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Creating Sacred Space: Walking a sacred path

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Abstract

In my work with Therapeutic Touch and CranioSacral Therapy, I have always had the sense that I was working in Sacred Space with my clients. My introduction to the sacred space of the Chartres Labyrinth led me on a new journey of self-discovery, healing and inspiration. More than twenty-five new labyrinth designs/paintings emerged in my work at a time when traditional labyrinths were just beginning to be re-discovered and gaining some recognition for their healing qualities.

In 2001, the Labyrinth Society of America placed a call for entry for a new labyrinth design to be built at Ground Zero. Two friends, Diane Brown, Dia Rigden and I brainstormed to create the concept and qualities we felt this special labyrinth would need and then I designed it. We ended up with three new designs – one to honour each of the three sites - Ground Zero, Pennsylvania and the Pentagon. Even though they were not chosen, many wonderful events have happened around them.

The purpose and intention behind our 9/11 healing labyrinths was meant to extend far beyond these tragic sites. Our intention was that these labyrinths would help to heal those affected by terrorism, war and other tragic events (natural disasters, violence in the home and community etc.) world-wide. As we learn heal ourselves, we can then begin to heal the planet.

Much has been written about labyrinths and adult experiences with them. The focus of this article is using the labyrinth as a learning tool with children. This article is about building a very special angel labyrinth with four young neighbourhood children.

Key Words: Labyrinth, Sacred Space, Spiritual Growth, Healing, Children, Teaching, Learning, Masaru Emoto, David Suzuki Foundation

Introduction

My life's path has been filled with many twists and turns, very much as in a labyrinth.

I chose a career in nursing (University of Toronto, Canada) because from the time I was a young child, I knew I was supposed to help people, and nursing seemed to be a logical place to start. My experience in nursing was satisfying – in that my patients seemed very happy with my care – but disheartening when I found that in some circumstances, the more training you had, the further you were removed from actual patient care.

I obtained my Certification in Midwifery, (Royal North Shore Hospital, Sydney, Australia). When my husband finished his MBA, we decided it would be fun to do a little traveling and spend some extended time in Australia before settling down with a serious job and starting our family.[In 1970, Midwifery was not recognized in North America and I felt taking this year long intensive course while we were in Australia was an opportunity to work in a field of nursing that I truly loved and really develop my expertise here. .

In 1988, I developed some serious health problems. For two years traditional medicine seemed to have few answers, and I turned to other resources such as acupuncture, imagery, meditation, and tai chi to cope. I also looked at my health issues as an opportunity to focus on my art. Sitting at my kitchen table with a pad of paper immersed in my watercolours was a wonderful distraction. Meditation workshops led me to spiritual healing, and I knew at once my heart had come home. However, this did not fit either with my traditional nursing or my family's belief system, and my mentor suggested I look into Therapeutic Touch (TT). Its foundation is based on a variety of ancient healing practices and, most importantly, it was developed by a gifted healer Dora Kunz and Dolores Krieger, Ph.D., RN who was at the time, a professor of nursing at New York University. This made a huge difference in my family's acceptance of my new interests in holistic health and energy work.

It was also interesting to see the change in my art from traditional flowers, barns and landscapes to more abstract content as I became more deeply involved with energy work. My practice of TT led to teaching it to family members, and after considerable study, also to teaching more formal classes. Eventually I had major surgery to remove my first rib. Nerves and a major blood vessel had been trapped between the rib and my collarbone. I was told the surgery was risky and it could take up to four months to regain the use of my arm. With the help of a wonderful neurosurgeon and use of my new tools (TT, imagery, meditation and much determination) I was able to raise it over my head in less than three weeks. In awe and gratitude, I became totally immersed in TT

In 1991 a problem with my jaw (TMJ pain) led me to a CranioSacral practitioner. Her expertise prevented surgery and led me to in-depth study of this modality as well. TT and CranioSacral Therapy interface beautifully together and the benefits to my clients continue to amaze me.

A wonderful opportunity arose last year to study Modern Shamanism with a gifted healer who lives nearby. There is always something new and exciting to learn, and I decided this was an opportunity I could not ignore.

I also raised three children, taught nursing students, pre-natal classes, and worked for the Public Health Department and in a holistic chronic pain and stress management clinic until I began my small private holistic practice in 1994.

In parallel with my career in the caregiving professions, I have also pursued my interests in art. I have been privileged to study with many well-respected artists over the years, including Shirley Erskine, Maxine Masterfield, and Carol Neghis. In 1992 I was invited to have my first solo art show at Victoria College, University of Toronto. Since then, my paintings and prints have found homes across Canada, in the USA, Japan, Australia and Ireland.

In 1995, I met Diane Brown, a trained labyrinth facilitator, and we have worked both independently and together on a variety of labyrinth projects since then. I have presented labyrinth workshops at conferences in both Canada and the US. Since my husband and I retired in 2001 and moved to the country, I have built five large labyrinths on our magical country property - all surrounded by forest and wildlife. In 2007, I worked with our local hospital to design and install a sixty-foot diameter Chartres Labyrinth.

In my work with Therapeutic Touch and CranioSacral Therapy, I have always had the sense that I was working in Sacred Space with my clients. My introduction to the sacred space of the Chartres Labyrinth led me on a new journey of self-discovery, healing and inspiration. More than twenty-five new labyrinth designs/paintings emerged in my art at a time when traditional labyrinths were just beginning to be re-discovered and gaining some recognition for their healing qualities.

In October 2001, the Labyrinth Society of America placed a call for entry for a new labyrinth pattern to be built at Ground Zero. Diane Brown, an experienced labyrinth facilitator, Dia Rigden, an incredible vocalist who channels her music, and I worked together to co-create the concept and qualities we felt this special labyrinth would need and then I designed it. In fact, we ended up with three new designs – one to honour each of the three sites: The BellStar Labyrinth© for Ground Zero, The Children’s Bell Labyrinth© for Pennsylvania and The Freedom Bell Labyrinth© for the Pentagon. Even though our designs were not chosen, many wonderful events have happened around them, and this article is about building a very special angel labyrinth with four young neighbourhood children.

