CHAPTER ONE

From the Heart
A Creative, Relational Approach to Conflict

Conflicts happen, leaving us with knotted stomachs, furrowed brows, shaky knees. They stress us and stretch us—they show us what we value even as we stand to lose it. Conflicts are significant emotional events. They happen in relationships, calling on our creativity and all our ways of knowing. To address conflicts constructively, we need intuition and imagination to navigate the nuances of conflict's terrain. We need our bodies, sensitive instruments that both receive and send signals reflecting our deep, inner wisdom. We need our emotions in active dialogue with our thoughts, giving us cues to action. And we need our spirits, sources of resilience, strength, and purpose.

In this chapter, we explore the resources of relationship, beginning with a letter to Madeleine, an experienced mediator. Building on this foundation, we examine the topography of conflict processes, climbing six metaphorical mountains to discover the creative gifts available to everyone who finds themselves in the midst of conflict.

Dear Madeleine Mediator,

Where did you get your ideas about conflicts? How did you learn to solve them? Can you help me learn, too? When things get complicated by history or hurt, how is it best to move forward? What do we rely on when things really feel tough? How

do we proceed when the people in conflict come from different cultures? Can you look into your bag of tools and tell me what helps?

Yours sincerely,

Curious Caitlin

Dear Curious Caitlin,

You have some good questions. And I have the answer to each of them. In every case, relationship is the answer. I got my ideas about conflicts in relationships with my family, classmates, and communities. I learned what I know about solving them through relationships with my teachers—some formal, traditional teachers and some I met on the path. I learned that when things are complicated, the only way through is by building and growing relationships. We can rely on them when the going gets tough; we can change them and even wish them away, but they are important for our progress.

Conflict is just relationship on a bumpy road. When we look into a relationship, we can almost always find good in it that can help us make it through the bumps. When people come from different cultures, they need to build relationships to feel comfortable with each other and get things done. This works well when they remember that their ideas about how to do things are part of the relationship, but not all of it.

A relationship is two rivers coming together. Neither is ever the same again. And this is good. Think of the mighty Mississippi when it is joined by the Missouri. How much stronger they are after joining. So are we. Relationships strengthen us, give us mirrors to see ourselves, test us, and help us feel good. They keep us looking, laughing, and discovering new things. Sometimes when they are hard or painful, other relationships can help us learn about what to do. We call these other relationships *mediation,* which is a word for someone who makes sure that the rivers don't dam up and miss the chance to become great.

> Relationships are precious, Caitlin. I know that yours will teach you everything you need to know.
>
> Love and best wishes,
>
> Madeleine

Relationships. They are the crucibles from which we come, shaped and sometimes scarred, but shining. They teach us about the world and how to be in it. They give us a multitude of messages about conflict, including what it is, how it happens, and what to do about it. When we need help with a conflict, we generally seek it through relationship. The helper must develop a relationship with us in order to help. We may resolve the issue that brought us or transform our understanding. Whatever we do, it will happen through relationship.

Eastern cultures understand this a little bit differently from the way dominant cultures in the West do. In Japan, for instance, a great deal of effort is directed to maintaining harmonious relationships and avoiding the open rupture of conflict. Smooth relationships prevent possible damage, disruption, and loss. There is an awareness that repair is never complete—that once the water of the relationship has spilled onto the floor, it can never be fully recaptured. There is also a shared desire for harmony to extend beyond individual relations to the smooth functioning of collective relationships.

I mention this not to valorize Eastern cultures and denigrate my own but to suggest that there is a golden nugget in this perspective. The nugget is the value placed on relationship. Although we may contend that pursuing harmony and muting conflict impedes the resolution of conflicts that exist beneath the surface or that a focus on collective cooperation can result in a tyranny toward conformity, the value of relationship stands on its own merits. In our individualistic, busy, efficiency-driven society, relationship is not always given the credit or the emphasis it deserves.

Of course, everyone values relationship. We all depend on it for survival. In our conflict processes, we build rapport with parties and emphasize the importance of building functional relations in parenting, in work life, and in communities. This book asks not

whether but *how* we value relationship. How are relationships resources for our processes? How can we tap our relational and creative capacities in addressing conflicts? Relationships have emotional, physical, imaginative, and spiritual dimensions. Do our processes welcome these as equal partners with logic and rationality? What qualities of attention and relationship—to ourselves and to others—do we bring to our work?

I have a friend named George. Like several other friends, he will live in this book through stories. I hope he won't mind. It is through relationship that I learn. George brings a rare quality of attention to his relationships. As a consultant to companies around the world, he travels a great deal, and he needs to be available to a variety of people when he is in far places in the world. But he does not use e-mail. George invites his clients to phone or to fax to set a time, and then he phones back. They have conversations in real time, with voices that convey emotion, senses, and nuance. He wants to center his work, as he does his life, in relationship.

I don't want to get too far from my point, but being around George is different from being around others. When I am with him, he is fully available. He is not distracted by the things going on around us, nor do I notice him disappearing into his mind to consider some problem or issue he has been working on. He gives himself to the relationship as it unfolds in shared time. When we part, I feel as though I have received a rare gift. It is a gift of connection and relationship. It teaches me, encourages me, and calls me to pay attention to relationship as the foundation of everything else in my life.

When I say "relationship," I mean it in a spacious way. I mean my relationships with others and also my relationship with myself. Effective mediators and trainers cultivate interior dialogues and qualities that sustain their own being and doing in the world. They connect their work to their sense of purpose and meaning. They are meaning-making creatures; they create stories, invent metaphors, and rely on rituals. All of these connect us to others, to our own past and future, and to that which is bigger than any of us.

Relationship as the foundation of conflict bridging is not only individual and interpersonal; it is transpersonal. Whether we find meaning in nature, a deity, or energy within and around us, this dimension also feeds our work. We will explore ways to nurture all

of these relationships in the pages of this book. Doing this is increasingly important in our fast-paced lives.

All of us are busy. I pack many things into every day, tending to family, teaching, writing, advising, mediating, exercising, driving, going home, shopping, making phone calls, e-mailing, going to the market, selecting clothes, planning. The list is longer than I ever finish. Relationships are too often rushed, fit-in, condensed into the too-small space on the list for the day. I struggle to slow down, to welcome the surprises and gifts that arise in conversation, family time, and meetings. Somehow the speed and efficiency that should leave us more time to relate leads us to take on more things, actually leaving us less time for relating and creating. We see this reflected in our conflict processes.

The Topography of Conflict

If we were to map our conflict processes, they would look more like a corridor than a diverse biosphere. We operate in a fairly narrow band of approaches, drawing on fewer resources than we have to offer. Our conflict practices mirror our individualistic and technically oriented culture. In professional settings, we devote defined lengths of time to staged processes that are designed to create closure. Out of our need for order, we restrict movement by sitting around tables, approaching conflict with the problem-solving parts of our brains. We break things down into bits to understand them. When there are strong emotions, we think of ways to manage them. Seldom do our process maps contemplate whole people and their relationships, with all of their varied artistry, grace, and wisdom. Even less do our processes take the symbolic level into account—the level where meaning is made, perceptions shape reality, and identities are defined and redefined in the dynamic dance of relationship.

Figure 1.1 depicts three levels of conflict and the kinds of strategies we have devised to bridge them. In the early days of the conflict resolution field, we noticed the integrative potential of "win-win" solutions. Conflict was seen to arise from competition over resources and differences over material things. To address it, we devised analytical frameworks, problem-solving approaches, and logical, staged processes. Success meant getting to "yes" about the

