

June 2002

Ninepatch

Stitch - by - Stitch

- W - e - C - r - e - a - t - e - O - u - r - L - i - v - e - s -

Editor's Note: Each month in this space I share a recent experience on my spiritual journey.

June 2002

Dear Friends,

Suddenly, I was enveloped in total darkness.

It was Saturday night, at the three-day retreat I recently attended in Maryland. We were about thirty-six hours into the forty hours of silence. Our dormitory-style rooms featured a shared bathroom down the hall from my small room.

I had not lived with shared bathrooms since college. After two nights, my body cycles were out of rhythm. To restore a flow, I took a magazine and padded down the hall to sit a while.

Faint oiled- hinges and air shift echoes greeted me as I pushed open the hallway door. I snapped on the light in the large tiled room that held private stalls of bathtubs, showers on one side and toilets and sinks on the other. I entered a stall, sat and began to read.

I had been sitting alone in the room and reading for some time when, suddenly, the lights went out. *What?* I wondered, *Was someone else in here -- someone I never saw who just left and turned out the lights?* I had no idea.

Since I closed the hall door when I entered, the windowless room was so inky, my open eyes might just as well have been closed. I waited a few moments for my eyes to "adjust." Still saw nothing more than nighttime on the inside of a closed hallway closet. As a test, I lifted my hand in front of my face. Sure enough—I saw nothing.

I thought of rising and walking over to the bank of switches near the door, but immediately dismissed the idea. I reasoned that I did not need light for my ultimate purpose here. After I reached that conclusion, I closed my eyes and meditated.

After some time passed, for some reason, I no longer had my eyes closed. It was then I noticed a very slight line of black-on-black contrast in the darkness. The outside room was somewhat less black than the space where I perched.

This whole experience reminded me of a story-puzzle published in *Ninepatch*, Dec.1994. (It was originally part of a "quiz" sent in by reader, Valorie.) Here it is:

Imagine this situation. You are suspended in the center of a dark room--no light at all. Use three words to tell how you feel.

Dear Reader, I suggest you do this before reading on.

I was not "suspended" but I surely felt that dark room. In telling this story, I took note of my feelings. Initially, I felt *surprise* at the sudden darkness. I *questioned* what happened. Next, I was *curious*. I had not chosen escape or to turn lights back on-- though I could have in a few clock ticks.

After visually investigating the original blackness, I *accepted* it and used the experience to meditate. Later, I *explored my senses again* and noted, I could "see" a little. I surveyed my surroundings, and noted vague out-lines. Last, I *reflected on my thought-process*. I wondered about not seeing my hand at first, then later detecting vague contrasts. Did I see only what I expected? If that is the case, why could I see a little now when I could not see after my initial "adjustment" period? Perhaps adjusting took longer than I thought...

The dark room exercise is supposed to tell what you think death is like. If that's so, initially, I felt *surprise*, then *curiosity*, *acceptance*, *sensory exploration* and finally, *reflection*. If that describes my encounter with the final transition, OK. However, I have a feeling that if I left that tiled room and still found no light anywhere ... if I continued down the halls and found no one else there, the whole experience might have been quite different.

Maybe that is why we are often encouraged to pray for the recently departed— perhaps prayer energy somehow provides a little light to guide souls through the initial darkness of the unknown.

Frances Fritzie

The Editor adds, "You might wonder why the lights went out. Here's more of the story,

Just as I opened the stall, fellow retreatant pushed in the outside door from the opposite hall, and flipped on the lights as she passed the switches. Since the room was dark when she entered, seeing me emerging from the stall, she uttered a little, "Oh!"

I started to explain, "Some-one turned off the lights ..." Then, I realized had spoken when this was a SILENT retreat. "OH!" I breathed, and clapped my hands over my mouth. Then, I murmured, "I'm sorry."

"It's OK," she responded and went on about her business.

I turned and left the room.

