



## HISTORY

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### History of Conversation Cafes and Transition to Community Action Dialogues

By Vicki Robin

In the summer of 2001, three Seattle friends, Susan Partnow, Habib Rose and Vicki Robin, ran an experiment. They believed that more spontaneous and drop-in public dialogue would serve democracy, critical thinking and neighborliness. So each sat in a different café once a week and invited whoever was there, plus friends, to dialogue about things that really mattered. Thus the *Conversation Café Method* was born. At the end of the summer they met to plan an outreach method so that in-depth conversations would take place more often in Seattle. That was September 10, 2001. The next day made it clear that *Conversation Cafes* could help diverse people process 9/11.

From there *Conversation Cafes* spread throughout Seattle then on to Toronto, St. Louis, Tucson and ultimately to seventy cities in the US, Canada and Europe. Susan and Vicki built a team to help with spreading the method and serving the growing network. *New Road Map Foundation* generously funded the project from inception to the present, with the *Foundation for Global Community* and Bob and Jacquelyn Pogue's foundation adding considerable funds.

They invented "*Conversation Week*" – a week each year when all *Conversation Cafes* considered the same topic, and through sharing the wisdom of each group, sought a global sense of what "we the people" were feeling and thinking about the important questions of our times. They applied the *Conversation Café* method to the "red-blue divide" in the US through *Let's Talk America*. Together with other *Conversation Café* hosts they brought *Conversation Cafes* to the *Bioneers Conference* four years in a row, to half a dozen *Green Festivals* in cities across the US, to the *British Parliament*, to *PBS* and to conferences and meetings too numerous to name.

Eight years after they began, Susan and Vicki recognized they'd done all they could and that the *Conversation Cafes* needed a new home. When they proposed this idea to Jacquelyn Pogue, perhaps the most dedicated and creative *Conversation Café* host ever, she welcomed the opportunity to continue support of the *Conversation Café* model. She also wanted to build on it by integrating her own methods for deepening the dialogue and offering opportunities for community action, which she and her team were already doing in Richmond, Virginia.

With an alignment of their vision, Vicki and Susan transferred the project to Bob and Jacquelyn Pogue, and they are now the stewards of the *Conversation Cafe* website such that it may continue to serve the future expansion of the *Conversation Café* method and support the *Conversation Café* hosts. Through *Community Action Dialogues*, the Pogues, along with the *Richmond Action Dialogues* team, invite other communities to create their own community action dialogues, and to give voice to the evolution of dialogue in its many forms.