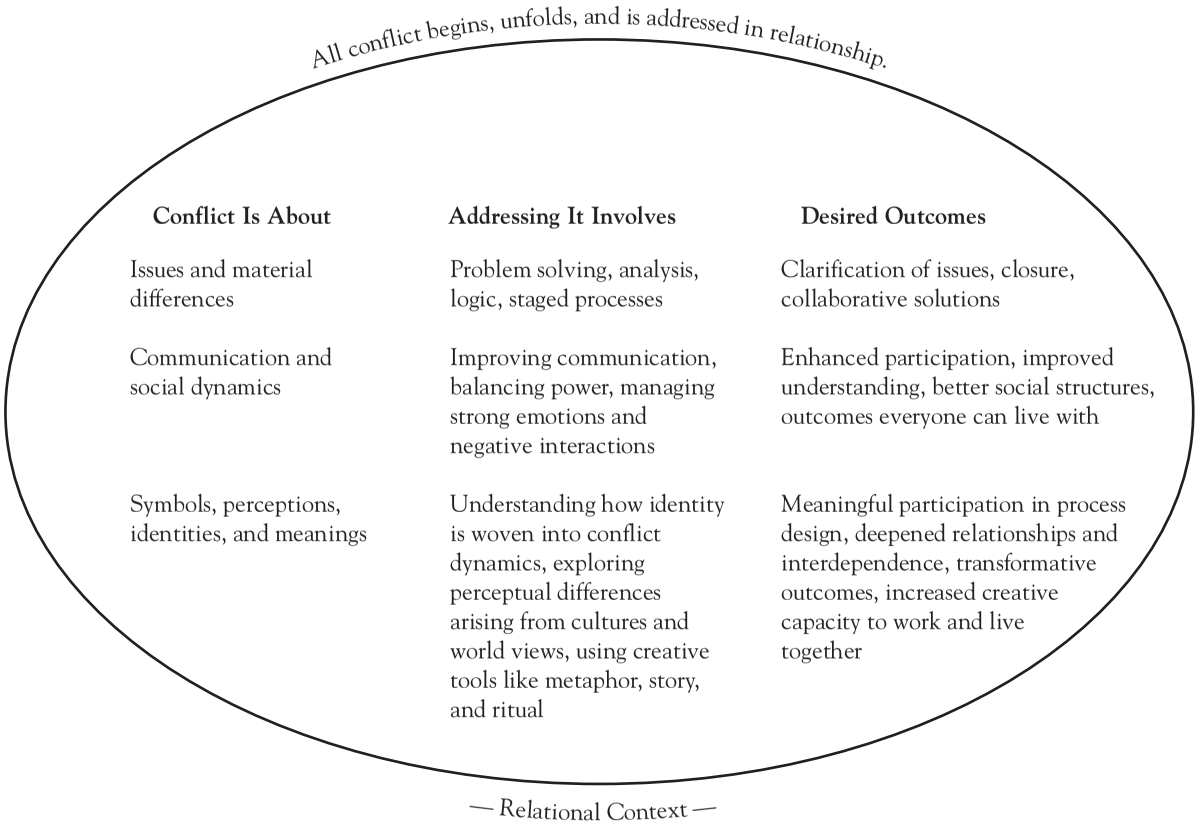
material matters at issue. People needed to be separated from problems so they would not personalize issues and make them more difficult to resolve. This advanced the theory and practice in conflict resolution by substituting scientifically ordered thinking for "jungle theories" in which wits and luck had been the tools.

In a second wave of theory and practice, it was recognized that conflict does not arise in a vacuum. It arises from poor communication, often exacerbated by poorly designed systems and unequal power. Third parties were trained to employ a range of communication strategies such as active listening, using tools like restating and reframing in a staged process framework that is designed to manage and moderate emotional intensity. They were admonished to balance power, although the ways to do this were not always clear. Hoped-for outcomes included enhanced participation by all parties, better understanding, calm discussions, and acceptable outcomes. This advanced theory and practice by bringing attention to communication as the conduit for conflict resolution. But still, our capacity to generate lasting results was limited.

Conflicts do not arise simply because of differences over issues or miscommunication. Some of the most difficult conflicts we face have well-defined issues and have been the subject of countless efforts at calm communication. Despite attempts to extract people from problems and promote rationality, more conflicts have surfaced, emerging out of unaddressed roots like nested Russian dolls. This is because conflicts are indivisible from the relational context in which they arise. As depicted in the third level of Figure 1.1, they are bound up with the stories we tell, the ways we order and structure our thoughts and our feelings, and the cultural messages that shape our perceptions. They calcify and keep us stuck, or they shift, energizing our lifeblood with new ways forward.

If we want to bridge differences durably and respectfully, we cannot use a strategy centered in problem solving or in improving communication alone. We have to begin by acknowledging that our logic and common sense about how to communicate arise from our own ways of knowing—the ways we make meaning of our lives. These ways are influenced by culture, personality, context, and a whole system of knowing called our worldview. Along with cultural and personality differences, our worldviews are present in

Figure 1.1. Levels of Conflict and Conflict Strategies



conflict, even when everyone at the table looks the same and apparently comes from a shared context. A look at the abortion conflict or any other deeply rooted social conflict makes this clear.

As we realize that ways of being and seeing lead us to understand conflict differently, we see that we can neither conduct an analysis nor design and implement a process without inquiring into the cultural and perceptual frames of those involved. If we proceed without this inquiry, we impose our own culturally shaped ideas of process and appropriate skills on others. Seeking to make conflicts manageable, we may extract and compartmentalize them in a way that makes sense to us but may not be shared.

If we want to truly bridge differences, we begin not with formal analysis but with stories, metaphors, and shared experiences. Parties cannot tell us directly about their cultural ways of seeing or worldviews; much of this is outside conscious awareness. Believing that surfacing ways of seeing is central to bridging conflict, however, we learn about them through inviting in as much context as we can. Conflict lives in the stories we tell about ourselves and others, in the ways these stories shape our identities, and in the options we perceive. As stories are told and experiences are shared, relationships deepen and interventions emerge that fit organically with the parties and their contexts.

In composing the next wave of conflict resolution practice, practitioners and trainers need to access a range of resources rather than rely on limited approaches to bridging conflict that focus on logic and communication. As creative and relational beings by nature, we have emotional, imaginative, physical, and spiritual gifts that assist us in the central human task of getting along. Using them, we welcome diversity; we build a range of cultural ways of being and navigating conflict into our processes. As we resist circumventing the rhythm of our conflicts through premature problem solving, we use inquiry, dialogue, and imagination to shift relationships. As troubled relationships are shifted through sharing stories, dreams, and other facets of ourselves, we clear our minds and hearts for effectively solving the problems that divide us. Stories, dreams, and shared experiences are the tributaries that lead us to the river where connections are more visible. Sometimes we discover them in places we had not thought to look.

Tributaries Leading to the River

More than a quarter of a century after she had taught me the same subject, my seventy-seven-year-old friend Meredith came to guest lecture in my "Psychology of Personality" class. You could see the looks on the faces of my twenty-something students. Who was this gray, stooped woman in the faded sweater, and what would she have to say that would be contemporary enough to touch their world? Hearing that she had taught me before they were born only intensified their apprehension. They settled in with unobstructed views of the clock.

Meredith arranged herself stiffly in the chair with a writing table attached to it. The chair seemed ill fitting and rigid, rude to her arthritic joints. She spoke with a voice slightly raspy, uneven. She knew their discomfort and dubiousness. She had voiced it herself to me earlier: What could she have to tell them? It was true she had practiced as a psychologist for fifty years and taught as long, but these days she felt invisible and increasingly dismissed by others. She began with the questions she had prepared.

"Are you more like a daisy or a rose?" she inquired. Silence. One or two of the more vocal or compliant ones volunteered an answer. "Why?" Meredith asked. More silence. She moved on. "Are you more like the city or the country? Like a mountain or a valley?" There was a spattering of answers, uncomfortable laughter, incredulous looks. She persisted. "Are you more like a computer or a quill pen?" No embarrassing psychological meaning having been unearthed in relation to the earlier questions, a few more students ventured answers. Most of them chose the computer.

At this point, it must have occurred to Meredith that they had been born after quill pens were no longer everyday currency, because she offered her own explanation. "I am more like a quill pen," she demonstrated, holding her third finger in the air with her others tucked under, revealing the bump that decades of holding pens had produced. Holding the pose, she slowly moved her hand so that everyone in the room could see the pronounced bump on her raised third finger.

This gesture was met with muffled giggles that matured into laughter and broke out among even the most reticent students.

Meredith looked out at her audience mystified, then down to her third finger, then out of the corner of her eye at me. And then she joined them, with deep belly laughter from the lower register on a tenor sax. When the mirth subsided, she apologized for giving them "the finger" inadvertently and moved into her presentation.

The entire climate in the class had shifted. Someone who would do what she had done, even inadvertently, and then laugh about it could not be all bad. Meredith knew to follow the tributaries of surprise and interest to the relational river. Now students sat in postures of openness and interest. They listened, participated, offered ideas. They asked questions about her practice. Meredith had changed for them, from someone outside their world to someone they welcomed in. A stranger still, she had come into relationship with them and this changed everything.