The purpose and intention behind our 9/11 healing labyrinths was meant to extend far beyond these tragic sites. Our intention was that these labyrinths would help to heal those affected by terrorism, war and other tragic events (natural disasters, violence in the home and community etc.) world wide. It is common knowledge today that as we learn heal ourselves, we can then begin to heal the planet.

Much has been written about labyrinths and adult experiences with them. I would like to share with you my wonderful experience of building a labyrinth with children.

Background

The design for Ground Zero is a navigation star we called The BellStar Labyrinth©. (See Figure 1)

The Navigation Star with its eight points, pulls together the four corners of the world and all points in between, radiating light and guiding a safe path home. Eight is the number of regeneration. In Christian symbolism, eight refers to the eight days of creation. It is likewise a symbol of the resurrection of Christ and the hope for the resurrection of humankind. (Matthews, 1990, p.66). Eight also stands for cosmic order and plays a significant role in many world religions. In numerology, eight represents wisdom, learning through experience, stability, patience, responsibility, financial security, caution, self-discipline and self-control.

In the BellStar Labyrinth, each point of the star is called a chamber, and each chamber embraces an aspect of the healing process with each one building on the last. The first chamber is *Courage*. It takes courage to begin a journey of any kind. As we move from chamber to chamber, the walker moves through the various stages (chambers) of healing and eventually arrives at the *Path of Freedom* which takes them around a bell and into the centre.



Figure 1. BellStar Labyrinth © Helen Will

Bells are an ancient symbol of the connection between heaven and earth. For centuries, bells have called communities together in times of difficulty: for protection; to offer assistance; to warn of danger or impending disaster; and to come together for worship or celebration.; In the case of the town crier, bells called people to hear the news of the day. The bell would also remind Americans of their own Liberty Bell.

In the centre are four hearts intertwined. At the heart of the bell we celebrate life, love, freedom and peace – both inner and outer. The sound at the centre is *silence*. The clapper is *still*. The experience is *peace*.

Once this was completed, we realized we had really only just begun. There were two more labyrinths waiting to be birthed – one for Pennsylvania, and one for the Pentagon.

The Children's Bell Labyrinth© was designed to honour the children affected by 9/11, including those on the plane that went down in Pennsylvania. However, it was our intention to reach out far beyond that – to children around the world affected by terrorism, war, famine, natural disasters, and violence of all kinds both in their homes and their communities. The angel within the bell is also a universal symbol, and was designed with much gratitude to the Angelic presences many of us felt so strongly at the time of 9-11. In the children's labyrinth, the bell is joyously ringing. In the center are four interwoven hearts radiating unconditional love based on mutual compassion, friendship, honour and respect. The four woven hearts represent the four major directions: North, East, South, and West, as well as the four major races of the world. They are woven together to show the interconnection we have with one another in love, life, freedom and peace.

The circle around the hearts holds, protects and stores the treasures within and represents the planet we call Mother Earth.



Figure 2. Freedom Bell Labyrinth
© Helen Will

The Freedom Bell Labyrinth© emerged as we spoke of the Pentagon, responsible government, and the urgent need for new solutions to solve conflict. This bell is also ringing and contains at its centre a five sided star to represent the Pentagon.

This sacred geometric shape also holds energy representing power, excellence, regeneration and transcendence. In numerology the number 5 represents communication, movement, versatility and intellect – both written and oral.

When all three designs were completed to our satisfaction, Diane, Dia and I sat in sacred space and Dia channeled the many vibrations to hold these qualities within each of the Labyrinths with her incredible voice. The lunations around each of the patterns were in honour of our foundation work with the Chartres Labyrinth. Each labyrinth holds its own unique vibration and stands on its own. Placed together, they fit together like clock-works, each working in harmony with the other.



Figure 3. Chartres labyrinth (Path is brown)



Figure 4. Wisdom Star © Helen Will

We live in the country. Our land is filled with hills, big rocks, ravines, creeks and bush. The soil is poor, and does not grow good crops. Because it has not been farmed for many years, it is filled with wildflowers and wildlife. Part of the joy of living here for me is that I love to be outside. We have built numerous hiking trails through the forest, and there is lots of room in the fields to build large labyrinths. I have already built two – one with the traditional Chartres Pattern found in a beautiful cathedral in France, and the other I designed a few years ago, called The Wisdom Star. It is a six-sided star, somewhat like the Star of David.



Figure 5. Untamed field

As summer of 2002 approached, I felt an urgency to have The Children's Bell Labyrinth© built in our lower field. In July, I decided to build The Children's Bell Labyrinth© with the intention it would be finished by September. Building a labyrinth is a lot of work, and I knew I would be lucky to have it completed in time. I dowsed the land for the perfect location and found it at the intersection of our walking trails that led into the forest. It was quiet here, with a few insects buzzing, the wind dancing overhead and birds singing happily nearby.

The land had not been farmed for many years and was overgrown with sumac and milkweed. Monarch butterflies love milkweed and we always saw their beautiful colours as they nested in our fields. My husband George helped to clear and level the area with the tractor and I cut leftover roots, picked up rocks and moved away brush.

Then it was time to start raking to remove as many chunks and lumps, as possible to make the surface as level and easy to work with as possible. This was a huge job. And I began to think to myself, "As beautiful as it is out here in the field, it is a bit lonely now that George has finished his part. It is also a lot of work. I could really use some help!" It was then I heard the children laughing, and this is the beginning of my story.



Figure 6. Ready to start

Building The Children's Bell Labyrinth©

As a kid, I can remember how shocked I was the first time I asked my father a question and he shook his head slowly and said to me, "I don't know the answer. Let's go look it up." I had always figured adults knew the answers to everything!