Since I had been sitting quietly, darkness may have been the work of a motion sensor. A note on the wall of my room informed residents that lights in the room turned off if there is no motion for thirty minutes. I have no other explanation."

- - - - A-R-O-U-N-D - - T-H-E - - F-R-A-M-E - - - -

(Letters to the Editor)

Hi Fritz,

That man said *what* to you? Please, he needs a muzzle. There is nothing wrong with having self-respect and morals. I agree, there is so much more to life than a physical relationship. That reminds me of a lengthy discussion I had with my previous husband before he went to Viet Nam. He was afraid he might be maimed and so he told me if that happened, I could have my freedom if I wished.

I could not believe he said it. To me the sexual part of a relationship is important, but the inner person, whether or not they are kind, their character, and their morals are far more important. The rest is just part of the package and if they are really good souls, then "the rest" is just icing on the cake so to speak. I would have cared for him and been there for him no matter what.

I feel the same way about my present husband. He is all of the above and more. The feelings I have for him are much more peaceful and calm. I guess that goes with age.

Speaking of aging, I have to relate something my father said to me once. My father was a very quiet man but when he said something it was often very profound and usually just as funny. (My sister and I still laugh at some of the comments he came up with.)

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I worked for a Thoracic Surgeon at a university when my father had his heart attack. The surgeon I worked for did Dad's surgery. After the surgery, Dad kept having tiny strokes and I was the one who took him to the doctor for his check ups.

Once, when I had returned him home from one of his exams, I was letting him out of his side of car when he staggered against the door. He nearly fell down. I was holding onto him – the only reason he did not fall. He steadied himself, took a deep breath, looked at me and said *so* seriously, “This getting old is really shitty.”

Well, I started laughing and so did he. We both stood there in front of the house, holding onto the car door like a couple of drunks, and laughing. As I grow older, I think of what Dad said.

I still laugh, but now I understand better what he meant.

Take care,

Patricia

Patricia (Feb. '02) says, “This past weekend, my last son was married. Now all three are husbands. I really never wanted daughters. I thought, ‘I will let my sons give me the daughters.’ Well, they have, I like and enjoy the wives my sons have chosen. My daughters.”

Dear Frances,

I'm all wound up. As the Irish expletive goes on the East Coast, *Jes--*, *I just can't seem to settle down on one thing!* Knitting doesn't interest me anymore now that I have this great book, Sacred Contracts by Caroline Myss. (I also have more books from the library and even bought two paperbacks of my favorite poet, Mary Oliver. All await my attention.)

Paper clutter is mostly my nemesis. Where to put it all! (And I used to be a secretary!) Words were always what attracted me, not the order needed to establish them. Decision-making is key in keeping order -- and thinking ahead.

Even so, today my mind is busy running from books I love to writing ideas, then to a trip I plan for the summer, and back to more books ABOUT writers then on to more ideas for writing.

My cup seems to be over-flowing. I need a clean saucer, an answer to my mind clutter. Time to settle myself with a meeting of my serenity friends.

Thanks for being there.

Love, Gail

Gail (May '02) adds, “ Sometimes, it feels as if I over-do being in the NOW, because I am not planning ahead, not organizing, not orderly. (It just occurred to me that I am living alone. Before, my pride would force me to stay on top of things better than I do now.)

Hi Everyone,

Well, there is much that has been happening as usual. Somehow life never gets boring!

I have resigned from my work in the literacy program due to differences between my director and me. I love the work and the people, but the tension was too great. Then, I was immediately asked to take a new position in the same neighborhood. It seems a director of ministries, in the same building where I worked, had been watching my work over the last three years. He asked me to take the position as religious formation director for his three churches.

I spent some time in discernment. I wanted to be sure this was the path God wanted for me. After much prayer, talking with my spiritual advisor and a retreat, I came to know this was the next right step for me.

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This is a b-i-g job. It means I will prepare all those adults who want to enter the church, have Bible groups and prepare a Lenten Series. Also I would be youth minister and director of religious education for the children.