Their stereotypes and assumptions originally coalesced into a kind of groupthink that yielded the conclusion: "She's not one of us." Only after judgment had left their minds were they able to draw on the spirit of curiosity they had brought to earlier classes. After the incident, they referred to her affectionately as "that lady who gave us the finger," going out of their way on campus to greet her and introduce her to their friends. They had come into relationship with her, and it had changed them all.

Relationships as Resources

Relationships are the places where conflict arises. They are more than locations of blame, hurt, and pain. Problems cannot be solved without the energy and the resources of the people who created them. The question then becomes how to engage people with each other constructively so that problems can be addressed. As we saw with our Y2K computer problems, changing one piece of programming code necessitates other changes. We have to work at the level of the relational system to get results. Where are our problems if not in relationships with people? Where are the resources to address them if not in the relationships? Where is the will to sustain transformation or resolution if not in the relationships of communities, families, work groups?

When we think of relationships, we tend to think of them narrowly. We mediate between two people rather than involve their

staffs or their families. We help spouses divide marital property without inquiring about the role extended family members or children may play in decision making. We seek to separate and moderate people and their relationships, structuring our processes by invoking ground rules and turn taking. What would happen if we stopped to consider how these relationships developed and grew and invited the same resources in to address the conflicts that arose in the process? How would our conflict practice change if we saw relationships not as extractable entities but as woven into cultural and worldview contexts that give them texture, richness, and intrinsic worth?

As relationships begin and deepen, we draw on many creative resources. We experience physical, emotional, imaginative, and spiritual connections. We do things together; we feel for and with each other. We share visions and possibilities, cultural and personal ways of knowing, weaving them together with our past. Looking for similarities, we find connections rather than differences. When our relationships through work and play are meaningful, we experience synergy, energy, and inspiration.

At the same time, focusing on relationship when it seems to be disintegrating rather than flourishing is difficult. It means going against the momentum of our thought processes, the ones that help us feel OK, justified, right, or angry. The difficulty is that these thought processes also work to narrow or flatten our resources in conflict. We become defensive, self-protective, closed. From this state, we do not have access to the resources that flowed so freely during the development of our relationship. It is just plain uncomfortable to be in the muck of unresolved emotions, unsalved hurts, and tumbling dreams. Our response to this discomfort has been to construct processes that largely operate in a thin band, drawing on a finite set of communication and structuring tools. Sometimes these processes insulate us from our full potential for exploration, inquiry, discernment, and discovery.

It is true that relationships are complex and unpredictable. No matter how much we may wish to control them, we cannot. Our relationships are stories brought alive. Like anything living, they change. Some changes move us in the direction of openness and exploration. Others reinforce our separateness, our differences, and our boundaries. How can mediators, facilitators, and trainers

help, given this complexity and the difficulty of accessing expansive creative tools from a constricted space? Sometimes relational complexity leads us away from creative tools, daunted by the many variables. We prefer a process arising from our needs for certainty, calm, and closure to the dance of uncertainty that may or may not produce alchemy.

Add all of this complexity to real pressures of time, results, cost, and accountability. We exist in a far-from-perfect world, and we need to get things done. Most of us are uncomfortable enough with conflict that we want to get things done quickly. In our focus on speed and efficiency, we may not see relationships for the sources of resilience they can be. What would happen if we grounded our processes in this resilience, using creative tools to build new containers for damaged relationships?

After all, the cost of neglecting relationships is considerable. In personal lives, it leads to fragmentation, loss, and disorientation. In communities, it leads to disintegration, conflict, and violence. In our world, it leads to paralysis, waste, and the loss of countless innocent lives. Let's consider what happens when we place relationship at the heart of our study and practice of conflict, to inform what we see, what we do, and how we approach it. Will you imagine this with me and join me in inquiry about the capacities and tools that best support a creative, relational approach?

Capacities for Relational Processes

Imagine a process that draws on all of our relational capacities—a process in which emotional fluency is valued along with incisive analysis; our powerful capacity to envision is paired with symbolic actions that help build the scaffolding to get there; there is lots and lots of room for divergence along the way to closure or transformation or whatever we define as outcome; and creativity breathes life into "givens," thus inviting originality, genius, and attention to "chance" references and ideas.

Analysis, reason, and logical problem solving may help address conflicts, but they are not all we need. Not only are they situated in particular cultural understandings but they obscure other parts of the picture. To use them alone is to be like the woman who took a transatlantic cruise after saving for years. Each evening she hid

in her room, eating the cheese and crackers she had brought from home while other passengers dined on exotic delicacies, accompanied by fine music in exquisite rooms. Only at the end of the voyage did she realize that meals were included in the price of her passage. She had missed a part of the voyage she would have enjoyed immensely, narrowing her experience because of her mistaken assumption. Logic and reason are like the seascapes she loved; they are an essential part of the picture. But the whole can be even more satisfying when our full range of relational capacities is available to our processes.

Bringing emotional, spiritual, physical, and imaginative resources to conflict gives us many more routes to resolution or transformation. Our processes also become accessible and useful to a much wider range of people. Not only are these resources important for building and sustaining good relationships, they validate different ways of learning, knowing, and approaching conflict. They help us bridge cultural and personality differences; they help equalize power; they broaden the wisdom available for changing the form and dynamics of conflict.

Educators know that presenting material in different modes, at different paces, in ways that promote interaction and reflection is effective in promoting learning. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners are served when some material is presented in their preferred format. So conflict resolvers and trainers who think broadly of their processes draw on all the senses, as well as on their capacity for emotional intelligence, spiritual meaning making, physical movement, and creative imagination.

There is sure to be resistance to doing things differently. Bureaucratic cultural expectations color our processes, leading to expectations of traditional formats and meetinglike settings. Many of us are uncomfortable with conflict, with its emotional intensity and relational complexity. Developing creative and multimodal tools requires that we "do" and "be" differently, situating relationships at the center of our approaches. In all of this, we will face challenges from within ourselves as we question our givens and step a degree or two out of our comfort zones. We will also face questions from parties and trainees who want and need to get to the point, to arrive at yes, to leave the discomfort of conflict behind.

In our diverse world, cultivating comfort with paradox and ambiguity is fast becoming a life skill. We already draw on it in conflict interventions, telling parties we have to go slowly at the beginning to go fast later. We suggest that broadening the conversation through investigating interests will advance our ultimate aim of finding specific solutions. We can also open the possibility that there are a variety of complementary ways to shift through conflict. We need two kinds of resources: our human, relational capacities and an array of tools. These relational capacities include our abilities to feel and sense, dream and envision, physically enact, and create and discover. As we have seen, we draw on these capacities as we build relationships. We will explore how these capacities can inform our conflict processes, bringing texture, maneuverability, awareness, and results.

From these capacities arise an infinite number of creative tools. They range from the dramatic, like psychodrama (acting out situations for therapeutic reasons), to the ordinary, like the universal act of telling a story. They touch our senses, referencing physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences. They speak to us of the underground rivers that connect us, building a foundation of relationship at the center of our processes. We explore three of the most basic, yet most powerful, tools in this book: story, metaphor, and ritual.

This book is about using these capacities and tools to enhance our practice and achieve success in our teaching. It is about strength and resilience in relationships as a resource in our work, even when it is hard to see where we are going. It is about noticing times that stand out for their brilliance, their poignancy, or their surprise. Can you think of times when something unexpected or out of the ordinary happened in a mediation or a classroom? Times when you or others were especially creative? Where were the sparks and the skraps in these moments?[1] What stood out as particularly shining or tarnished? What has this shown you about relationship and conflict? What has it shown you about creativity? My experience is that these sparks and skraps arise unplanned. I do not program them; I cannot predict them. I only learn from the serendipity they deliver or from the discomfort they cause—discomfort that leads me to change an approach next time.

Sparks and skraps have topographical reality. Sparks are the hills we stand on from which we can see a long way. Things fall into perspective. Relationships grow closer. Creativity flourishes. Thoughts and feelings are integrated. Skraps are the valleys from which the summit seems remote and difficult. Distances are hard to judge and distorted. Relationships may be strained and creativity seems inaccessible. They are the "ouch" in the classroom, the dart in the mediation. They hurt.

Conflict is mountainous terrain. It happens in human relational systems that are bigger than we are. Mountains happen. This book is about climbing, playing, reaching the summit, and exploring. It is about accessing creativity in the valley and empathy on the peak. It is about developing repertoires that span the altitudes and reach to the depths. It is about curiosity, hope, and grace in the face of conflict.

