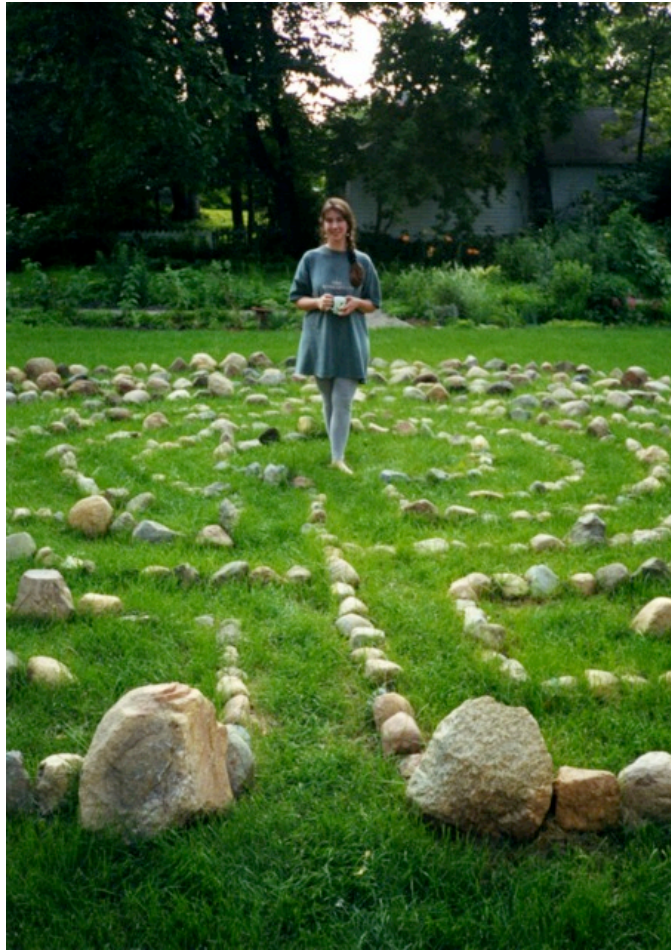


Walking the Labyrinth



After I first walked a painted canvas labyrinth at Pathways, a healing center in Minneapolis, I dreamed of being able to walk one every day. I wasn't sure exactly what effect it had had on me, but I knew it was powerful. What I yearned for was to walk a labyrinth barefoot, on grass, when my feet could touch the ground.

After returning to Northfield in 1996, I was delighted to discover the temporary labyrinth near the Hill of Three Oaks. I walked it often, and dreamed of having a nearby labyrinth as a permanent resource. The next summer, in 1997, my husband and I asked Marilyn Larson to help us create a labyrinth in our garden at 114 Winona Street, just down the street from Carleton's Chapel.

Marilyn dowsed the labyrinth's outline on August 6, 1997 -- our 9th wedding anniversary and the 48th anniversary of Hiroshima Day, an international symbol of the importance of working for peace, both in one's daily life and in the world.

As a yoga teacher, I have told students how the first yogic principle, *Ahimsa*, means "non-violence. Yoga is a way of practicing non-violence with one's self, of quieting for a time the overlay of voices we each carry that insist we push too hard, too far, too fast. As a writer, I have found that when I am struggling with a project, stuck in a mental cage of my own making, it helps to walk the labyrinth. Because I feel safe there, fear of failing dissolves and along with it my writer's block. The built-in turns that all labyrinths contain encourage me to look at problems of all kinds from new perspectives. The circular path reminds me that the process, not the product -- the race, not the finish line -- is what is truly important to me. I am reminded that "peace is every step" and that if I simply put one foot in front of the other I will arrive. By walking, I become grounded, but not stuck.

One large fear, now dissolved, is how other people would interpret the labyrinth. Our labyrinth began as a relatively discreet outline of twine pegged into the lawn. The next year, my husband and I moved stones from a farmer's field to mark the paths. This meditation walk is visible from the street, and has drawn many comments. I have been surprised by how intrigued people are, and how many decide to accept the invitation to walk it themselves. Most report a sense of calm and well being. One woman who has trouble with an occasionally irregular heartbeat described how walking this pattern restored her normal rhythm in a few minutes, a process that usually took several hours for her. I have heard a variety of such stories from strangers and friends alike. I've noticed, too, that birds, squirrels, and rabbits are drawn to the perches and hollows created by the stones.

Today, I consider our labyrinth a form of living sculpture. The stones, which seemed so permanent when we laid them in place, shift as the grass grows and the frost heaves the ground beneath them. Each time I walk this circle of stones is unique, because I am different and so is the world about me -- the air, the light, the seasons, and the possibilities for my day. It is said that "Truth waits for eyes unclouded by desire." Like its shadow, fear, I find desire suspended when I walk the healing pattern of the labyrinth. This is the ongoing gift the labyrinth makes to me, encouraging me to slow down, look carefully around me, and to emerge from this place refreshed by listening to that still, small voice within.

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