to renew our hearts, minds and spirits. Our process of creative interchange had led us to design a combination of workshops and intense experiences over a four day period. We facilitated workshops for each other in the evenings and the mornings with wonderful meals, swimming and excursions in between.

For our first evening together after sharing a meal prepared by the hosts, we have an opening session which focuses on our spirit of entry and setting our intentions for intercultural growth during our time together. We knew in advance to bring a meaningful object that represents these intentions. As we settle into a circle of chairs around a coffee table or in a semi-circle near a hearth, we name these intentions while placing the object in the center of our space. In so doing we are creating a center piece which will serve as a symbolic center point for our Circle time through our time together until the closing session which includes lifting the objects and naming the spirit or intention with which we depart from our time together.

While at Squam, we introduced a new dimension to our Opening Session. Prior to coming to the retreat, many of us had used a set of prompts to guide us in writing up what we have come to call our “global intercultural narratives.” We were now sitting together in a circle with each other after naming our goals for intercultural growth and learning to experience the sharing of these narratives. However, we wanted to be intentional with this sharing in bearing witness to the narratives and in practicing deep listening. Deep listening, we had discovered through our monthly virtual gatherings and in reading extracts from *Story Catcher* by Christina Baldwin, may not come naturally to many of us. Such listening requires some real attentiveness to how we listen. So we borrowed from Baldwin in setting our space together and we agreed to strive towards inquisitiveness, curiosity, empathy, being present and inviting forgiveness. This contrasts with many of our natural tendencies of being closed, judgemental, preoccupied and unforgiving as we listen to others.

[Sharing our Global Intercultural Narratives. \(2017 Retreat Workshop\)](#)

[This session will involve the creation of a space drawing from the text the *Story Catcher* by Christina Baldwin.](#)

“Story Catchers are: intrigued by human experience; inquisitive about meaning, insight and learning; more curious than judgmental; more in love with questions than answers; empathetic without overidentification; able to hold personal boundaries in interpersonal space; able to be present while others experience emotions; able to be present while others have insight; able to safeguard the space for listening; able to invite forgiveness,

release and grace; aware of story's power and use it consciously; practitioners of the heart of language.

Setting the Space

- Shall we be seated so we can see and hear each other.
- Shall we place candle(s) and a significant objects in the middle of our circle to remind us we are setting our words in this space. Nobody has to pick them up; we can listen without having to agree.
- Shall we adopt a few simple agreements.
 - The narrative belongs to the speaker and will not be shared without permission.
 - We will practice listening to each other with curiosity rather than judgement
 - We will take responsibility to ask for what we need and offer what we can;
 - We will pause to take a breath, recenter, call ourselves back to our intentions.
- Our intention is to bear witness to the stories of defining events in our lives that have been at the core of our “intercultural journey” -- in all of our diversity. attentiveness
- Our time together has a defined beginning, middle and end We know when we are in the heightened attentiveness of listening and when we are relaxing together.

Each member is invited to read their Global Intercultural Narrative which they have prepared in advance of the retreat. Prompt questions were forwarded in advance to help stimulate our thinking and writing. Each member is asked to be prepared to read up to 8 pages or 15 minutes of their narratives. The reading of the narratives will be spread out over at least two evenings so we have ample time and energy for heightened attentiveness of listening.

Christa's Experience with sharing and listening

During the 2016 retreat, we had created journals for capturing our global intercultural narratives, so as I considered the prompts for crafting this narrative in preparation for the 2017 retreat, I was drawn back to this journal. While in Sequim, I had written a chapter on the “Seeds of Curiosity” -- those early influences during my childhood growing up on the Pacific Northwest.

Opening the journal again, I was drawn to narrate additional chapters of this journey using the seed metaphor. So, my second chapter was entitled “Nurturing the Seeds of Curiosity” and focused on my study of French in high school and studying abroad in France. The third chapter was on “Sowing the Seeds of Curiosity” which featured experiences in graduate school and a postdoc, in Senegal and my initial years of being a Professor of French and Intercultural Studies. As I continued writing the seed metaphor broke down as my life experiences became increasingly complex and layered with intercultural experiences. The fourth chapter featured my global intercultural work as a professor and project manager at the American Council on Education. The fifth Chapter entitled featured my Fulbright experience in Mexico and Canada , the sixth my work as an SIO at Drake and the seventh my global intercultural teaching at Drake.

With my journal in hand and pondering which extract of my global intercultural journey to share, I decided to share from Chapter 7. It was in these pages that I talked about our work in

creating the global intercultural circle and how I was grappling with the question of how we foster global intercultural learning in all of the spheres of our life. It was a rich experience reading this pages to my Circle friends. I felt heard, affirmed and supported.

Listening to other's global intercultural journeys was even more powerful than sharing my own. But it was also much more challenging. I love each of these women deeply, I want to take their words into my mind, empathize with their emotions, and connect with their spirit. When I was able to hear their stories with a open mind, heart and soul, I felt the bonds of connection between us become thicker. But, there were moments when the act of listening was intense and I felt my attentiveness slipping. There were moments when I was challenged to keep my mind open without judgment. There were other moments when I was challenged to be present with the emotions expressed without trying to fix things or I found myself withdrawing to be protective of my own tender spirit. It was through this listening experience that I came to more fully appreciate how much we have to practice deep listening. It does not come naturally.