Seven Mountains: Principles of a Creative, Relational Approach to Conflict

To conflict we bring energy and the capacity to solve problems using all of our resources. We bring tools to help us make the journey. At last, we seek the grace of acknowledging that we could not have made it by ourselves. Conflict is a relational journey. Curious about ways to enhance our work and play, we traverse seven mountains that are central to a creative, relational perspective.

1. Circle Mountain: A Holistic Approach

We are now at the point in the development of the conflict resolution field where we need to reexamine and refocus. For years, we have worked to develop staged processes and communication skills training modules to help people become fluent with conflict resolution. We had to do so if we were to bring awareness of the positive potential that conflict brings and of the possibility of handling it in ways that yield integrative solutions and less animosity than previous approaches. We had to formulate structures that could be taught easily, in a language that made conflict a part of our everyday lexicon. This is the phonics of bridging conflict.

It is now time to balance phonics with whole language, to look at the meaning and the sense of what we are doing and ask these questions:

- How is relationship a resource in our work?
- What are the core capacities for third parties and trainers in conflict, and how do these complement the approaches that we already use?
- How can we infuse conflict resolution or transformation with creativity?
- What helps us bring our whole selves into the service of addressing conflict?

I have taught in this field for fifteen years. When I began, I was enthusiastic about the discovery of a constructive way to approach conflict. I taught principled negotiation and helped many lawyers, judges, counselors, scientists, scholars, and others learn to distinguish an interest from a position. It excited me to see the paradigm shift that took place. It excites me still to participate in questioning the ways we have done conflict in the past and proposing new ones that respect and honor relationship.

Increasingly, however, students in my classes tell me that they leave with more questions than answers. This is because I have come to believe that one of the most important jobs we have as educators and intervenors is to get the questions right. This means wondering what else we might bring to the project rather than traversing the same ground. I hope, as the poet Rilke[2] suggests, that we might collectively live into some of the answers. I wonder:

- Are there ways we can draw on ourselves and our relationships in addressing conflict that we have not yet conceived?
- Are there sectors where creative, relational practices have evolved that could inform other sectors and groups of practitioners?
- Where are questions being generated that can inform and focus our explorations in new ways?
- How can we integrate creative, relational tools into our practices?

As a field, we have achieved wide exposure for our conflict resolution and transformation ideas. Few people are confused these

days about the difference between *mediation* and *meditation*. Mediation services are available in many communities, schools, and workplaces. At the same time, the many trained mediators we have produced have not eliminated intractable conflict. Differences in class, ethnicity, race, gender, and other identities seem to be intensifying rather than diminishing. What does a mountaintop view of our field show us about what else we can do and how else we can be?

This book seeks to contribute some answers. It looks to build trails up the mountain that respect the ecosystem and suggest themselves from the terrain. No superhighways are contemplated. Rather, climbing Circle Mountain is a process of integration, of gathering wisdom along the way through openness to diverse ways of seeing, doing, and being. It is to acknowledge where we have come, how we have affected systems around us and how they have affected us. As we do this, we will see that change occurs through relationship, that our hearts have contributed, along with our minds, to our greatest successes.

2. Heart Mountain: Relationship as Resource

As we have seen, relationship is both the medium in which conflict sprouts and the soil that births and sustains resolution. Putting relationship at the center of our processes situates us so that we can see the many resources it offers. This does not mean, as one of my colleagues worries, that we should all sit around and sing "Kumbaya." There is too much tumult, too many barriers, for that to work. When we center our response to conflict in relationship, we are called to authenticity and openness. Conflict was never successfully addressed by welcoming in only the treble clef. Our whole range of experience becomes a resource for our processes, drawing on many ways of knowing, being, and relating that are learned through pain and loss as well as joy and connection.

Because we are different culturally and personally, no one of us has a prescription that can be swallowed whole by others. We can only work together, devising ways that fit particular times, groups, needs, and understandings. As we work, we create a relational space in which shifts and change can happen. We always work within boundaries. Part of our job is to discern where the boundaries are,

how they both inhibit and support progress, and ways it may be possible to shift them.

Boundaries are important to the healthy functioning of relationships. In their absence, there may be confusion, waste, and even resentment, exploitation, or injury. Boundaries facilitate safety and spontaneity by letting us know limits. They free us to explore, relate, and inquire within a safe space. As a facilitator, teacher, and mediator, I engage everyone in naming, setting, and maintaining boundaries so that learning can take place. I try to get everyone on the same page, or at least in the same book. This is not always easy. Difficulty with initial boundary setting signals a need for more relational work before engaging the substance of issues.

Some of the hardest conflicts arise when different relational expectations are brought to a process. I remember when a friend taught a week-long course about women and global leadership some years ago. She is an accomplished scholar, and many of the students came with high expectations, born of reading her work. It happened that they were all women. But there the similarity ended. Some of the women believed that a course of this nature would, at long last, invite all dimensions of their identities into the room. They could engage in spiraling dialogue, sharing their experiences as mothers alongside their experiences in the boardroom, all in a seamless web. They resisted structure, as well as all but the most relaxed boundaries and most attempts to focus their participation. They were there for the journey, unconcerned about destination.

Others came to challenge themselves with theories and facts in the service of advancing their career paths as global women leaders. They grew impatient at prolonged sharing. They wanted to move through material, not into it. And they wanted to leave their multifaceted identities at the door, coming together as learners with a common, focused objective. These women resisted experiential exercises, especially as the course went on and they encountered more and more of what they perceived to be diversions from the agenda.

One particularly challenging day, my colleague asked her class to form small discussion groups. As it was warm and sunny, they dispersed outside the building. It took her some time to realize that she had not told them when to come back. Surprised at her

lapse in clarity and boundary setting, she realized that the struggle to bridge the two kinds of agendas in the class was more wearing than she had known. She found them, scattered on the grass, and invited them back into the classroom.

Part of what saved the course was my friend's awareness and articulateness about the process. When she did reassemble the class, she engaged them in dialogue about how to proceed. She shared her genuine frustration at the level of conflict among class members and resistance to nearly every suggested activity. Together, class members negotiated a way of proceeding that balanced the concerns of those who wanted to explore with the needs of others for information and closure. Although the trail had switchbacks, the women did make it up the mountain. On the last day of class, they brought my friend a beautiful hand-potted bowl to symbolize their full learning experience—a remembrance of their now-precious relationships.

Seeing the class together after their final meeting, I was amazed at how close they seemed and how much affection was demonstrated among those who had acted earlier in quite adversarial ways to each other and the instructor. The affection lasted; many of the women remained in touch with each other and with my friend in the years to come.

Relationships strengthened in the fire of conflict can be resilient and enduring. For those of us engaged in helping to build and hold relational containers, it is important to remember that the process is not a straight line. We see ourselves through the mirror of relationship in ways we cannot when we are alone. Relationship shows us our blind spots, our weak points, our surest strengths. Our most important job in conflict may be to find a way to hold the mirror high so that as we see ourselves, we also see the choices we make in seeing. Exercising choice, we look for places where our hearts are partners with our minds in engaging relationships. This is the journey of Heart Mountain.

3. Magic Mountain: Welcoming Surprises

All dimensions of relationship are realized most expansively in the creative process, which calls us to attention, invention, and change. All of us are fluent in these processes, though some of us have built

fences around the realms in which we show it. We ask ourselves *whether* we are creative (and many of us answer no) rather than *how* we are creative. We think of creativity as a thing we either have or do not have rather than as a process available to all of us. How do you manifest creativity? How do you be creative? When you bring a creative moment to your awareness, what comes? Take a moment to notice the feelings, thoughts, and physical sensations that are present. Now consider what it would mean to experience the same vitality in the midst of conflict.

Engaging creative processes requires suspending judgment at least temporarily, substituting a spirit of inquiry and openness to outcome. Judgment will shut down creativity every time, just as it stopped members of my class from relating warmly to Meredith. Judgment has nipped more creative possibilities in the bud than lack of time, funds, or imagination ever could. Turned inward, judgment inhibits individual creative expression. We second-guess ourselves, minimize our contributions, and mute our voices. Critical judgments also build fences between us and others. Believing we know, we do not inquire. Thus we quash possibilities for transformation and even peaceful coexistence.

When we suspend judgment, we acknowledge that other ways of being and knowing exist alongside our own. We get genuinely curious about how these work, how they lead to ways of seeing and being, how they translate into behaviors. As we do this, our ways of being with each other and with conflict shift, opening new possibilities and revealing again the importance of relationship as a learning place, a place from which quests, tests, and gifts arise.