This all would be for all persons in the three parishes, and many are Spanish speaking. I have been continuing to prepare myself in Spanish since 1997 when I was in Guatemala, Peru and Honduras for language immersion.

The change is exciting and a challenge. I will have to start with priorities. There is no way I can do it all. I will be attending a variety of workshops this summer to get ready for all this.

One workshop is in July. I will be taking a train to New Mexico for that one in Spanish and then head for California to my family.

Much love to you!

Patience

Patience (May '02) continues, "My life here with the Dominicans is good. I hope to make my final vows next summer or spring -- not sure exactly when. "

Hi, Frances—

It's been quiet there with you. What's up? Good, I hope.

I have decided it has been, (besides physically painful and frustrating with my new knees) a very satisfying year. I am doing things I never thought possible. I introduced a speaker to a chapel-full of people, led a large, influential church committee, and did all kinds of planning that I used to hate. It's been good.

I got *Ninepatch* this week. Does it seem to you (as we have also felt at church) that the *issues* are no longer *there* or being talked about? It seems life's transformations, changes and spiritual aware- nesses are missing. The focus seems to be just smaller and normal life issues and crises--not that they aren't important.

It is less exciting or interesting to read, being now more of a newsletter.

What is your thinking on this? Maybe I am off base—

Take care,

Joan

Joan (Jan. '02) says, "I have begun to date (I'm a widow 17 years now.) and have met a few men. Dating seems all iffy and surfacey stuff, even remote in a few cases, but it's some action at least. The only problem is that I am not certain how to handle it all.

Hi Frances,

I thank God for another opportunity to extend Love to the thousands of people who cross my path on a daily basis. Today at my work as a NYC Transit Conductor at what is now called Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan, I met a group of people who were visiting from Texas, young and old alike They came to New York to extend a hand to the millions of people who are affected by the devastation that occurred on 9-11.

Their contribution was prayer stations setup in different areas around New York City: Grand Central Station, Times Square and areas in and around *Ground Zero*, to mention a few. People are frightened and people are depressed. It is almost unbelievable and hard to accept. The fact remains that the Trade Center is gone.

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People come down into the subway after visiting Ground Zero and are choking with grief-- not their own, but feeling what must have been like the end of the world for the people who did not perish immediately but died from suffocation or starvation.

I give them hugs or pats on the back and thank them for their Love.
Peace Love and Light,
Egeria

Egeria (May '02) adds, "A few years ago I was blessed with an opportunity to celebrate my 48th birthday at windows of the Trade Center. I remember looking down at airplanes and helicopters flying below us and thinking, What a beautiful view! Looking at the beauty that surrounded me, I thought to myself, One day I will bring my grandchildren here for lunch.

I learned a great deal from the 9-11 experience. One thing is never take anyone or thing for granted. Even James in the Bible reminds us not to make any plans for tomorrow because we only have today.

Frances:

As always, thanks for e-mailing me the *Ninepatch*..

I have good news: Last week I was accepted to pharmacy school at a university nearby - a big hurdle! (I'm still excited about it.)

So now my journey continues - four years there and then I will be a pharmacist. As you said in your e-mail, time does fly by! The older I get, the faster it flies. I start full-time in August. I will be commuting. At that point I will have a Seventh grader and a Fifth grader. So, I imagine we'll all be doing our homework together at the kitchen table! Won't we be smart? Ha, ha.

Warm wishes,
Maeve

Maeve (Mar. '02) adds, "Having a framework or plan for the future - really helps anchor me or something like that. Perhaps it's the structure that appeals to me?"

Dear Frances,

I'm going through some things I have written in the last two years. It's an interesting experience, most were written as journal notes or things I planned to send to you after some refining. In view of the events of 9/11 and my own personal physical difficulties this past year or so, I haven't written many new things.