Sometimes we can find answers by searching in books, or finding a person who is an expert on the subject. But over the years, I have learned there are times when there are simply no satisfactory answers, and that is when we have to look into our own hearts to try to make some sense of things. In my work with labyrinths, I have learned that they can help us to find our own answers and help us to understand things in a different way. That's why Diane, Dia and I decided The Children's Bell Labyrinth© was important for the "kid" part of adults. Many adults, caught up in the world of hard work, responsibility and the busyness everyday life forget what it is like to be a kid. Sometimes, they need to remember how to play again and feel the joy and laughter that comes with no agenda, and just have fun.

The angel in this labyrinth is there to remind us that each and every one of us has a Guardian Angel, whether or not you can actually see one, or even believe in one. Angels come in all shapes and sizes, colours, and ages. Sometimes we don't actually see our angels. I can remember falling down a full flight of stairs one day. When I finally stopped bouncing, I felt a bit stunned, and sat still for a moment, wondering how I would get to the phone to call for help. After a few minutes, I realized I wasn't hurt at all. Not a bruise or a scratch. I didn't hurt anywhere! Somehow, my fall had been 'cushioned,' and I was completely fine. There was absolutely no explanation for it. So I decided my Guardian Angel had been on hand at the time, and I simply offered a big "thank you."

Sometimes your "angel" may show up as a real person, perhaps in some emergency situations, as a member of a rescue crew - a policeman, fireman, paramedic or volunteer. It could be the cook who feeds the rescue crew. Most often of all, that angel can simply be someone just like you and me. That angel is the person who takes the time to show kindness to someone else - often in very simple ways, such as offering a smile of encouragement to someone who needs a little boost, or holding open a door for someone in a wheelchair. It could be offering your seat on the bus, or inviting the new kid in the class to eat lunch with you. I believe everyone can think of at least one time when they felt the presence of an angel. This past summer, I met four new angels. I'll introduce you to them soon.

It was a picture-perfect beautiful July morning in the meadow, I had been working hard, humming to myself, feeling dirty, hot, and sweaty, and very tired. The sky was clear blue. The birds were singing. The bees were buzzing. Beautiful black and orange monarch butterflies were actually landing on my hat. But every muscle in my body was aching, and I leaned on my rake and sighed loudly out loud to myself, "I sure wish I had a little more help with this!"

It was then I heard the children laughing. Down in the meadow, my closest neighbours are at least five acres of thick forest away from where I am working. "Perfect!" I thought to myself. "The S. family are back from their summer holidays and out for a walk to the pond. I wonder if the children would like to come and play with me? "

George and I are still getting to know our neighbours, and we had only met briefly on a few occasions. I wondered if the children would even be interested in such an activity with someone they hardly knew. Then I began to wonder what their parents would think of my project. I knew they took great care in providing their children with lots of interesting opportunities. Maybe they would be too busy with sports and camp... maybe they would be too shy to want to come... maybe they would think this was silly..... You know how it goes. My mind makes up all sorts of stories and excuses if I let it. I

decided to ignore all the chatter going on in my head and ask them anyway. They could always say “no.” On the other hand, they might even say, “Yes!”

As I continued raking, an invitation to join me began to write itself in my head. If I sent a note, Mrs. S could read it over, think about it for a bit. If my idea met her approval and she thought the children might be interested, she could tell them about it. My letter went something like this:

July 29, 2003

Dear Mrs. S.,

As I was working in the field today, I heard the children laughing while you were out for a walk to the back pond, so knew you were back from your holiday. I hope you had a great time.

Enclosed, you will find a copy of the labyrinth pattern I am currently building. I have also included the write-up that my friends and I sent to the Ground Zero committee. Although our designs were not chosen, we feel they hold incredible potential for healing and I am currently building The Children’s Bell in the lower meadow.

(Then I told her a bit about labyrinths in general, and why I wanted to build this particular one now.)

George and I have cleared a space, and I have started to set out part of the pattern. As I heard the children’s laughter today, I realized that the presence of children during (and after) the building of this particular labyrinth is an important element to the project. If they are interested, and it does not interfere with their other commitments, I would like to ask your permission for them to come and help me with it.

I have also decided the building of this would make a good children’s story since one of my dreams would be to see this labyrinth in schools, parks and community centers as a part of both gardens and/or playgrounds – perhaps a bully-free zone. At the moment, this story is simply rolling around in my head, and I am not sure what direction it will take, but I think my note to you may be the first step.

I tend to only work about a couple of hours at a time and plan to go the field around 10 am or after 3 pm so we would miss the bugs in the morning and the heat of the day.

Criteria to work on the The Children’s Bell Labyrinth:

Preferably under age 100 (but must be young at heart).

Parents’ permission

Interest in participating.

Can let me know the night before if you are coming.

Willing to wear a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, long sleeve shirt, long pants and shoes and socks even when it is hot.

Willing to drink lots of water while in the field. It will make you feel better. (Besides, it gives you a great excuse to stop and have a rest.)

Willing to play, sing or dance if you don’t feel like working.

Can jump up and down or stomp your feet. This can be done while playing hopscotch, tag or just for the fun of it. However, foot stomping in anger or frustration is not encouraged, although this would be a safe place to do it if you want to. Maybe this could be done on your walk to the field so

that by the time you arrive, your feet would rather dance. Ideally, foot stomping will be done with the kind thought that this is packing down the pathways to make it easier to walk, and adding a happy vibration to the earth.

Able to think kind or happy thoughts the whole time you are working on the labyrinth. Next to your parent's permission, and wanting to come, this is the most important item, on the list, because this particular labyrinth was designed to honour children around the world who have been exposed to, or lost their lives to violence or horrific world events.

