

Labyrinth continued

I walked my first labyrinth before I knew what a labyrinth was. Perhaps many of us do. I was eleven years old when a doctor ordered a scan of my spine to check for scoliosis. The MRI revealed not scoliosis but, at the edge of the image, a vastly enlarged thyroid gland. I was whisked away for a biopsy and, days later, diagnosed with cancer.

I suddenly found myself walking a path that would simultaneously take me out of childhood and back into it, into surgery and toward healing, toward an understanding of the preciousness of each moment through a reckoning with mortality. I was going both toward death and toward more life. It seems only fitting that the word “labyrinth” likely stems from the Greek *labrys*, meaning “double ax”: the labyrinth is the blade that cuts both ways.

The path itself was long and swung me far out from the center of things, into a peripheral realm. I never knew when the next turn would come, and when it did, I was just as likely to be moving back out as further in. But this was not a maze; I was not lost. A certain route had been laid for me, difficult as it was, and I was following it toward wholeness. At age thirteen, after a complete thyroidectomy and two years of radiation treatments to eradicate the cancer that had metastasized to my neck tissue, lymph nodes, and lungs, I was declared cancer-free. Then I had to take what I learned and walk the winding path out again, back into the world.

As you walk the Pratt House labyrinth, consider giving it a part of yourself and seeing what it gives back. You may find that the outer journey you’re taking mirrors an inner one.

I could spend all afternoon regaling you with tales of how the labyrinth has followed me around in the years hence. But that yarn is for another turn in the path; we have a labyrinth to walk. Instead I’ll close with this quote from the French mystic Simone Weil, who once wrote, “The beauty of the world is at the mouth of a labyrinth.” ***By Gabriel Dunsmith***