



Felted Finger Labyrinths from Orcas Island

By Mary Louise Tucker

As I try to remember what led me to making my first felted labyrinth, it's a bit like the chicken and egg story: which came first, my enjoyment of needle felting or my love of the labyrinth? For years, I have been known to spend ample time arranging beach stones in labyrinth patterns and taking photos of them. But as for the felted versions, one early inspiration came from photos I had seen of a labyrinth drawn in sand on a beach. Eventually, I had to take on the challenge of working it into felt. I liked how it turned out, and one led to another. And then, someone in my church asked me to make her one. I enjoy turning these into something tactile for the fingers. The creating process is itself a kind of meditation, as my fingers “walk” the path numerous times while felting, making sure it all feels pleasant to the touch. The pattern ends up raised above the path, which would also facilitate someone using them who cannot see. I like the challenge of a new pattern or shape or even size. The smallest labyrinth that I have made is done on a felted ball, just over an inch in diameter, and has hung from my Christmas tree.



My finger labyrinths are made by a combination of wet and needle felting techniques. Each represents many hours from start to finish. My most detailed pattern takes days to complete. Using local Orcas Island sheep's wool, the bases are first wet felted. Further shaping and finishing is done by needle felting. I lay out the pattern with straight pins and a good eye, removing them one by one as I apply carded wool with a felting needle. I like to give the wool a twist as I go, imagining I'm spinning yarn in *very* slow motion: twist...needle...add wool...and so on, until the pattern is complete. I then "walk" the path with my felting needle, smoothing and shaping until it feels good to my fingers. Alternatively, a well-worn beach stone is nice to use for "walking" the finished path.



Last summer, I had the privilege of joining five other creative women of my church and community in hosting a two week children's labyrinth workshop at Emmanuel Episcopal Parish on Orcas Island. The Children's Story Path, as it was christened, was the first such endeavor for all of us. I believe it safe to say that every one of us came out of that experience forever changed. This turned out to be one of the best community efforts I've ever played a part in; truly inspiring and a joy to contribute to. I'm looking forward to this summer's offering, which will have a gratitude theme. The labyrinth provides a wonderful framework to work from, and it's fascinating to watch how each child responds to it. During those two weeks, the children were exposed to a variety of labyrinths, from finger size to the permanent full size labyrinth on Emmanuel's lawn.

While there is pleasure for me in the creating of a finger labyrinth, as there is in making any thing of beauty, it is even more fulfilling to see them put to use and enjoyed, as in our summer workshop. I have noticed on various public occasions that it is often the children who are especially drawn to a labyrinth and can't resist letting their fingers try out the path. It makes me smile.

Mary Louise Tucker
Eastsound, WA
bythesea@orcasonline.com

About the Author:



Louise lives with her husband and two daughters on Orcas Island, where she enjoys a wide variety of arts and traditional crafts. Her home business, Written in Stone, derives from her passions for beach-combing and nature photography and the joy of sharing the everyday gifts she finds along her path. In addition to her photo greeting cards, Louise's felted finger labyrinths have joined Written in Stone's offerings. The labyrinth as a design element fascinates her and keeps finding its way into various creative forms in her work. You can contact her at bythesea@orcasonline.com.
