

We formed a committee to plan a ceremony. And so after our monthly meeting in March we walked to the land. Silently and with intention we entered the still undisturbed forest, walking single file; each of us paying attention to the branches arching overhead, to the calls of birds, the rustle of leaves underfoot. We paused and gathered to name the trees and animals whose home it was (and recalled with a chuckle the rumored story of a mischievous bear). Also, thanks to Charlotte's careful interviews with neighbors and relatives, we heard stories of the people who once had lived on the land, all gone now.

We walked further into the land, to a clearing on the southwestern corner. There we reflected:

*...we are the newcomers, the immigrants here. We seek not so much to bless or be blessed. Rather we humbly hope simply to belong...We begin to feel in our bones our participation in the cycles here, to know our place in this family...In a few short weeks...bulldozers will arrive. These machines will break things down and tear things up; the soil and its inhabitants will disintegrate, at least in part. There will be trauma and loss and sadness. Yet, out of that disarray and destruction a new community will emerge. The beings here will reorganize and begin to heal. We will be in the thick of it, anxious to learn and with humility to care for things and beings, to nurture them and contribute to their wellbeing as best we can; eager to belong...*

Then Linda led us in a simple circle dance, "The Elm Dance," which for more than 30 years has been danced across the globe as a vehicle of grief, healing, longing, and hope. Our ceremony had ended, but its meaning and power remains.