

# A Special Volunteer Opportunity awaits You at Coffee Creek

BY MARY ANDONIAN

One of the most unexpected and satisfying things that happened after my book BITSY'S LABYRINTH was published was that I was contacted by Kay Kinneavy at the Labyrinth Network Northwest. Kay had read and enjoyed my book, and was now calling to make a request. She said their organization had a ministry that brought in a labyrinth walk to the women inmates at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, and she wondered if I would volunteer to help facilitate some of the walks.

Mind you, I have no formal training in facilitating labyrinth walks, but I love walking them. It's a divine, meditative experience that helps clarify your thoughts, commune with your higher power (or higher self), and leaves you feeling energized yet peaceful. I replied with an enthusiastic, "Heck, Yeah!"

That was three years ago. In that time, I have witnessed some pretty amazing things during those monthly Monday evening walks. Some inmates have been walking long before I joined (8+ years) and knew more about the labyrinth than I did, and last night's walk consisted of an inmate who had just surpassed 20 years of incarceration and was walking the labyrinth for the first time. I learn something from all of them.

Our little Network has struggled recently to staff enough people for our weekly walks. We currently have eight volunteers. Two are Tualatin residents (yours truly and Laura Spurrell), and the rest come from the Portland area (and some from as far away as Newport, Eugene and Vancouver). Sometimes we have to cancel a walk due to lack of staff because we maintain a rule that at least two volunteers attend per session. This is met with great disappointment by the inmates who arrange their evening schedule so they can participate. It's a long waiting list to earn the right to walk the labyrinth so only the best-behaved are allowed to attend.

If you ever wondered what it would be like to volunteer at the women's prison – only a five to ten minute drive from your Tualatin home – here's a great opportunity to find out. We're looking for people who have familiarity with labyrinth walking (or at least are spiritual, enjoy meditative practices, and open-minded to interfaith programs). The time commitment would be once a month or every other month on Monday nights, arrive by 5:30 p.m. and leave usually by 7:05 p.m. (The actual walk is from 6:00-7:00 p.m.) You would also need to become a member of Labyrinth Network Northwest ([www.labyrinthnetworknorthwest.org](http://www.labyrinthnetworknorthwest.org)), with annual dues of \$10/year.

Once you decide you want to try it, you need to fill out some paperwork, and then one of us can escort you for your first walk. The actual labyrinth walk is in the prison chapel and 10-20 inmates attend each week. If you like the walk, you go through a standard paperwork/training process to get "badged" so you can attend as a monthly volunteer. It's easy, but takes a little time to go through all the hoops. The results are very rewarding. You get to be part of something very rare at Coffee Creek: an hour of peace and quiet to reflect and connect with women who desperately need it. It's an extremely gratifying experience. If you've read this far and your gut is saying, "I really need to do this," then please don't delay: contact Kay Kinneavy at Labyrinth Network Northwest ([info@labyrinthnetworknorthwest.org](mailto:info@labyrinthnetworknorthwest.org)) and she'll "walk" you through the process. I hope to connect with you soon.



**Mary Andonian** is a Tualatin resident and Film Chair for the 45th Annual Willamette Writers Conference. She is also a volunteer at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. [www.maryandonian.com](http://www.maryandonian.com).



Coffee Creek - Front entrance.



Coffee Creek Interior.



Exterior of Coffee Creek.



Walking the Labyrinth\* - A unique experience  
\*Actual Coffee Creek labyrinth not shown