Recently I taught a course titled "Spirituality and Conflict." The course was broad and general and covered a variety of topics from forgiveness to resilience—from an exploration of cultural ways people make meaning to an examination of reconciliation commissions and processes. How could I join with the class to hold all of this together in a coherent whole? How could I

- Introduce and define the topic of spirituality in a way that included everyone yet was not so broad and abstract that it could not be grasped or integrated?
- Convey the universality in the topic and invite expansive thinking yet create boundaries for comfort and clarity?

- Engage participants in a way that would make the creativity inherent in spirituality and the spiritual component of creativity apparent?

Before the class began, I saw a friend who is a docent at a modern art museum. I shared with her my judgments about modern art and my fear that, if I suspended them, I would be left only with my lack of understanding and frustration. I had dealt with this by avoiding modern art exhibits. If I had thought of connecting art to my class, it would surely have been Renaissance pictures of angels before any piece from the twentieth century. "But Michelle," she said in an excited voice, "modern art is all about spirituality. That is why there is so much space. It invites us to go within, to explore meanings and meaning making!"

Together we generated an idea. Rather than a traditional meeting for the first class, we met at the museum. With her gentle leadership, we walked, watched, and listened our way into dialogue about spirituality, conflict, and creativity. Surrounded by the stark whites and grays of the museum walls, ceilings, and floors, we found warmth and connection. Encountering paintings and sculptures that would have intimidated or put us off in the past, we found surprises and insights.

We began in front of an egg-shaped piece resting on the floor, covered in pure, deep-blue pigment. It was quietly lighted, a symbol of life and paradox. It seemed deep and shallow, concave and convex at once. Setting aside our initial anxiety about not understanding it, we began to share our responses. The piece elicited feelings of attraction and awe, fear and distancing. It was an inviting cocoon. Or was it bottomless and frightening? Some saw nobility, others intensity, others ambiguity.

This experience led us to a dialogue about the paradoxes of conflict and our ambiguous feelings about approaching it. The theme of spirituality wove through our observations, touching issues of boundary and mystery, infinity and simplicity, transformation and loss. As we moved to view other items in the gallery, we built on these themes, reflecting on the different messages conveyed by the artists about spirituality and existence. Were they communicating the importance of transcendence or of humble acceptance? Did the pieces speak to releasing attachments or of

creative connection to our world and each other? Our exploration created sparks that enlivened later conversations and a quality of relationship among us that made learning deeper and more productive.

Only later did I reflect that the whole experience mirrored the creative process. It began with an opening, sparked by my initial suspension of judgment about modern art. Together we moved through exploration and inquiry to insight and integration. We composed our experience in the moments together, releasing our thoughts, feelings, and imaginings into the museum space. By the time we left, we felt much closer than when we had come. We felt the satisfaction of having explored without reducing, of having shared without contesting, of having entertained paradox without retreating. Every participant agreed that this had set a generative tone for the class, where there would be plenty of time later to weave theories into the pattern of our experiential web. We had set a rich table for ourselves, one loaded with textures, visions, scents, and sounds. And so we made ourselves available to surprise and experienced creative synergy that arose, not from any one of us but among us. This is the gift of Magic Mountain.

4. Goldmine Mountain: Involving Our Whole Selves

We have said that effectively bridging conflict is at its heart a creative, relational process. Creative processes call for the active engagement of all of our parts:

- Our physical selves, who enact relationship and creativity, receive discernment, provide direction, and embody flexibility
- Our emotional selves, from whence comes resilience, interpersonal facility, empathy, clarity, and hope
- Our imagining selves, who visualize, hear, taste, and touch possibilities into reality, giving our intuition form
- Our spiritual selves, who connect us to larger contexts and to meaning making and exploring mystery through the natural world and that which we cannot touch

Each of these capacities is explored in a separate chapter; each is connected to, or coexists with, the others. Our peak experiences

draw on all or many of them together. Our conflict processes, as we have seen, tend to underuse and underappreciate them. Yet our conflict stories are full of references to these facets of our experience. One story comes to mind.

We were outside Dublin, meeting to work on issues relating to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I was part of the facilitation team for this gathering of diplomats from around the world. It was the early 1990s, and the region was unsettled. What would happen if a group of people who understood international relations and the skills of diplomacy came together in dialogue about Israeli-Palestinian issues? For the first two days, nothing much seemed to happen at all. Rhetoric was familiar, as issues of identity and security were spoken about in the guise of confidence-building measures. Sessions were sometimes intense but more often verged on tedious. Someone has said that watching mediation is a bit like watching paint dry. It is hard to see it happening and it takes a long time. In this workshop, it was worse. I was not sure that any paint was sticking to the walls at all.

On the third day of this five-day workshop, a trip had been planned. We loaded ourselves onto buses and headed up the east coast of Ireland to Belfast. Organizers thought that seeing another deeply divided society would give us food for thought or at least reality therapy. In fact, the visits we paid to an organization dedicated to bicommunal housing and the sites of bombed buildings had less impact than the hours we spent being jostled in the bus. On the bus, we learned that one of the participants was a novelist. He wrote every evening after work for four or five hours and had produced several books. Another raised horses. There was talk about children, spouses, cars, and traffic. We shared stories about travel disasters and childhood dreams, about New York City and the streets of Cairo. When we arrived back in Dublin, the relational climate among us had shifted.

Over the remaining days, we worked together with energy and imagination. We did not solve the complex issues involved, but we engaged in authentic conversations and exchanged ideas that were followed up after the workshop. The physical act of taking a bus trip got us out of our problem-solving minds, tapping our emotional intelligence in the service of building relationships. We had shared dreams, and this helped us take an imaginative look at our

subject, the conflict between Israel and Palestine. We had shown each other parts of our lives that matter deeply and so shared some small part of our ways of making meaning.

What did we learn from all of this? Should we always take bus trips together when trying to address problems? Prescriptive and narrow as that is, it is not as wrong as it might sound. Designing opportunities for movement and relational engagement, as well as for sharing dreams and purposes, is important in our processes. Taking a break and moving our focus away from a problem that we have tried hard to solve without a breakthrough is an important step toward a creative outcome. In so doing, we share parts of ourselves that become relational resources to our processes. We literally share who we are in the service of what we are trying to do. This is the gift of Goldmine Mountain.

5. Noble Mountain: Being Our Teachings

What images come to mind when you hear the word *noble*? Perhaps you remember a person, perhaps a piece of art or a place. Is it the Grand Canyon, stretching out in endless possibility, or the Milky Way splashed onto a magnificent desert sky? Is it a black-and-white image of Gandhi or Mother Teresa, gazing at you in calm sureness, or is it a painting by Georgia O'Keefe, inviting you into the delicate heart of an exquisite flower? Nobility conjures awareness of the big picture. We call an act noble when it serves others. We feel admiration and appreciation for noble acts. They inspire us to stretch ourselves, to be leaders, to listen to that which calls us.

Leaders in conflict resolution bring sets of techniques and understanding of processes but, most important, they bring themselves. Without the self, none of the other things are useful. We saw at Goldmine Mountain that we enhance our processes by bringing all of ourselves. Noble Mountain asks that we consider how vision and purpose direct the selves that we bring. At Noble Mountain, big-picture questions reveal themselves as we climb. What is our purpose? How does our work relate to our purpose? Beyond this mediation or that process, what is our vision for ourselves, for others, and for our world? The questions persist, moving to deeper and deeper levels. It is not enough to say that our purpose is to help and our work as mediators or facilitators is helpful. When we

have climbed our last mountain and look back at all the others, what will be the thread that holds them together? What unique gifts do we bring? How do we bring them? What is the legacy we live into every day? These are big questions. Having climbed several mountains already, you may wonder why these questions are necessary here. Does a book about conflict resolution really need to treat such weighty topics? For two reasons, the answer is yes.

First, as we tell our clients, we really need to know where we are going if we want to arrive there. Purpose provides focus, fuel, and feeling to our journeys. Second, our dominant culture surrounds us with values of consumerism, pleasure, and quick fixes. Just below the surface, there is a hunger for meaning, community, and connection with others; we seek connection with the natural and spiritual worlds, with ourselves. Knowing our purpose is a way of deepening our relationship with ourselves. As we do this, we are better able to engage relationships with others, including those who are different from us. This is because comfort and clarity with ourselves leaves us with less of a need to change others. As we attend to our own internal voice and walk our own purposeful path, we can be of service without bringing our unmet needs to the table and imposing them unconsciously on others.