Too many emotions are bombarding me at once, I think. My spirit feels raw and exposed. Reading and hearing certain things reduces me to tears. I'm not sure who or for what I weep. So many of my perceptions and beliefs have changed or deepened in some cases.

For many years I have ended every phone conversation with my family with *I love you*. Always a deliberate choice of words, a phrase my family always repeats to me. Somehow it takes on an even more important meaning now.

One day it will be the last time I get to say and hear it --
But till then--.

Joan V.

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Joan V. Spies (Mar/'02) adds, "I am still slowly recovering. On January 31,2002 I once again had to have general anesthesia and surgery. That makes the third time in thirteen months. I am finally able to go swimming again—the perfect exercise for my body. I am very grateful for that and so much more."

Hello Frances,

Hope you are having a good day. We are busy with our jobs, kids, grandkids and chores around the house—all the usual.

My husband is gone to the stock car track where he works this time of year. I stayed home. I wanted some time to myself—to read, write letters, work in the yard and that sort of thing.

I have seen my dad a couple of times. He seems lost without Mom. Sad to say, but I think he may be up to his old habits again.

Take care of yourself.

Love and prayers,

LindaSue

LindaSue (May '02) says, "Now the weather is turning nice, we are taking our first vacation—some time just for us! Finally!"

Dear Frances,

Life has settled down again. After my job, little house projects continue to fill up time. We rearranged the furniture after living with it for ninety days. It made a nice difference.

The plants are in their outdoor beds and the colors are coming out. Birds have found our feeders and bath. They are regular visitors. We're finding our routine in our new location.

Love,

Georgene

Georgene (Mar 02)says, " I need to find rest in the simple things for now. Moving through grief (the death of my parents within a week of one another) is very demanding. I'm grateful to the Ninepatch writer's who have shared their grief journeys over time. Their experiences are lamps upon this dark way."

Frances,

I read your letter about a kind of love in last month's *Ninepatch*. Here's where I am with love these days.

I've decided that the way to win in matters of love is to do something else. Maybe love will eventually come your way, maybe not- - but it won't matter because you will be busy building a happy fulfilling life either way.

The more I thought about love, the more I tried to get love-- the more pain I had. Today I live pain-free. It occurs to me, on occasion, that I might prefer to have a loving partner -- all things being equal. But then I remember that all things have *never* been equal for me in a relationship, and I know I'm very happy now with the balance of my life.

I seek love from my child, my dog, my family, my friends, and a kind of comrade- love from my favorite co-workers. Most of all, I try to remember to rely on the love of my Higher Power. When I remember to do that it always works!

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And in order to get the sort of excitement and intense joy that I use to seek from romantic love, I try to work hard at improving myself and I seek out and fully celebrate anything adventurous. Those two things, self-improvement and adventure, make me happy.

Maybe that's what I really LOVED about being in love all along!

Hugs,
Sherryl

Sherryl (Jul.-Aug. '01) adds, "The fuller my life becomes, the less I worry about having a male partner. The less time I waste worrying, the more time I have to focus on knowing myself and filling my life with what matters most. At long last the scales have tipped and doing what matters is more important! It is a most acceptable compromise."

----- **F-A-B-R-I-C-S** -----
(Our Experiences)

A CERTAIN SYMMETRY

I had a heartwarming experience last week. To tell it, I need to go back in time to where this story begins.

When I was six, my mom died. I won't bore you with the details but my dad remarried. My stepmother was an alcoholic and abused me while Dad was away. (He was a long-distance truck driver). My refuge was the YMCA in Ohio where I lived. Mostly I went to the swimming pool there.

A man named Pat Notly was the pool director and swimming instructor. He took me from a non-swimmer at age twelve to lifeguard at age fourteen. He, along with a guy named Joe, the Y director, became my mentors and adult role models.

I was out of the Navy and in my twenties before I realized how much they contributed to molding my character. By then they both were retired and moved out of the area.

