

CIRCLES OF FIRE

Lisa Lee Peterson and Patrick Horsbrugh, with Lenna, Clifford, and Toby Peterson



Until the last few years of his life, Sigurd Peterson, my father-in-law, Lenna's and Toby's grandfather, and Clifford's father, kept a herd of about 80 shorthorn cattle. The richly fertilized garden west of the big barn and the hay bale feeders are part of their legacy to us. We have taken three hay bale feeders, red twig dogwood and cherry tree branches harvested from the farm, and green-dyed baling twine to construct three tree-circles as a remembrance of Grampa, his land, and his cows.

Over a decade ago, Sigurd transformed two difficult-to-farm fields at the south end of the farm into a forest of 10,000 trees and a pond with an island in the middle. Year



after year, our family has planted various species of native shrubs and trees on the island, hacking down the 10-foot-high horseweed as they worked. Earlier this year, Clifford and our son, Toby, copied red twig dogwood branches from the island.

My original idea was to tie these leafless branches to the hay bale feeders to create circles of fire, but we had only enough material to make one such circle. For the second

and third circles, we used fresh branches with their leaves still attached that Skif hauled in as Lenna and I worked on the first circle: more dogwood from the island and branches from cherry trees culled from the windbreak adjacent to the installation site.

Sigurd, his sons, and our neighbors planted the native white pine windbreak forty years ago, part of the work that transformed the barren farmland surrounding the once-



desolate 19th-century farmstead into today's wooded and landscaped environment.

The morning after we had moved the circles into their site, birds were looking for suitable nesting sites among the branches of the leafless circle. So the birds, along with the wind and the rain, will reshape these circles over time. Clifford has referred to me as the weaver-bird who always straightens things out and puts things in order.

By knotting branches to the hay feeder structure, we have imposed order on Nature. Even so, I deeply appreciate the beauty and chaos of the branches above the structure, drawing their wild and crazy lines reaching up into the sky.