Articulating our purpose brings focus to our actions, calling us to decision and discipline about what fits and what does not fit well. Duane Elgin, in his book *Voluntary Simplicity,* quotes Richard Gregg, who originated the term *voluntary simplicity:* "Voluntary simplicity . . . means singleness of purpose . . . an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure a greater abundance of life in other directions. It involves a deliberate organization of life for a purpose."[3] To see the value of this, we look at the alternatives.

Have you ever had the kind of morning where you set out to do one thing and never got to it? There is the phone call that interrupts, the kitchen drawer that needs tidying, the dog who won't take his medication, and the agenda to prepare for tomorrow's meeting. Walking past the mirror, you see that your hair needs attention. On the table is a half-written letter you had promised yourself you would get out. The morning disappears into fragmented doing, none of it wrong, all of it at some level necessary. But the "one thing" lies unfinished, perhaps not even started.

Sometimes we treat purpose like this: it is something we plan to get to after we clear up everything else that demands our attention. And so it waits for a time when, climbing Noble Mountain, the questions come back again in ways they cannot be ignored. Then we call a time out and commit to exploring our purpose.

We can learn about our purpose through self-reflection and dialogue with others, as well as by watching ourselves in the world. What do we try to do, to be, in our interactions with others? Do we want acknowledgment, harmony, victory, security, or connection? Do we seek adventure, creativity, joy, solace, or certainty? How do the things we care about manifest themselves in our relationships with others, with the natural world, with spirit? We may want many of these things, but we can't pay attention to them all at once. Our habits of attention lead us to look for and cultivate particular things in our lives and pay less attention to others.

Richard Leider has been working with leaders to discern and realize their purposes for many years. Most often, he reports, purpose involves contributing to someone or something outside the self. It may be "bringing joy to others" or "being a small part of making others' lives big." For the past few years, my answer to this question has been consistent. My purpose is to live creatively in relationship with others, the natural and spiritual worlds, and myself, sharing and receiving gifts of discovery and connection. A primary way that I share my gifts and facilitate discovery is through writing. When days go by and my writing is neglected, something inside feels "off." I have an internal alarm that starts to ring when life gets too busy to attend to a core part of my purpose. It calls me back to the computer, sometimes late at night or early in the morning, to write a letter, to add to a book, to let my thoughts take form on paper.

Try asking yourself this question, or get a friend to help by asking you repeatedly: What do I want to do and be in the world? Once you answer, pose the question again. If a friend is helping you, ask the person not to comment or share views but simply to thank you for each response and ask the same question again. This is not our ordinary way of conversing, and it may feel awkward at first. As the question is posed again and again, you will get beneath the quick, ready answers to deeper answers. What stands out as important to your life mission, your purpose? Your answers may

surprise you. After doing this, consider how the ways you have set up your life and work match your purpose.

My goal here is not to prescribe a particular purpose. Recognizing diverse ways of knowing and of making meaning suggests that there are an infinite number of purposes. Each of us can only discover purpose for ourselves. Others cannot impose it. Naming purpose ourselves and keeping it in everyday awareness is a powerful step toward realizing it. Noble Mountain represents many different purposes. If we could survey people in the field of conflict resolution, we would find many reasons for involvement. This is excellent news; it means that we can serve diverse people in diverse ways that fit with our wide range of purposes.

We teach others that conflict-bridging skills are life skills. We magnify those skills through engagement in creative, relational processes. It follows that we cannot draw artificial boundaries between what we do in our work and how we are in other facets of our lives. As I seek to engage disputing parties in creative invention, practicing at home with my children and partner helps. It helps not just in expanding and strengthening my repertoire but in contributing to the alignment of my purpose with all facets of my work and play. As there is alignment, there will be congruence, and I will grow in my capacity to do imaginative and creative work from the solid foundation of Noble Mountain.

A story about Gandhi speaks powerfully of this. He was asked by a mother to tell her child not to eat sugar. "Come back in two weeks and I will tell him," he assured her. She did as he asked. When she returned, he spoke to her child about the ill effects of sugar and the benefits of abstaining. When the mother asked why he had requested two weeks, he told her that he had to stop eating sugar before he could ask anyone else to do so. Gandhi knew the power of congruence. Through congruence—living his principles in his actions—he changed systems and upset injustices.

Daniel Bowling and David Hoffman,[4] two leaders in our field, have written persuasively about the personal qualities needed in conflict intervention and training. They suggest that once we have mastered conflict resolution skills and an intellectual understanding of processes, our next developmental task is to develop and integrate personal qualities of clarity, awareness, and centeredness. As they acknowledge, there are many paths to these qualities.

This is reinforced in another book in our field, Deborah Kolb's book *When Talk Works*.[5] She shows persuasively that mediators and facilitators are diverse in their approaches. What each of them brings is a strong, authentic personality, creativity that fits with their way of seeing and being, and ways of building influential relationships. Although Kolb's work does not explore *purpose* explicitly, the clarity and coherence demonstrated by her interviewees suggests its presence. Third parties in Kolb's book match their work in the world with what they care about internally, thus manifesting congruence.

We live in a time when ideas about congruence are countered in popular culture. Politicians and other leaders would have us believe that it is possible to segment our lives, to be ruthless or unfaithful in one setting and compassionate and trustworthy in another. Without entering this philosophical debate, I will share my personal answer. It is my experience that I am more at peace and therefore more effective when my purpose and my actions are aligned. Alignment brings energy and clarity to my work and play.

Thinking of this takes me back to an early summer afternoon. I was sitting in my ample office with the window open. A breeze wafted in from the manicured green lawn, bordered by neatly trimmed pink and mauve azaleas. It was quiet and my work on patients' files was proceeding. My life in general seemed settled and secure since I had accepted the job of patient advocate at a large mental hospital. True, I was not experiencing much success in changing conditions at the hospital or achieving releases into supportive communities for my clients. I was working in a system where control and power were centralized, where my clients were impoverished not only financially but also in life choices. It was hard to see how an atmosphere of collaboration could be cultivated in the midst of such a huge and powerful bureaucracy. Protracted litigation and efforts to change legislation loomed ahead; it was a difficult and adversarial road.

Then the telephone rang. I was offered a new position, directing a research project in conflict resolution and culture at a university in another city. To my surprise, I heard myself accept. The acceptance came from deep inside of me, from the place where I was crystal clear about my purpose.

Earlier that year, I had visited a psychotherapist for one session, seeking to clarify my career direction. It had become very clear to

me that my heart was in conflict resolution rather than the adversarial practice of law; I wanted to creatively and collaboratively bridge differences in relationship with colleagues and clients. The new opportunity fit this purpose elegantly, so I stepped into a career that has given me space to create and contribute in relationship with many others I deeply admire. This taught me the importance of knowing and clarifying purpose as I go along. It is hard for us to be congruent when we have a fuzzy idea about what we are aligning with.

When there is not alignment, tension arises. Sometimes I live with that tension because there are external pressures to proceed. It is matter of degree; I may do something I know is not central to my purpose because I am asked or because it is important to another. This works as long as it is not opposite my purpose and as long as it does not violate any deep belief. Sometimes the tension arises because I have not been clear enough about my purpose in taking on a project, only realizing later that it is taking me away from my purpose. Most of us do things that are not central to our purposes, and we sometimes feel ourselves out of alignment. And still we can be effective. We compose our lives around themes, and the themes shift, changing the way the light shines on our purposes in a dynamic and intriguing dance.

The journey up Noble Mountain has a fluid quality. It is neither extreme nor rigid. It just asks us to keep our purpose in view and to ask questions of alignment and congruence of ourselves as we climb.

6. Mirror Mountain: Transcending Limitations

At the summit of Noble Mountain, we come to see our purpose and its power to illuminate our actions. On the way down the mountain, we encounter obstacles and tests that challenge our resolve and our clarity. These obstacles can obscure our view of connections—connections between ourselves and others, our experiences and their impact on our lives and work, our histories and what they lead us to perceive as well as what they may obscure. Recognizing these connections is the gift of Mirror Mountain.

Some of the obstacles have their roots in our early histories as peoples and as individuals. As we seek to engage our creative purpose, many of us have to grapple with the limitations of our beliefs

about ourselves. Whatever the stories we tell ourselves, they have a great deal of influence on our actions and effectiveness in helping others in conflict.

