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Christian/Muslim Storytelling Duo Performs in Communist China

Chicago, IL – October 2, 2006 - After performing and leading workshops locally on the theme of tolerance, Susan O'Halloran and Arif Choudhury found themselves in China wondering how *they* would be accepted. The two Chicago-area performers were part of a 40-person national storytelling delegation to China this month. The delegation's mission: to create people-to-people connection through the sharing of stories. For two-weeks, O'Halloran and Choudhury sat in people's homes or performed in schools in Beijing and a small village of 1200 called Gencun, five hours outside of Beijing.

"With interpreters' help, we were able to hear the ancient and present day stories of China," said O'Halloran, "and they were able to hear our folktales and personal stories. The stories Arif and I tell about the importance of valuing our differences resonated with the people there. But what was so touching was the times we didn't even need words. The villagers and school children clapped along when Arif and I sang. They even joined in as I taught them the square dance! Together, we were able to bring to life what our stories are about."

The two Story Artists saw much evidence that China is opening to new ideas and people. "Everywhere in Beijing there are signs and products being sold for the 2008 Olympics," Choudhury remarked. "They want to be seen as an international city and, although sometimes Sue's red hair or my brown skin caused curiosity, we felt people were very open and welcoming to us."

O'Halloran who is President of O'Halloran Communications, has performed and facilitated diversity workshops in schools, corporations, community organizations and graduate schools of business for the last 15 years. She conducts public seminars on the topics of inclusion and cultural awareness and skills. "More and more schools, businesses and non-profits are understanding that they need global perspective. I feel it's important to be in the minority position, at least some of the time. We need to walk in other people's shoes to understand better what so many experience in this country and to benefit from each others' unique contributions."

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Photos available

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