

We All Share the Same Journey by Carole Morse

An introduction to Write Around Portland's Spring 2011 anthology, *Moving or Still/En movimiento o quieto*

Carole Morse runs the PGE Foundation for Portland General Electric. She is a passionate advocate for the arts and for education and loves when the two disciplines intersect. Carole recently completed seven years on the Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC) board where she served as board chair. She also has been chair of the board of Business for Culture and the Arts. Currently, she serves on the boards of the Creative Advocacy Network and the Portland Schools Foundation. She is Honorary Chair of RACC's Work for Art employee giving campaign for 2011-2012. She has won several awards for her arts advocacy work. Carole says that as an artist, she has failed miserably at tap dancing and accordion playing, but she's not too bad at writing.



Thirty years ago I ran a shelter for abused women and their children in Kentucky. The pain and fear, low self-esteem and despair of the families we were trying to help were hard to penetrate.

The budget was miniscule; case workers doubled on the crisis line and helped clean the rooms as well. But after landing another grant, my first job search was for an art therapist to work with the kids and their moms.

Children who were either acting out or totally withdrawn started drawing, sculpting or performing their distress. Those old enough wrote in journals, and their moms joined in. It was my first experience with the arts as an instrument of healing.

Since then, I've witnessed the arts as a medium to comfort at-risk kids, adults with mental illness, children who were terminally ill, seniors who are homeless...and to loosen up left-brained executives. At my own company, we've used dancers, drummers, poets, singers, actors, even improv comedians to teach us about cultural diversity, team building, and to dramatize how our customers feel about us. There's no doubt in my mind that you grasp and retain a concept or relinquish a bias much easier if you're doing "call and response" on African drums or listening to a writer's personal story.

Attending a Write Around Portland community reading was an emotional experience for me. What was intended as a "site visit" to learn if our grant had made a difference for this new nonprofit turned into an enlightening, moving evening. Formerly incarcerated men, people newly recovering from alcohol addiction and frightened homeless women went up to the microphone, one after the other, and read some of the bravest stories I've ever heard, full of depth, pathos, even humor. Stammering presentations turned strong and loud as writers leaned into the rhythm of their words. Their faces changed; their posture improved; they were speaking their truths and gaining strength in the process.

Not unlike my own experience at the writer's camp, Fishtrap, in the mountains of northeastern Oregon. It was there that I found my voice in poetry six years ago when I spent a week in a class led by award-winning poet and novelist Luis Urrea. His enthusiasm and encouragement motivated me to delve into the grief I felt after my father's death the year before. My complex, contradictory relationship with Dad found its place in my simple poems, and the healing process finally began.

Right now I'm working with author Karen Karbo in a memoir writing class, very similar to Write Around Portland workshops. The community of our group of women is as important as the expertise and feedback Karen shares with us. In a short period of time, we have gotten closer and more intimate than we are with many of our friends and family members. There are no holds barred with us. We are speaking our truths without fear of judgment. For several hours a week, we are our authentic selves with other human beings – not just on the written page. The same is true of the Write Around Portland community which brings those who feel disenfranchised back to life and hope.

Bless you Write Around Portland and all the writers who are part of your magical groups. Your work, your words, your voices remind us that we all share the same journey.