

Both hurting from failed first marriages, Jane and Craig walked the mystical labyrinth at a nearby church. As the two fell in step, they also fell in love

The Long & Winding Road to Love

In the muted light of San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, Jane and Craig Wirth slipped off their shoes. Just inside the gilded bronze doors, Jane took Craig's hand and led him onto the large carpet with the medieval labyrinth design. The two walked the single-file path that loops back and forth and round and round to the center. It is here, they say, that they fell in love.

Like the labyrinth itself, the story of Jane and Craig's courtship is long and winding. The two were introduced by

mutual friends in 1994. Jane, now 56, a health education director for Kaiser Permanente, invited Craig, also 56, to join the San Francisco Bay-area hiking and biking club that she spearheaded. Craig, a national recruitment manager for the IRS and an avid biker, accepted her invitation. Unbeknownst to each other, both were unhappy in their marriages. Craig would eventually separate from his wife of 27 years; as would Jane from her husband of 33 years.

Devastated by her upcoming di-

vorce, Jane sought ways to cope with the pain. She attended church, she meditated, got counseling and took tai chi classes, but nothing resonated with her soul as powerfully as walking the labyrinth. She took her first walk in 1995 after reading about Grace Cathedral's labyrinth in her church newsletter. The circuitous design of a labyrinth, she learned, is intended to represent life's progress. Adherents through the centuries have used the meditative walk as a journey to deeper spirituality and self-discovery. Mindful-

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At Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, Jane and Craig Witt retrace the path that led them to love.

ly strolling on the looping path that first time, Jane became aware of her deepest feelings. Sometimes she even broke down in tears. "Walking the labyrinth opened me up to the pain that was in my heart," says Jane.

Meanwhile, over the next couple of years, she and Craig kept discovering more and more things they had in common. They both shared an interest in reading and the arts and would often attend cultural events and movies together. Over dinner and on the phone, they logged many

hours talking about their jobs and their children (Jane has three children; Craig has two).

Sometimes, those conversations were about the labyrinth. She told Craig about her trips to Chartres, France, where she had traveled with a group of fellow labyrinth enthusiasts to walk a stone path in the town's cathedral that's more than 800 years old. Closer to home at Grace Cathedral, she had also become a certified facilitator, someone who explains the meaning of the labyrinth to newcomers and guides them on their walks.

In the beginning of 1999, a year before Craig's divorce became final, Jane encouraged him to walk the labyrinth as a way of sorting through his feelings. Together they walked the cathedral's two labyrinths: the indoor one and another etched in stone near its entrance. "I was very aware of Craig's presence on the labyrinth," says Jane, whose divorce became final in October 1999. "Every time I'd glance in his direction we made eye contact. That's when our relationship began to develop more fully."

The Grace Cathedral walk would be the first of many they took together.

The couple remembers one walk in particular in which Jane was mourning her marriage, sadly letting go of the past with each turn of the path. Craig, following several paces behind her, seemed aware of her emotional turmoil. When both reached the center, Jane sat, deep in thought, as Craig stood silently at her side. It was a metaphor for their budding relationship. "He not only allowed me to have my feelings, he stood by me," she says. "He wasn't going to try to fix everything, but he was going to be there in the center of those changes with me."

In May, Jane traveled to France again to walk the Chartres labyrinth, this time as one of the leaders of the group. She was gone a month, and Craig called every day. "I think we had something like \$800 in phone bills," Jane says. "It would have been cheaper if he'd flown over!"


For her next trip, a year later in May 2000, Craig accompanied Jane on a week-long retreat to the French town. Each evening they'd walk the church's labyrinth by candlelight.

Early one morning on the fourth day of the trip, Jane and Craig went to the cathedral. Extraordinarily, the couple found themselves completely alone as they entered the magnificent Gothic structure. Later, they would wonder if their private moment was some sort of divine gift. Hand in hand, the two walked down the aisle, gazing up at the luminous stained glass windows. When they reached the labyrinth, Jane said, "I think there's something we need to talk about." At nearly the same instant, Craig dropped to one knee.

"Jane, will you be my wife?" he asked.

Jane simply looked at him and said, "Yes, will you marry me?"

"And then," recalls Craig, "we both started to cry."

The couple were married six months later on November 19, 2000. They are now both volunteer facilitators at the labyrinth. The second Friday evening of each month they light 500 candles around the labyrinth, stand by to answer any questions and assure first-timers that yes, walking this path can change your life. 

Got a great story about how you and your spouse met? Then send us an e-mail at lhj.howtheymet@meredith.com. We'll pay \$50 for any stories we publish.