A Chinese Canadian woman came to my workshop on creativity and conflict transformation. She was respectful and earnest, speaking when asked and otherwise silent. I asked the class to work individually, remembering and writing down the messages they had been given about creativity as children. An astonishing number of participants had received messages from parents, teachers, and others about limitations on their creativity. I asked them to draw a picture of creativity in their own lives as they would like to imagine it. What would it look like? What colors would it be?

She did the activities intently. Slowly her face seemed to relax and she set down her pencil. She related the story of how she had moved from China as a young girl with her immigrant parents. They had opened a Chinese restaurant in western Canada. While her brothers were involved in after-school athletics, she helped at the restaurant. It was a given; she was needed. Her life was busy and full. She learned that it took a lot of hard work to get ahead.

She remembered how, as a little girl, she had loved to draw. Late in elementary school, she was given a scholarship to a summer art program. There she drew animals and flowers, earning the praise of her teachers. At the end of the program, she had a portfolio of treasured pictures of shaded charcoal, pen-and-ink, and pencil sketches. She put them in the basement of her parents' home. They stayed there during all of her school years. They stayed while she went to the university and when she married. When she visited her parents, she often disappeared downstairs and got them out, just for the pleasure of seeing them again.

She was close to tears as she said that she wanted to redraw the lines of her life, to reclaim that part of herself who had fallen outside the boundaries of schoolgirl and family helper. It was a passion that called her through the years since she had drawn two decades before. She felt relief to articulate it and energy to pursue it. She was living a script of security and self-deferment, but her art still called her to relationship. It called her to a relationship with her creative self, with her capacity to extend herself and expand her experience. Later she told me that the art had made a difference in her relationship with her husband and in her work. "I feel opened up inside," she confided.

Reflecting on this experience, I saw again that creativity is a sensitive area for many of us. Imagining that it is something we "are" or "are not," our wish to be creative seems like the desire to change our height or our blood type. Considering it narrowly, we see it in others, not ourselves. Setting it apart, we do not integrate it into our everyday selves. We know intuitively it is important to bridging conflict and to living a satisfying life, yet we are threatened by our perceived inadequacy and unsettled by our uncertainty about what creativity is and how it might manifest in our lives. I am reminded of Marianne Williamson's words, as quoted by Nelson Mandela in his acceptance speech when he became president of South Africa: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, talented, gorgeous, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?"[6]

As we climb Mirror Mountain, we remember that what we see outside ourselves is a reflection of who we are inside ourselves. We can live into spacious ways of being, using our physical, emotional, imagining, and meaning-making capacities. As we magnify our creative capacities, we are better able to assist others in bridging conflict.

7. Invention Mountain: Creative Tools

Cultivating our capacities for relationship and creativity, we discover new ways of engaging with others on Invention Mountain. The toolbox for a relational approach is bottomless. We can reach in at different times and find surprises among our tried-and-true favorites. We may reach in and find it empty during one panicky moment. Grounded in a relational approach, we know that it is never empty. Sometimes we find the needed tool through letting go of our idea of what a proper tool should look like. Sometimes we find it by posing the question to those with whom we are working. For they bring their own wisdom, whether or not they know it. Sometimes we find it by chance. At least, we call it chance. Together we will explore how we can prepare ourselves to be favored by chance through personal preparation and fluency with creative processes.

No plumber goes out to fix broken pipes without a wrench; no attorney attends a meeting without a pen; no dancer heads for the

theater without her shoes. Conflict bridgers need fundamental tools, too. In addition to the communication and structuring skills we have developed, we need our capacities for relationship and our fluency in creative processes. Our tools give us what we need to respond with resourcefulness, spontaneity, and ingenuity to conflicts:

- *Metaphors*—direct links from language to experience and back again
- *Stories*—containers for meaning and relationship since before language was invented
- *Rituals*—new and traditional ways to mark, change, and contain new stories, identities, and relationships

Our creative processes are animated through language, both verbal and nonverbal. From language we build stories enlivened by metaphors or images. Stories stimulate empathy and build connection. From connection we bridge experiences of separation and conflict. Rituals help us cross the boundaries between the world we know and the world we imagine. They help us move through conflict, with the changes in identities, roles, and meanings that conflict brings. Sometimes metaphors, rituals, and stories help by stirring things up enough for new meanings to emerge.

I was giving an intensive course on creativity and conflict to a varied group of people with widely different levels of experience in conflict work and seriously different perspectives about creativity. Nothing undermines a course on creativity more than an atmosphere that is flat and unengaging, just as nothing undermines our effectiveness as third parties in conflict more than exhibiting our own unresolved conflicts. The morning was going slowly, and it was difficult to find places where relational bridges could be built that would allow for exploration and discovery in the group.

After a break, I asked the participants to come back into the room and introduce themselves to each other. They had already done this, of course, sharing names, contexts, and learning goals. This time, I requested that they introduce themselves as someone they have dreamed of being. There were no other instructions, except that the dreamed person was to be as complete as possible in demeanor, affect, speech, and presentation. As they introduced

themselves, I asked them to talk to us about creativity and how it related to their ways of being in the world.

What happened was amazing, to me and to them. We met a professional hockey player, an award-winning gardener, a dancer, a writer, a waitress, and an inventor; before there had been lawyers, judges, and consultants. They introduced themselves in completely different voices, complete with accents, new intonations, and body language to go with them. Freed from their usual identities, they exuded confidence and certainty about their art, their work, their lives. Creativity was something they knew well, but they needed to shift their stories, their images of themselves, to express it. The new introductions became a ritual for these expressions, an invitation to share parts of themselves usually kept hidden.

This foray into metaphors and stories through an informal ritual made room for many new conversations among us. Flexibility flourished among us, where self-consciousness and image had dominated. The exercise powerfully underscored our role in creating ourselves in the world, minute-by-minute. Our identities come from the identities we live into being every day. Together the creative tools of metaphor, story, and ritual help us compose the worlds we envision. To use them, it is helpful to consider some things about creative processes and how they work. First, come down from Invention Mountain and take a rest, savoring the journey.

Gifts from the Mountains

We have visited seven mountains—mountains that symbolize the principles of a relational approach to conflict. Although we may have wanted to stay longer, we did not linger. We took the chairlift up and down, seeing the view but not getting muddy or winded. We will have opportunities to climb each of the mountains as we go forward, to taste the air freshened by local flora, to experience ourselves in connection with ideas and stories. Woven into the chapters that follow, we will visit

- Circle Mountain, beginning and ending our journey in integration and connection, recognizing many ways of seeing and knowing

- Heart Mountain, inviting us to mindful and heartful relationship in the service of bridging conflict
- Magic Mountain, drawing us to stay open and alive to discovery and surprise
- Goldmine Mountain, where the winds whisper that we need all of our physical, emotional, imagining, and spiritual selves to do this work
- Noble Mountain, reminding us why
- Mirror Mountain, engaging us in seeing and surpassing our limitations
- Invention Mountain, offering us ways to be the creativity we envision

As we do, we will draw on creativity as a relational resource. Before we begin, a few words about creativity and relationship.

The Relational Nature of Creativity

There are thousands of books about creativity. Sadly, many of them reinforce narrow ideas about the subject. Anthologies about creativity collect the voices of accomplished painters, authors, and scientists, perpetuating the idea that creativity is about mastery. A myriad of books provide steps to creativity, suggesting that it is reducible to a series of techniques. When the techniques get usurped by other attractions or demands, they are relegated to a shelf in the garage next to the dusty rowing machine, and we continue as before.

Although these books may be limited, they are surely correct in their message that we can all develop our creative capacities. The question is how to proceed. Creativity is the process of bringing something new into being. It involves all parts of us: our beliefs and attitudes about ourselves and others, as conditioned by experience; our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual states; and our ways of paying attention. It also involves relationship, whether fleeting or long-term, before, after, and during the creative process.

Most books on creativity treat it as an individual pursuit. Let's take a moment to examine that assumption. Bring to mind a time in your life when you felt inventive or imaginative, when you were

involved in bringing something new into being. What was the process like? Can you locate the sensations you felt then in your body? How did you feel about the activity? What were your thoughts? Take a moment and explore these questions in writing or a drawing that evokes your experience. Celebrate your creativity by naming and marking it.

If you have difficulty thinking of such a time, remember that creativity need not be the invention of electricity. Use these questions to help:

- When did you feel enlivened or energized?
- When did you mediate, facilitate, or train in a way that went especially well?
- When did you feel particularly close to someone else?
- When did something happen that surprised you or led you to change your point of view about an issue or another person?
- What was happening at these times that brought something new into being?

