The Dwellings in the Woods in a non-profit retreat center located in McGrath, Minnesota. It is open to the public and sits on 150 acres of land. They offer five hermitages (cabins) to stay in for as long as you would like. It is a place to "quiet your mind and open your heart, find solitude that allows the integration of your mind, body and spirit, a place to grow through hospitality, peacefulness, solitude, meditation and prayer. A place to honor nature, beauty, the arts, and experience abundance, healing and spiritual awakening." From their website at [www.dwellinginthewoods.org](http://www.dwellinginthewoods.org)

I first come across The Dwelling in the Woods in the spring of 2007. I was looking for a spiritual or meditation retreat to try to combat some depression I was feeling and thought that if I could just get out to the woods, maybe I would feel better. I didn't end up going until late spring 2008, but it was worth the wait. I made the reservation and was a little hesitant to go. I was used to being in the city and I was scared to be in the woods by myself. I went back and forth on whether I should follow through or just skip it entirely, but ultimately decided to go. I headed up on what I thought would be a few hours drive, but it turned out to be much shorter. It was a nice drive through small Minnesota towns and along some one-lane highways.

**Arrival**

Upon my arrival I was greeted by a friendly dog, named Millie and a lovely woman named Teresa. She shook my hand and welcomed me. She first asked me if it was my first time there and I replied that it was. She showed me a map of the property and where my hermitage was located. People who stay at The Dwelling are called hermits, hence we stay in hermitages. She told me that my Reiki and massage appointment was schedule for later that day and I should come back to the main building to have the services done. I was pleased with her warmth and sincerity and was so glad that I had decided to come.

**The Hermitage**

I went to my hermitage and thought I would unpack and get ready for my massage appointment. My dinner was already prepared and waiting for me in the cabin along with a loaf of The Dwelling's signature Honey Cracked Wheat Bread. I took a look around and was amazed at how wonderful it was. It was small but had everything that I could possibly need. Everything was carefully laid out and nothing was overlooked. The name of my heritage, Woodlands was placed throughout the cabin. The name was carved on my cutting board, placed over the entrance, and written on the fireplace gathering. It was a friendly touch. The kitchen was fully stocked with food, dishes, cleaning supplies, condiments, and pots. The bathroom had fresh towels and soap. The hermitage also hosted books, a CD player, drawing materials, and a fire prepared - all I had to do was light a match to start it. I felt great being there and was hoping some of my anxiety would be lifted just from the love I could feel radiating off the cabin.

**The Property**

The grounds at The Dwelling is filled by woods, walking trails, a labyrinth, a spiral garden, five hermitages, two community buildings, a cat, a dog, a pond, and nature's animals. It is a quiet place. Monday and Thursday are reserved as "silent days", where you engage with other hermits and staff less frequently. Most of the time I was there, I felt that I was alone in the woods, except for the few times I saw people walking along the trails. I walked the labyrinth, while I meditated and prayed. I had never walked one before, but spent some time reading the story of how it was created and was very intrigued. It was smaller than I had imagined and I was pleasantly surprised at how good it felt to walk the path.

I spent a great deal of time sitting in my lawn chair staring into the woods and watching the animals play in the bird feeder and the raccoon that came by. I was amazed at how much time I spent looking at the woods and thinking. I had brought so much to do and didn't need any of it. The point of being there is to gain a sense of peace and to just be. It is hard for a "city" person like myself to relax and enjoy the surroundings without the feeling like I was doing nothing. I spent a lot of time writing and the other part crying out all my emotions that had been building up. It was a great release to just let it out whenever I wanted. I read a lot of *Walden* and then *Tree Spirited Woman* when I couldn't take anymore of Thoreau. I really enjoyed being in my hermitage. It felt safe and made me believe as though I was part of something bigger than myself.

**Meals**

The meals at Dwellings are all prepared for you, with the exception of breakfast. The kitchen in the hermitage has eggs, milk, pancake mix, cereal, homemade granola, coffee, tea, and a variety of juices. Lunch is served as a community meal unless you choose to take your meal back to your cabin and eat in solitude. We said a prayer before lunch, then sat around the table and ate and talked about our experiences. Dinner is made and ready for you to take back to the cabin and eat later. Most meals are made using organic ingredients and are for the most part vegetarian. The food was good and I had more than enough. There are even snacks in the hermitages. They are stocked with hot cocoa, popcorn, and fruit.

**Departure**

My stay at the Dwelling was three days. I think that is about average, but I would like to stay longer next time. It feels so good there. You come away a little different than when you arrived. It is a good feeling. At my departure, I ate my final lunch with Janice and Judy and we talked about Duluth, MN and some fundraising efforts they could try. I got to look at some pictures that other hermits had taken and especially liked the one of a raccoon eating out of one of the bird feeders. When I left, Judy gave me a warm hug and encouraged me to come back.

I had a wonderful time at The Dwelling and encourage others to stay a night or two. The purpose of the trip is reflection and solitude (if you choose). It gives you a chance to be in nature and not have to worry about anything except connecting with yourself. I found it to be greatly rewarding and just what I needed at the time.

For information about The Dwelling in the Woods check out their [website](http://www.dwellinginthewoods.org).