The labyrinth itself is considered to be a kind of sacred space – a place where people can connect with nature, family, music, laughter, joy, understanding and love for all the Earth. This is why hearing the children's laughter on the breeze this morning was so important. The labyrinth needs to be filled with the very special sounds of children's laughter and voices. I know at least one of you was in the music festival. Were you playing an instrument? Do you like to sing? I have some beautiful drums I could bring down to the field if you would like to try them. I would love to have you come to the labyrinth and laugh and sing and play. And if you feel like picking up a rake, or helping to smooth down the pathways, that would simply be a bonus.

I guess my note to you Mrs. S, has turned into a letter to the children. If you decide it is okay for them to join me with this project, you can share this with them. If you decide this is not appropriate, or they are too busy I will certainly understand.

Many thanks,

Helen

P.S. George will be helping me with the heavy aspects of the project such as gathering rocks to line the pathways. The children might help with raking, packing down the paths, clipping any leftover roots, and carrying away dead grass, roots, and twigs. My goal is to have it finished by the second Sunday of September when I have an annual picnic.

When I got back to the house at 11:30 a.m., I decided it was time to have my hair cut so I called to make an appointment. It proved to be a day filled with synchronicity. My hairdresser had just had a cancellation and could fit me in at 3 p.m. There were also some interesting telephone messages waiting:

"You don't know me, but I was talking to Dia a few weeks ago, and she told me you were building a new labyrinth. I would love to come and help. I love working outside and have had some wonderful experiences walking the Chartres labyrinth. Please call me."

As it turned out, she also had a few other friends who also wanted to come to help. I was totally thrilled! I had been reluctant to ask for help when I built the other two labyrinths because I did not want to impose on anyone.

When I returned my next phone call, I told Diane about my day, and she started to laugh. She had called to tell me about her experience at her morning fitness dance class. During the class, through an open window she had heard sounds of children laughing and playing at a nearby park or playground. However, when she later went to look out the window, to watch them, all she could see was a normal business area street with lots of traffic. When she asked about the playground, she was told there were no parks, schools or playgrounds anywhere nearby.

When I shared my idea of writing a story about building The Children's Bell Labyrinth, she told me she had just received an e-mail from an acquaintance asking about any children's books about labyrinths.

None of us were aware of any, and I knew then for sure, that I had to sit down at the computer and get started.

Within two hours of asking the Universe for some help, I had an idea for a children's story, had written a note to invite my neighbours to come and help, and received an offer of help from a total strangers! By the end of the day, another friend had heard children's laughter from an impossible location, and someone else was searching for a labyrinth book for children. When people say Angels work in mysterious ways, I just smile.

I dropped in with my note to see Mrs. S. on my way home from my haircut. The gate was closed and the lock was in place. They were still away on their holiday! I wondered if she would notice the date on the note when she read it, but left it in the mailbox anyway. It seemed important to start the process in motion.

Mrs. S called me three days later when they returned. Everyone thought it was a good idea. It was the only week in the entire summer when they would all be available to help me. It was perfect timing for all of us. More synchronicity!

We made a date to go for a family walk to see the existing labyrinths, check out the new site, and answer any questions anyone had about the project. I just smiled as they puzzled over the sound of children's laughter that had been the inspiration for my story. Not all mysteries need to be solved.

By the end of the week, I had created an outline for the story. While tidying up the mail, I noticed a newsletter from The David Suzuki Foundation. It listed ten of the most important ways people could help to save and protect our environment. Immediately, I knew this was something else that needed to be part of the labyrinth story. On the Friday afternoon, just before the August 1st holiday weekend, I sent the Foundation a request for permission to use information from the newsletter. The response in Figure 7 came within an hour of sending my fax:

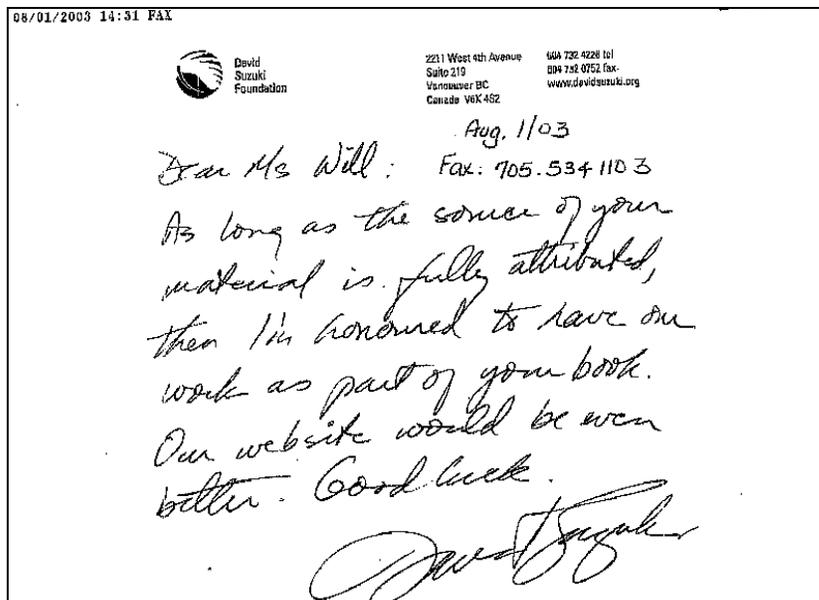


Figure 7. David Suzuki Fax

You cannot imagine my excitement! What were the chances that Dr. Suzuki, who tours the world giving lectures as well as running a large foundation, would actually reply personally to my fax within an hour of receiving it? More synchronicity! For me, it is the Universe working its' invisible magical hand helping things come together in a very special way. I spent the rest of the weekend humming to myself:

"All day, all night, Angels watchin' over me, My Lord,
All day, all night, Angels watchin' over me..."

-Words from an old Gospel song. Author Unknown

Day 1

The summer sun was shining brightly as the children met me right on time at the gate on the first morning. Everyone was always on time.

I was excited and happy to see that everyone had decided to join me. Let me introduce my assistants. They all love the outdoors and spend lots of time helping their parents and Grandfather with outdoor jobs and other activities such as piling winter wood, and helping to make maple sugar in the springtime. I was delighted to learn that they love to go rock hunting and collecting - also a hobby of mine. Meet my angels.