Once you have brought a creative time to mind, consider these questions:

- Where did the idea come from, how did it arise?
- What role did others play in your first brush with the ideas or activity, either through interaction, casual encounter, or remembered contact?
- Did you carry them out in a solitary way, or in connection with others?
- How did contact with others, with the natural world, with dreams, or with spirit inform or shape your work?
- When the process came to closure, how were others involved?
- If there was a product of your work, did you share it?
- If there was no product or you did not share it, how did the creative experience affect you?
- How did it affect your relationships?

I notice that my creative moments always have to do with relationship. When I struggle with writing, enduring confusion and the voice that asks why I am trying to write at all, I remind myself through conversation. The conversation may be with a friend or

colleague who understands and supports what I am doing; it may be a conversation with myself in which I go back to the purpose I had for writing; it may be a conversation with Spirit as I walk along the beach, asking with genuine inquiry what comes next. At some point, the creative process extends beyond me and my ego boundaries, refuting the image of the tortured composer or painter working endlessly in isolation. Even in these cases, creative work is conceived and shaped through relational experiences, and it is eventually played, shared, and experienced in relationship with audiences.

Creativity happens in relationship, in the multidirectional exchange between us and our environment. To engage creativity is to pay exquisite attention, to let our agendas be shaped by interactions and relationships with other people, ourselves, Spirit, and the natural world. Picasso said, "I do not seek, I find." Mozart wrote the last movement of the G-major Concerto for Piano and Orchestra after hearing a starling singing in a street vendor's cage. Antonio Stradivari came upon a pile of broken, waterlogged oars while walking in Venice one day. From these he made some of his most beautiful violins. A woman blocked in writing her dissertation found an article open in a study carrel addressing exactly the point she found puzzling. How have chance encounters, conversations, disclosures, and discoveries made a difference to your creativity?

Creative intelligence makes itself at home in the world. The first step in cultivating creativity is to be sure we are not so attached to outcome or design as to block out the daily wealth of gifts—gifts we might call accidents or chance. This means that we cannot be dogmatic about processes but must constantly adapt them and ourselves to the creative possibilities that present themselves. In doing this, we model the very flexibility and spirit of inquiry that parties need to shift conflicted relationships to those more generative.

Creativity—bringing something new into being—involves releasing the old, whether the old is an idea, an assumption, a value, or a way of ordering life. It is therefore central to conflict, which requires bringing something new into being to be resolved or transformed. We open ourselves to the creative process, releasing our ideas about outcome. This is why techniques are not the whole story. Creativity is neither a straight line nor purely an individual act of volition. It is a relational process in which we make ourselves available to synchronicity in whichever form it appears.

We open ourselves to relationships, not only with a canvas or a musical score but with each other, with our natural world, and with vast unknown parts of ourselves. All are rich sources of inspiration, motivation, and unique ideas.

Creativity, Courage, and Conflict

Seeing this, we can understand why it is so difficult to engage creativity in conflict. Conflict involves narrowing ways of seeing, not expanding them. It may mean fierce attachments to ideas, identities, needs, and interests, rather than elasticity and inquiry. When in conflict, we are in a perceptual corner. If we could easily use creativity to get out, we would. We don't like to think of ourselves as attached to pain and narrow vision, though these may feel more known and secure than alternatives in the midst of deep conflict.

Engaging creativity is an act of energy and courage, as Rollo May reminds us. Courage is not the opposite of despair. We will encounter despair along the way in any creative endeavor, and this is to be expected. Normalizing despair and discouragement is critical to our work in bridging conflict. We may not be able to quickly get to yes. We may find our way to some maybes or some things to try along the way. Some will work; others may not. Courage and creativity is about continuing through despair.

To do this, we need to cultivate relationships with ourselves that sustain us, even as relationships with others are tested. May observes that a "chief characteristic of this courage is that it requires a centeredness within our own being, without which we would feel ourselves to be a vacuum . . . [E]mptiness within corresponds to an apathy without, and apathy adds up . . . to cowardice."[7] Conflict resolution and transformation teachers, trainers, and third parties who cultivate a rich and reflective inner life will have more creative resources to offer their clients. They will also model creativity. This congruence between a professed value and a way of living is powerful indeed. Throughout this book, we will talk about developing, maintaining, and enhancing a creative relationship with ourselves.

May, writing more than thirty years ago, outlines several dimensions of the courage to create. Because they are powerfully in accord with the ideas in this book, I want to mention them here.

Listening with the body. Sensitivity to our physical being is central to our relationship with ourselves and each other. The body is a means by which we empathize and communicate with others. It is an instrument of discernment that cues us about ways to engage and help. It provides important information about our level of depletion or fullness and how this can enliven or impede our work. It is with our bodies that we enact our ideas, so our bodies are important vehicles for creating and anchoring change. We develop these ideas further in Chapter Two.

Aligning ourselves against violence. In May's assessment, alignment against violence comes from moral courage, from allowing ourselves to feel outraged at others' pain and inhuman treatment. To take an interest, to devote energy to drawing attention to violence and developing alternatives, is an exercise of moral courage. It is to remember the questions of Noble Mountain that ask us how our work connects to the world outside ourselves. It is an essential step on the creative path. Many conflict trainers and third parties come to their work from a philosophy of nonviolence and a commitment to peacemaking. Keeping fairness and justice in the equation as we design and implement conflict resolution and transformation programs is a way of demonstrating our empathy for those in conflict. We consider the role of empathy in Chapters Three and Seven.

Relating to others with intimacy. When we enter a relationship with another, we do not know where it will lead. This is true whether the relationship is personal, collegial, or professional. Choosing to invest in relationships is an act of courage in the face of risk, which is always present because relationships are systems. When one part of the system shifts, all parts of the system shift.

We can enrich our practices by bringing the understanding that relationships are systems. As one member of a family, community, or workplace changes, ripples affect everyone. This is true of even small or incremental changes. We can help parties in conflict remember that their conflict did not arise in a day and it may take time and patience to address. Because change happens in systems, it is always to some degree outside our control. We offer ourselves in the service of change, while maintaining openness to form and outcome.

We are most effective when we offer ourselves in ways that are authentic and genuine. Authenticity deepens our relationships

with others. This involves another level of risk because we are making ourselves vulnerable by keeping less hidden. It can also stimulate fear, either the fear of losing the relationship or the fear of absorption. As we intervene in conflict, we will see both kinds of fear manifest. It helps to know that these fears arise naturally in deepening relationships. Engaging with each other in spite of fear or distrust is a kind of courage central to a relational approach to conflict.

Following our deep convictions while maintaining an awareness that we may be wrong. Commitment is healthiest when it is not without doubt but in spite of doubt. People who are absolutely convinced that their idea is the only right one are not open to change or truly mutual relationships. Bridging conflict requires both. For every idea there is another perspective. As these perspectives are shared in relationships, something new can be born. We aspire to this statement attributed to Leibniz: "I would walk twenty miles to listen to my worst enemy if I could learn something."[8]

A relational approach to conflict involves listening—not active listening or any other listening technique. It involves listening with every fiber of our being, both to that with which we feel in accord and that with which we feel discord. It means listening for connection, not agreement. It means listening for humanity and artistry, not evaluation and comparison. It means finding a space within ourselves that is open to relationship, with all of the surprises, gifts, and challenges it brings us. In the service of relationship, we tap our physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual ways of knowing and being. We use stories, rituals, and metaphors to help us uncover what has meaning for us, communicate it to others, and shift when we encounter conflict.

Sometimes we lose sight of the trail, getting lost in the brush, fearing the onset of night or a coming storm. Addressing conflict relationally is about staying together in all conditions, not idealizing relationship or minimizing its damaging possibilities but firmly situating ourselves in openness, inquiry, and commitment to purpose. Preparing to be surprised, we work toward shared goals. Trusting individual and group wisdom, we marry analysis to intuition, imagination to logic. We invest in creative possibility experienced through relationship within, with others, and beyond ourselves.

Along the way, we will generate new questions to be answered in future books, in processes that are never recorded, and in quiet moments never spoken. Following Rilke's advice, we live our ways into answers, step-by-step. Sometimes we come upon breathtaking moments in the form of sweeping views or tiny wildflowers. Sometimes we simply continue, watchful and open. Coming back, we are refreshed and energized. This is the gift of time in the mountains.