Then two weeks ago an obituary for Mary Notly appeared in our paper here in, Virginia. She was from the same town in Ohio. The obit said she left her husband of sixty-two years, Patrick Notly. I was struck nearly speechless, which is next to impossible for me. I told the story to my Sunday school class and there, vowed to find Pat.

They lived in a Virginia town about twenty-five miles away, but were not listed in the telephone directory. The next Sunday afternoon I tracked down their son and later was able to talk to Pat, himself. He's eight-eight years old and is in good health. We have agreed that I'll pick him up and take him to some YMCA events.

Another interesting twist to this tale is that, because of my affection for the YMCA, I volunteered to serve on the Board of a new YMCA being built near where I live.

There is a certain symmetry in this story, don't you think?

Bill (May '02) adds, "A similar thing happened two years ago. One of my high school upperclassmen, showed up where I live in Virginia. He had retired from the US Army and settled down about thirty minutes away. Then, last year something else occurred. A friend retired from the US Air Force. At his retirement party I met the daughter of two high school classmates who now live about twenty minutes away. Her dad was in my class, her Mom was in my wife's. He also retired from the USAF. It's (all) too bizarre.

- - - - -I-N-S-T-R-U-C-T-I-O-N-S- - - - -

(Reading and Listening)

THE FORCE OF CHARACTER

This book by James Hillman called to me from my book club flier. In the pages Hillman examines the purpose aging serves in the final stages of life. What he means by "force" of character in the title is the persistence of, "...those traits you can't fix, can't hide, and can't accept." He believes the older we become, the more our true nature emerges. One can compare it to a process of refinement or distillation of traits.

His book is divided into three parts: Part One, LASTING, deals with the desire to last as long as one can. It looks at "old-ness" and why oldness is essential to what we love about a person, place or thing. Part Two, LEAVING, looks at how the dysfunctions of aging affect character. He says that character learns wisdom from the body. Part Three, LEFT, asks what is left when you have left. That is character's multi-layered image that has been shaping you from the beginning.

Hillman concedes that "...old age is affliction—especially it is afflicted with the IDEA of affliction."

June (Apr.02) says, "When I have left, I hope my image carries some humor and a little wisdom."

YOUR SACRED SELF

Wayne Dyer takes us on an inward journey enabling us to arrive to our Sacred Self. His work is a synthesis of the different the labels that identify the process called, contemplation.

It is enlightening to discover that the ego is a synthesis of the accumulated information from others whose focus was on striving whereas in the quietude of silence one has already arrived. One chapter in his book that I found fascinating was called, "Cultivating The Witness." In this section he brings to the reader's attention the constant chatter going on in our minds. He labels this observance, *The Witness*. This voice is categorized as coming from outside and speaking to our Sacred Self.

Dyer uses an analogy. If an outsider choreographs your dance of life, it detracts from your own quest of your Sacred Self. No one else knows this Self.

The Sacred Self finds peace below the surface of all the turmoil and strife. Dyer teaches a method of going below the surface of turbulent waters where one can hear the true self in silence. Silence, he says, is the voice of God.

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Mr. Dyer helped me realize that there is goodness at the center of our beings. He has a meaningful way of directing us to banish doubt from our lives at the very beginning of his book.

He speaks from knowledge of The One who directs his life. This knowledge is never found in striving but rather by arriving in the silence of God's Voice, knowing her completely as a man can *know* woman.

Connectiveness is a thread that runs through this work. Stating that we are all equal and the only thing that makes us special is our connection with one another by the common element, God. He states there is no separate God for each of a separate or us or a separate God for each culture ethnicity or race.

Dyer's parting gift for us is the "Prayer of Saint Francis" to lead us to create a collective Spirit of our Sacred Selves.

Lee (April '02) reminds us of St. Francis Prayer for Peace:

"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,

Where there is injury, pardon,

Where there is doubt, faith,

Where there is despair, hope,

Where there is darkness, light,

Where there is sadness, joy.