The first day, we measured out the pattern starting from the centre and placed markers to help us draw the design in the earth. At the centre, we used a compass to locate the four directions. When the compass was placed in the middle of the circle, the needle indicated that North was actually in the West. We had a basic idea of our location in relation to the roadway, fence lines, and position of the sun, and knew this was wrong.



Figure 8. Taylor, Hanna, Claudia and Carly

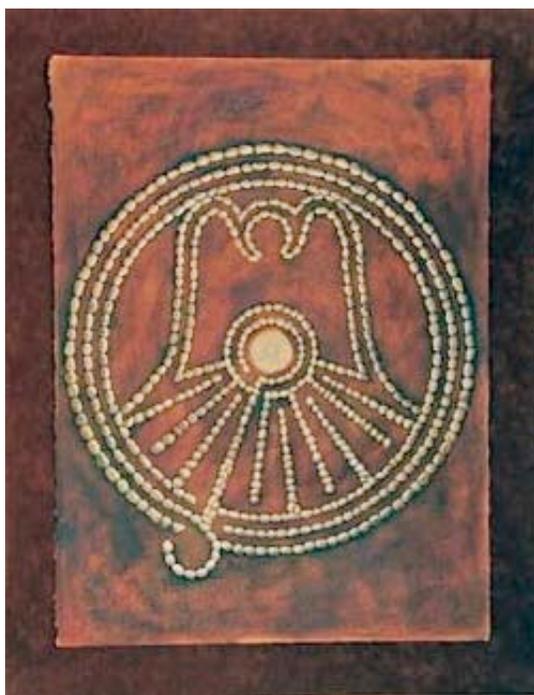


Figure 9: The Children's Bell Labyrinth
© Helen Will

I wanted the head of the angel to be facing the west with her feet to the east. The paths leading from the other fields and labyrinths, join together to meet at The Children's Bell, and I felt it was important to place the labyrinth at an angle that would feel like the angel is greeting you as you approach it. Unfortunately, the complete pattern is hard to see from ground level.

Most of the ancient labyrinths have been oriented either in relation to the four directions, or to reflect from the orientations of the sun, moon or stars – such as the summer solstice sunrise when the sun would first touch the land. Therefore location of the entrance became extremely important.

Labyrinths also are often positioned according to the 'earth energies.' These particular energies are found around ancient holy places. They are sometimes called "ley" lines. They cannot be seen with the naked eye, but are found by using instruments that are sensitive to energy. In the ancient days used dowsing rods, or dowsing crystals. Actually, experienced dowsers, can use many kinds of objects to do this. It doesn't have to be

anything fancy. Traditionally, it is a piece of forked willow, or whatever kind of wood the dowser prefers. When these lines cross each other, they are called 'power centres.' Sometimes ley lines are arranged like spokes in a wheel at major sacred sites. It is believed that most of the ancient large cathedrals in Europe are built along these ley lines. Most of these cathedrals are built in the shape of

a cross, and are purposely oriented over the ley lines. The original idea behind this was that since the earth energies here were strong, it would be a better place to pray to God. Many well diggers today still dowse to find the best spot to place the well.

It was very hot working in the bright sunshine, so when George arrived on the tractor with a load of stones, we decided to put him to work helping us to set up a screened tent where we could sit in the shade for our breaks. Taylor, Carly, Hanna and Claudia helped George put up the tent while I continued to measure out the pattern. It was hard to believe how quickly our first morning had passed, and how much we had accomplished.



Day 2

Today before we started, honouring Claudia's love for all creatures great and small, we played with a pattern I adapted from the Nazca area in southwestern Peru. It is estimated to have been built around 500 A.D. during the time of the Mayan civilization. The land there is very flat and one of the driest in the world. This pattern is about 40 meters long (45 yards) and is best seen from the air. It was created by simply sweeping away a very thin layer of a reddish-brown "varnish" which covers this very dry soil, to reveal pure white gypsum underneath. Because they get so little rain there, it has been preserved over the centuries.



Figure 10: Nazca Spider labyrinth
© Helen Will

In the original Nazca spider, there are eight legs. The entrance is at the next to last lower right leg – also the same location as where the spider carries her eggs. This is because the spider was considered to be a very special creature – a 'power animal' by the Native peoples. As well as being a symbol for a weaver of many intricate designs, the point of entry focuses on the spider's fertility, reproduction and continuation of the species.

Today we finished marking out the pattern using a long rope to set the radius lines of the angel's skirt, and the wheels of a lawn mower to mark the outer circumference and some of the inner pathways. The rocks need to be placed far enough apart to allow the lawn mower to cut through the pathways once they are filled in with grass. George helped us again by bringing more loads of rocks, and the five of us also collected rocks with the all terrain vehicle and a little trailer. Taylor already knew how to drive it, and we all helped to load and unload rocks.

We were amazed at how beautiful they were – a wide variety of colours, in all shapes and sizes with different kinds of inclusions such as quartz, silica, mica and limestone. Some of the larger ones would need the help of George with the tractor. Years ago when the land was first settled, these rocks had been laboriously moved into piles and fence ways by the pioneers who had originally cleared the land to farm it. I felt a little guilty moving these rocks back to the land, knowing what a terrible job it must

have been with only bare hands and horses to do this. We were only moving some of the smaller rocks. The pioneers had also had to move large, half-buried boulders as well.

Mrs. Robinson, another neighbour, dropped by today to see our progress. The site where we were building the labyrinth had been originally cleared over one hundred and fifty years ago by her grandfather. I felt better when she gallantly remarked, "Don't feel bad. Grandpa Charlie was a visionary. He would have approved of your project."

