



Of Balance, Connection, and Family

By Mark Woodlief

I was excited to begin my weekend of labyrinth facilitator training with Veriditas master teacher Jo Ann Mast on March 10 and 11 at Portland's Trinity Episcopal Cathedral. Even more special would be having my mother – the person who introduced me to the labyrinth – travel from Green Valley, AZ, to participate.

It is interesting – and appropriate – to talk about “coming full circle” in the context of the labyrinth. I felt that completion of the circuit more than once during the training. Sharing the experience with my mother is key in many ways – most fundamentally, she has fostered and guided me on my spiritual path much, if not all, of my life. It was also very validating to see other participants in the training acknowledge her wisdom and contributions to our discussions. Plus, it was fantastic to hear her ecclesiastical humor appreciated ... During one of our discussions regarding the various tensions that can arise at hospitals, she dropped this zinger: “What's the difference between God and doctors? (Pause) God knows he's not a doctor.”

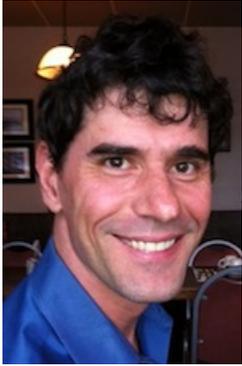
It's also interesting that “coming full circle” does not connote an ending. This process of being introduced to the labyrinth by my mother, and experiencing the training with her, actually opens new possibilities and discoveries, rather than “closing” anything.

I began the weekend by sharing the story of what brought me to the training: I walked the Trinity Episcopal Cathedral labyrinth last New Year's Eve. As I began that walk, I chose a stone from the basket at the entrance to the labyrinth. The stone read: “Balance.” As a person who lives with MS, balance (as well as strength, coordination, and other issues) is a central concern to me. As a person on a spiritual journey, balance – emotionally, psychologically, metaphorically – is also crucial. Upon post-walk reflection, I realized and recognized that “balance” would be a significant component of my life in 2013. A few weeks later, I discovered that Jo Ann would be holding a day-long workshop (prior to the facilitator training) entitled “Finding Center: Using the Labyrinth for Integration and Balance.” My direction was clear.

To really bring things “full circle,” I want to share what happened when the facilitator trainees walked the labyrinth together in a closing ceremony on March 11. Jo Ann structured a ritual where each of us carried a lighted candle along our walk. Many of us chose stones to carry with us as well. Almost immediately after I entered the labyrinth, the flame on my tealight candle went out. I felt dismayed, disappointed, and a little distracted – all my focus was directed, momentarily, toward the lack of flame and what effect might result. Feeling a little let down, I continued walking.

Several turns later, I felt myself regaining a little focus. Looking up, I noticed Laura, one of my fellow trainees, approaching me. As we passed one another, she held out her hand. I extended mine, and she placed a stone on my palm. It read “Balance.” What a beautiful gift. Touched by Laura's awareness and generosity, I began to weep. I also felt like my light had been rekindled. It wasn't until after our walk had concluded that I learned that Laura's candle flame had also gone out early in her walk. Gifting me the “Balance” stone had helped reignite her metaphorical light.

For so many reasons – the connections, the comradery, the lessons, the time spent with my mother – the labyrinth facilitator training was an incredible affirmation.



About the Author:

Mark Woodlief has lived in Portland, OR, since 2002, and co-facilitates a labyrinth group at First Unitarian Church. A former contributor to numerous local, regional, and national publications, he is now a freelance editor/writer. Contact him at markwoodlief@gmail.com.