



Why I Chose a Labyrinth

By Mary Andonian

My friend Jill was the first person to introduce me to a labyrinth. She lived down the street from Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. As I walked behind her that very first time on the church's outdoor labyrinth, I thought, this is it. I am hooked. I ended up going to that labyrinth several times during the few years I worked in San Francisco.

Much later, after we moved to Oregon, I read in the local community paper that an Eagle Scout had worked tirelessly with volunteers to create a labyrinth at a nearby Lutheran church. I quickly gathered up my two little girls, jumped in the minivan and went there. As I approached the labyrinth, I was slightly disappointed by its size, which was

dwarfed in comparison to Grace Cathedral's. Still, I was able to explain to my girls what the labyrinth meant to me. And then we walked it.

On another occasion, I met a friend there who had small children of her own. I was taken aback when she allowed her kids to run back and forth across the labyrinth as we walked it. It seemed sacrilegious to me.

A few years ago we had the opportunity to purchase the lot next door to our home. I told my husband I wanted to buy the land and build a labyrinth. He thought it was a crazy idea. Still, I daydreamed about it. I visualized the pavers I would use, where I would place the opening, and how I would explain it to the neighbors.

When we lost our bid for the land, I decided to explore the idea of owning a labyrinth by writing a book about it. In the book, a girl's mother builds a labyrinth on their lavender farm. The book had the working title, *A Labyrinth in my Backyard*, but I eventually renamed it *Bitsy's Labyrinth*, after the book's main character.

This was my second book and my first try at fiction. Interestingly, my first book, *Mind Chatter*, was a memoir about all the ways I didn't live in the moment. *Bitsy's Labyrinth* was about characters who *did* live in the moment via their walk on the labyrinth, each experiencing something different and, sometimes, profound. In the end, the labyrinth

became a character as real and complex as the main protagonist and her supporting cast. I made sure to include a finger labyrinth in the appendix so teenage girls could see firsthand what “walking” a labyrinth felt like.

After my book was published I received an e-mail from a representative from the Labyrinth Network Northwest, asking if I’d like to join the association. I am happy to report I am now a member in good standing and, as a member, look forward to my first labyrinth walk with the women at the local prison.

I am not an expert on labyrinths nor do I necessarily wish to be one. I simply want to share the experience of using a labyrinth to pause, turn inward, and find peace or, as one character states to Bitsy, “Find peace. Not because of your circumstances, but despite them.”



About the Author:

Mary Andonian currently serves on the Board of Directors for Willamette Writers, one of the largest writers' associations in the United States. She is the author of two books and many articles and is currently working on her second screen play.