The early pioneers would have viewed the rocks with major annoyance and frustration since rocks and boulders cause the animals to stumble, break wagon wheels and damage ploughs and other farm implements. As we were working with the rocks, we saw them from an entirely different perspective. Rather than creating problems, the rocks were a necessary part of building something new and exciting in a natural setting people would enjoy. I know that many people will find comfort and healing while enjoying labyrinths in the fields. We also had the luxury of time to admire their beauty and be thankful there were enough rocks that we could use them to complete our labyrinth.

During our break today we talked about the Turtle of Hearts®, and I invited the children to use this as an exercise in connecting with heart awareness.

Exercise: Each time you find a heart, think about someone you really like/love a lot. Take a moment to think about something special about that person. People act like mirrors for one another. The special qualities you see and like in others are also your own. What kind of qualities would you like to see in people to make our world a more friendly and happier place to live? Now imagine sending these kinds of thoughts to people everywhere around the world. Can you imagine how the power of true and *authentic* friendship could change the world?

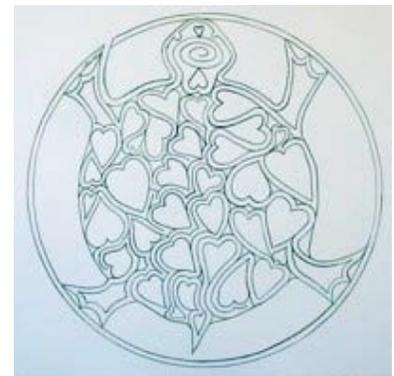


Figure 11: The Turtle of Hearts
© Helen Will

It was important not to lift rocks that were too heavy. None of us needed a sore back. Sometimes if the rock was really interesting and we really couldn't just leave it in the pile, two of us would roll it together. Then Taylor would help me lift it into the trailer. When we got back to the labyrinth, we then would roll it off as close to the pattern as possible before rolling it into place. Occasionally, Taylor would surprise me by moving some of the big rocks by himself, and then give me little shrug and an "innocent" smile as if to say, "Hey! How did that get there?"

When we needed a break from the physical work, we would sit and chat, and I would present them with more of the patterns and activities. Since there was an age difference, I was challenged to find different ways to use the same image. Taylor and Carly would need more complicated projects than the others, but Hanna always showed me that I had forgotten how imaginative and resourceful a seven year old can be. Claudia showed an amazing dedication to finish each and every project. Together, everyone offered helpful comments and suggestions, and their genuine interest in the projects kept me inspired to bring a new one each day.

Days 3 and 4

Each day the children arrived with their laughter and enthusiasm and we gradually got to know each other. We were neighbours when we started, and as we worked together, we became good friends. Raking grass, pulling out leftover roots, and moving rocks in hot weather is not easy work, but we took breaks when we needed them, and had lots of time to chat and play. We were all glad to have the shade of the picnic tent on these extra-hot days. One day Carly brought a cassette of the school choir



Figure 12: Journey of the Heart
© Helen Will

singing a song about sharing and we listened to that while we worked. Meanwhile, Claudia helped move the smaller rocks and danced around the labyrinth chasing the plentiful butterflies and grasshoppers, giving us a chance to a pause in our work to check out her latest treasure. Hanna continued to work steadily and quietly, always with a shy smile on her face, and when she was tired, sat and worked carefully on the activity sheets.

Exercise:
None! Sometimes you just have to have some fun.

Butterflies are a symbol of transformation and the dance of joy. Life too is a dance. Butterflies begin as a crawling caterpillar, and transform into a beautiful creature of flight. They are a reminder that difficult times of growth and change in our lives can also be just as beautiful, and filled with a joyful outcome when perceived from a different perspective.

Exercise: There are four sections that make up the wings of the butterfly. When you come to a circle in the first section, list the qualities about yourself that you most admire. In the second section list the special qualities of someone in your life you consider to be a good a role model. In the third section, list the qualities that attract you to your best friend.

In the last section, list any other qualities that you would like to see within yourself in the future. This exercise was too hard for a five year old. But Claudia enjoyed following the labyrinth pathway, colouring and counting.

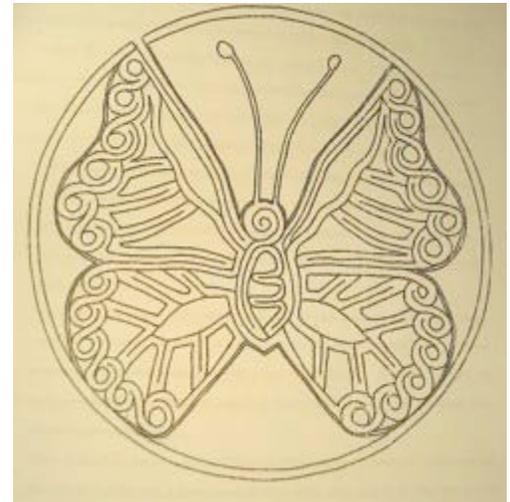


Figure 13: Butterfly Labyrinth
© Helen Will

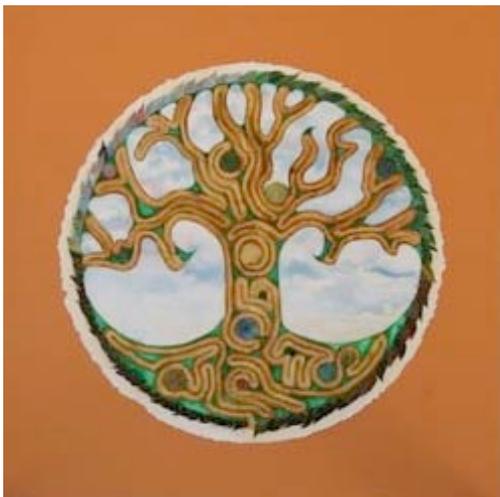


Figure 14: The Tree of Blessings
© Helen Will

Exercise: At each circle on the Tree of Blessings, think of something you are doing to take care of Mother Earth.