Oh, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console,

To be understood, as to understand,

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning, that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life."

*

SMALL GRACES And SIMPLE TRUTHS

The time I allowed to run my errands that day was more than necessary, so I was early for my meeting. I was so early, not even the coffee-maker was there.

I decided it was a good time to browse the shelves of the church's small library. A volunteer monthly chose special books to spotlight in the newsletter. A nice touch. She also dedicated a shelf to *Recommended by the church staff*.

I slowly read random titles the one wall dedicated to books. Shelves featured a wide range from "churchy" to "Christian Romance." I glanced at my watch. It was nearly time to go to my meeting. Before leaving, I paused at the *Recommended* shelf a moment. There I saw a small volume entitled, SMALL GRACES. I slid it off the shelf. The author listed was Kent Nerburn. "Never heard of him," I thought. Still, I opened to the Table of Contents. There were several chapters, each two or three pages. I opened the book at random and read,

... If I am not careful-- if I rise from my bed full of small concerns—the mystical flow of the imagination at rest will be broken...

I turned back to the beginning of that chapter,

I have risen early today. Far in the distance, a faint glow paints the horizon. Dawn is coming, gently and full of prayer...

I closed the book. This was a view of prayer I enjoyed—the non-traditional one. I pulled an age-old sign-out card from the book's back and recorded my name. Then I placed the card in the simple box for such and tucked the book under my arm before I shut off the lights and left the room. (See back.)

That volume was a delight. It later led me to request, SIMPLE TRUTHS, the author's first book from the public library. That book was less *magical* and more philosophical.

I liked it, too, but in a different way. I think my favorite chapters were, *On Loneliness and Solitude* and *On Love*.

In the first a distinction between the two named conditions was made,

Solitude is a condition of peace... becoming one with the space around you. It is a condition of union.

Loneliness is small, solitude is large. Loneliness closes in around you; solitude expands toward the infinite. Loneliness has its roots in words, an internal conversation that nobody answers, solitude has its roots in the great silence of eternity.

In *On Love*, he says,

...Remember this and keep it in your heart. You don't choose love. Love chooses you. All you can really do is accept it for all its mystery when it comes into your life.

These are two charming and thoughtful books. Both have about a hundred pages. Add them to your reading list. You won't be sorry.

Editor, Frances

IN MEMORIUM

Sue Ann (July '96),
Frances' high school Classmate
And preteen girlfriend,
Daughter,
Mother of two,
Member of our *Ninepatch* Circle,
Ended her journey
In this world April 2002.

May eternal peace be hers.
May she walk forever in Divine light.

----- **T-H-R-E-A-D** -----
(Our Knowing and our Spirituality)

FLOAT

**Teensy cloud in the sky,
Captivating to my eye,
All the rest is beauteous blue,
What is it with you?**

**Did you drift away
From momma cloud?
Are you scared to be abroad,
So small in all the vast expanse?
Or are you in a delicious trance,
Dreaming as you drift around,
Way up above the surface ground?**

Speak to me, I teensy cloud
Tell me all, tell it out loud,
What are you about?

“Lighten up,” you say,
”It really is a perfect day.
Float like me
Upon the sea
Of space. “

Phyllis (May '02) from Frances' personal collection.

---M-A-N-A-G-I-N-G—T-H-E—H-O-U-S-E---

(Ninepatch Business)

The IRS recognizes Ninepatch, Inc. as a nonprofit corporation, category 501c3.
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Ninepatch
Statement of Purpose

Ninepatch is the monthly publication of a non-profit organization
by the same name.

In the pages of this newsletter, women
and the men who support them,
share their spiritual journeys,
their life experiences, their stories, their thoughts, their pondering,
their pain, their joy and their observations.

This newsletter offers a forum where its readers can be heard
and remain anonymous if they choose.

Such sharing is vital in helping
other women and men find their place in an eternal spiritual circle where all
both know and are known.

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