

The Story of the Dancing Woman Labyrinth™

By Lisa Gidlow Moriarty



The Dancing Woman Labyrinth was created as a woman's story about cancer survival and loss. She is dedicated in memory of my mother who died of breast cancer 14 years after the discovery of cervical cancer and, later, two radical mastectomies several years apart. I am, myself, a cancer survivor, celebrating many years since ovarian cancer surgery shortly after the birth of my only child, beautiful daughter Erin in 1983.

The Dancing Woman knows grief; she bears the tears, embraces the heart pains and celebrates the days of joy and survival. She is a symbol of women's strength and compassion. She dances with wild abandon in release of pain and in celebration of enduring love.

The Dancing Woman's name is also based on a personal story. When my mother was dying from cancer, I moved her into our home where we could share her final days together. As her physical health deteriorated, transferring her from the bed posed a challenge. I would place her arms around my neck and reach my arms around her weakened body in a full embrace. We would turn and move together with awkward steps that we jokingly referred to as dancing. My mother soon became too weak to move from the bed. When she was restless, I would ponder her needs. One such time she whispered softly, "I just want to dance." Some weeks after my mother died, a young child wisely explained to me that when people die they go up to heaven where they dance with the angels. I understood this divine message and since that time have envisioned my mother doing just that. Released at last from the pain of her disease, she was once again free to dance.

Symbolism

The symbolism of the Dancing Woman design includes outstretched and uplifted arms that both reach out in a welcoming, supportive embrace and reach up in celebration. Wild and flowing hair suggests natural freedom as well as the crazy and unexpected ways hair may grow back after chemotherapy. Entrances to the pathway under the arms are reminiscent of a mother's or friend's support and protection (e.g. a mother bird hiding offspring under her wings, taking someone under your wing). A flowing skirt and leaping movement are in pure grace and beauty. The path center located within a womb or birthing space is a place for transformation or rebirth. The location of the woman's figure is as if rising out of the labyrinth, a phoenix-like rising upward or, if turned downward, a re-birth from the womb-like shape of the labyrinth.