Taylor worked tirelessly to place the rocks around the pattern, seldom stopping for a rest or a break. I almost had to sit on him to slow him down.

Day four was a Friday, and I incorrectly assumed the children would be too tired from the week's activity or busy with family projects to work on Saturday. We were all excited about finishing it, so we decided to work on Saturday too.



Figure 15: Making progress. Photo by Taylor S.

Day 5

Everyone arrived right on time as usual on Saturday, including Mrs. S. I was surprised to see her and she laughed as she quickly assured me she was just out for a walk to check on our progress and take some pictures. Claudia decided to do an activity with her Mom that morning, and after some picture taking and a hug, went back home with her. She had worked very hard all week on our project, and had already participated far more than I thought would be possible for someone her age. Remember, one of the most important criteria for working on the project was the choice to participate or not.

George knew how hard we had been working, and knew how much we hoped to finish today, so he came with the tractor and helped us to gather extra rocks and move them to the labyrinth site. That meant we could spend our whole morning completing the pattern.

As the last rock was moved into place, Taylor, Carly and Hanna asked if we could build an inukshuk in the centre. 'Inukshuk; is an Inuit word for 'a meeting place,' which is indicated by a stylized figure. I had brought three small angels for them to place in the middle when we were finished, and their suggestion was wonderful surprise. I thought we had used all the larger flat stones, and would have to wait for another day to build it when George could help us.

I was wrong. While I was making some minor adjustments to the pattern, Taylor, Carly and Hanna found the perfect stones and brought them to the centre. "Look!" they called to me, "We have

everything we need right here!” And they did! Within fifteen minutes, the inukshuk, was completely built! The children’s idea was the perfect centre for the labyrinth.

Taylor reminded me that it had taken me three years to complete the Chartres Labyrinth, and George added it was because I was too stubborn to ask for help. After the land had been cleared, working together as a team, we had completed this project in five days! Did I mention this labyrinth has a sixty-foot diameter? My dream had been to finish it by September. I never imagined we would be able to walk it so soon!

Another pile of stones was set to one side. Future labyrinth walkers were invited to choose one, think of a prayer, blessing or whatever felt important to them and gently with their breath, “blow” the prayer into the stone. Then it would be placed anywhere on the labyrinth outline they wished. Today, the stones in the labyrinth are all touching one another, and if we could see it from the air, it would look something like Figure 9.

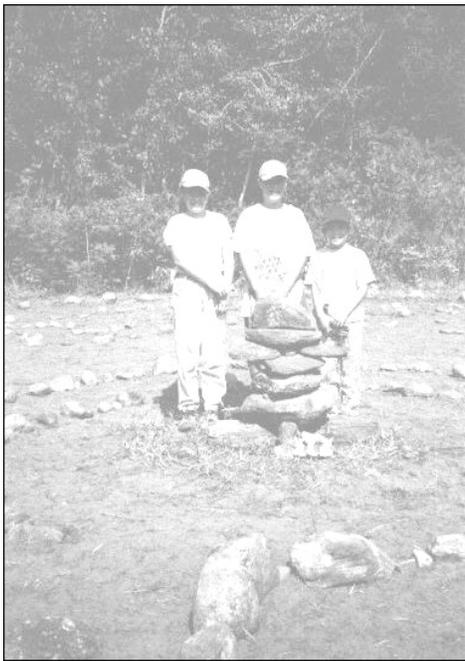


Fig. 15. The Inukshuk

It is amazing what can be accomplished when you clearly set your intention and ask for help. But it goes far beyond that. We all worked together, helped each other and had fun together. My dedicated assistants never once asked to be rewarded for their efforts. They came to help with the project just because they wanted to. They brought with them their energy and enthusiasm, and friendship, and their love of life, their joy and laughter, their ideas of honour and respect, co-operation and friendship. All these qualities were infused into the labyrinth like a breath of fresh air, through hard work, play, music, dance, and love of nature. I hope they have taken home with them, another way of understanding our relationship with others, with our Earth, a growing friendship with each other and also with George and me.

Lots of people talk about making our world a better place to live, but make no effort to change it. I believe building our labyrinth together was one way of doing this, and our story is just the beginning of another story that will continue to grow as others come and explore the labyrinth; as others read about our journey, and are hopefully inspired by it in some small way. If we want to show honour and respect for others, we must find it

first within our own hearts. If we want to change the world, we have to begin by changing ourselves. If I want you to respect me, I must also act in ways that show I have respect for you. My assistants come from a loving family that already work and play together, respect each other’s opinions, show trust in each other, and demonstrate this same respect for nature and our environment. They are among the lucky children of the world. It is much easier to learn these values when we live in a safe and loving home than if we live in a home filled with fear, anger, criticism, or violence. It is for all these children, we need to hold the vision of a better life in our hearts. They need our caring and understanding - our compassion. It is heartbreaking to see pictures of ten –year- old children heavily armed with machine guns, or throwing rocks and glass bottles into angry crowds. Unfortunately, this is how these children have been taught to survive. Adults have taught them this kind of behaviour. When these children become adults, what will they teach their children?

It is sometimes easier to imagine a better world for those who live in difficulty in far away places. However the reality of our world right now is that there are children who may go to your school, and live in your own community who need the same compassion. There are children nearby who also do

not have enough to eat, warm clothes for cold weather or safety within in their own homes. Sometimes it has nothing to do with any of that. Sometimes when people feel angry or upset, they think they feel better when they make other people feel as badly as they do. Cruel words can be just as violent as a fist. Over the years, I have learned that each of us, now matter how young or old we are, can have the vision and the power to make our world a better place to live. The labyrinth is a simple but powerful tool we can use to create the vision of a world where everyone can live together in peace and harmony. When the children helped to built the labyrinth in 2002, Dr. Masaru Emoto's work had not been published. His amazing book would be a perfect way to show children the power of intention and the difference we can make in our world with mind-full-ness. This renowned Japanese scientist has discovered a way to visually demonstrate how water molecules are affected by thoughts, words and feelings. The Hidden Messages in Water, Beyond Words Publishing, Inc. 2004 is filled with beautiful photographs of frozen water crystals. The water crystals exposed to words and feelings expressing such things as peace, love, and gratitude (positive feelings and ideas) form beautiful symmetrical geometric patterns. The water crystals that have been exposed to negative thoughts, feelings or ideas such as anger, fear, pain, anxiety or stress will either form distorted and disrupted patterns or not form at all. Since humans, animals and earth are all composed of a lot of water, can you imagine how much help we could offer by just becoming more aware of our thoughts, words and feelings? His book clearly shows how important it is to be mind-full. It also shows how much we can do with the power of intention.

Since labyrinths are considered sacred space, hold within their patterns very positive energy, can help people to heal, feel peaceful, solve problems, find inner peace, I decided to do an art project that I hoped would impact our world. Hardly anyone has seen it. Hardly anyone even knows about it. And the best part about it is that it doesn't matter. It also doesn't matter if it is only me who thinks it is a terrific idea. In my heart, I know it can make a difference, and that is all that counts.

When we understand our own feelings and have a clear picture of how we would like our world to be, our vision can then become our reality. It may not happen overnight, but sometimes other people can "catch" your dream too. And as we work together more and more with similar ideas to make our world a better place, it will happen – one positive thought at a time.

I hope each of you will find in the sacred space of The Children's Labyrinth, your own special vision of how you would like to show honour and respect for yourself, your family, your community, for our Earth and everything that lives on our planet. With this vision, you hold the key to the future. Blessings abound. Angels are everywhere. All things are possible.

Believe!



Figure 16. Healing the World
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Reports from people who walked the labyrinths

1. This is my experience when I walked the Children's Labyrinth for the first time:

As soon as I approached, it seemed that the energy was light and whimsical. As I travelled through I felt like laughing and in the center as I sat quietly, it brought memories of my childhood at home. Although we lived in a small house, 5 kids, one small bedroom was dedicated as a playroom where we could do whatever we wanted or dreamed. I remember building stage coach using a small table and chairs with reins to a rocking chair as a horse. It was a very special space. That is what the children's labyrinth feels like for me- a very special space.

- Fred James P. Eng. Shamanic Healer

2. Skipping through the labyrinth

Whenever I have visited Helen's enchanted property, I have tried to walk the labyrinths (except in the winter, when they are covered with snow). She and George have now built five. Each one has a special energy and a particular one will draw me, depending on my healing issues at the time.

The day the picture was taken (See Figure 17), I had brought my mother to visit Helen. They are both artists and enjoy discussing their art. Then we went down to the labyrinths. My mother had never walked one before. As soon as we got out of the car at the Children's Bell Labyrinth, my mother asked, "Did someone turn on the music?" Here we were in this sacred space in the middle of the property, surrounded by beautiful forest with the tinkling sounds of children's voices, singing and laughing. To the eye, we were the only ones there. Nobody had "turned on" any music.

It was a dry, hot, and sunny July day. The wildflowers were dancing in the breeze. I began to walk the Children's Bell with my usual combination of anticipation and trepidation. These feelings are quite linked because what I anticipate is that I will be transformed, but there is always a slight trepidation because I am always the last one to know what kind of change that will be. While walking a labyrinth, I experience an altered state of consciousness, but I also experience an awareness of that altered state. This dual location allows me to be conscious of what is happening to me.

This day, I was conscious of how I had held myself back from play, both as a child and an adult. As I wound around the labyrinth, getting deeper and deeper into meditation, I felt myself lightening up. A smile filled my face and I felt my consciousness expanding to include the possibility of joy. The gradual lightening up reached a peak when I turned around in the centre of the labyrinth, and began my journey back. The little tinklings of child energy that had been around, intensified to the point that they were almost deafening. And what they were telling me was what a child would say to an adult who doesn't know how to play: "Skip!" I broke out into a joyous skip. I continued skipping and bounding around the labyrinth until I reached the end, elated and crying at the same time. Something had broken through.

This is my experience of the labyrinth. There is a "breaking through." I reach a point at which something has to change. On this day, it asked me to be a child again.

I haven't forgotten how to skip. Every now and then I pause to re-experience the sheer and simple joy that the labyrinth gave me that day, with gratitude.

- Lesley D. Harman



Figure 17. Skipping in the Children's Bell Labyrinth

3. I have had the opportunity to walk the Children's Labyrinth many times. Each time is a different experience. One that stands out in my memory was from last fall. I felt pure joy and lightness of spirit. I also felt very connected to the earth, the trees and the birds. Their songs sounded sweeter and the leaves were more vivid in colour. As I processed what this all meant for me I came to know that pure joy is available to me in each moment; it all depends on how I see the moments and experience them. I am connected to all of the joy that children feel. It is inside of me always.

Second experience: Several years ago, four of us walked the Wisdom Star Labyrinth together. We each had our own unique experience. However, we each also experienced what I would call a "Holy Experience" (the Presence of the Divine). Although some of this is too private to share, I recall M. and C. kneeling at the center while L. and I held the energy for them. It felt like Christ was in our midst. It was a sacred moment in time. At one point, C's feet were "washed" by M. but somehow it was Christ washing her feet. We all had this 'knowing.' When I came into the center, I was compelled to kneel down over the white crystal stone and clear the area over my throat. Looking back now, I see this was the beginning of finding my voice.

- Barbara Soden Ret. Reg.N. Rec.Pract. T.T.

4. The one really amazing experience that made the Star Labyrinth my favourite happened the first time I walked it. I could feel 'doors' opening and closing at the points of the star as I walked the outside star pathway. It was like each point held a new and wonderful room just beyond the next door. I honestly don't know how to describe it any other way. It was a very powerful experience that has never left me.

- Pamela King

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I have consent from the Sorgini family for their participation in this article.

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