

Ninepatch

Stitch-by Stitch

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

March 2002

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

Dear Friends,

That evening several weeks ago, the church was nearly full. The service was short to allow for a talk to follow it. Father left as we started the closing hymn and before the last verse, he was back—without vestments. Instead, he wore all black: robe, sandals and cloak. On reaching the steps to altar, he knelt.

When we finished singing, we also settled to our knees and the church filled with soft sound: well-oiled kneelers opening and gentle thumps as the small rubber-footed benches touched the tile floor. Silence expanded as moments passed. In the midst of this, I opened my eyes, and glanced to my right wondering if the presider were still in prayer.

Between kneeling people in the row ahead, and the pew behind them, I saw him. His silver-haired head was still bowed and his ebony wrap flowed from his neck like a cape and trailed on the floor.

As I gazed, a great well of tears, rushed from my heart, sprang from my eyes, and trickled quietly down my cheeks. *Something* moved from my heart, and wordlessly presented itself. In the deep silence of several hundred people in prayer I wondered, *What IS it?* More tears were the only reply. Unusual as this was, I had a similar experience early in 1996.

My mother had died in 1995 and I was trying -- without success -- to sell her Florida house. I was living (and still working a little) in Michigan. It was cold the day it happened. Entering the church, I chose a pew bathed in wintry sunlight. I do not recall that service before I was filing back to my seat after taking communion. Then, I happened to glance up at the simple, clear church windows. In that moment, *something* struck me. It first hit in my gut. Then my throat tightened and finally my nose constricted before I began to weep. As the large congregation continued to file past, I knelt and looked back over my shoulder at the windows.

Something touched me in the way the light weakly shone through those tent-shaped windows. *It* rested on me as tears slid down my cheeks, turning cool as they dripped off my chin. I tried to stay with the feeling.

When the service ended, I knelt in wordless prayer, turning occasionally take in the windows. In time, I rose then lit a candle as a vigil- for- knowing before I left the church. I continued silence as best I could the rest of the day. In time, I came to know the message. It was, *Sell your (Michigan) house ... move to Florida (Mother's house) ... 2002.*

Though I had pondered my two-house-and-retired-income-problem, it was a terrible move to consider. It meant leaving my children and friends, my little job, my church—

everything I loved and made my life full. Leaving was heart-wrenching. Yet, the *sign* gave me strength to make changes.

The first few months I lived in Florida, I doubted the *sign*. Sadness clouded my faith. I missed my friends and family. I missed my groups and ached for large bookstores where I had enjoyed browsing, reading and sipping coffee. I longed for a large library system.

I wondered about, "2002." I explored possibilities. I ran around, looking and considered several larger cities All the while my Higher Power was working, bringing me serenity and friend-ship. So, when I moved in November of 2001, it was not to a larger city, but to a home of my own not far from Mother's.

Now, I have a wonderful new *family* my Higher Power created for me. I also see my boys nearly every three months. I drink coffee in the discussion groups I attend and I simply buy books online when I can't get them at our library.

What of my recent *sign*?

I don't know. I'm trying to wait faithfully for guidance.

Frances Fritzie reflects, " Keeping an open mind about 2002 is not easy for me. Neither is living with my recent wordless sign. I am impatient with not knowing but I continue to pray for clarity.

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

(Letters to the Editor)

Dear Fritzie,

I am so happy to tell you that I received my *Ninepatch* today. Read it all right away. I love it! Now I am beginning to get the real flavor of all of it. I say or do many of the things I read about - I am truly grateful to

God for letting us meet up again at this place in our lives.

I don't think I remembered you losing your mother. (I wonder if it was recently--for me that could be in the last 5 years.) I still have tearful moments and it has been 9+ years for Dad's passing and it was 8 on Feb. 3 for Mother. Sometimes I just call out to her as if maybe she could answer ... and I would be satisfied with only that! I just have those moments when I still miss them extra much.

I feel so happy for you that you have a prayer group... I think that is soooo wonderful! I would love to be in one, too. But, have I done anything about finding one - not yet! This, too, shall come. God does lead me - I just need to listen more carefully!

I'm tired and ready for bed. Sweet dreams to you, Fritzie!

Love and prayers,

CJ

CJ (Feb. '02) adds, "I want to share from, Courage to Change, p. 332, Today's Reminder: If I so choose, I can regard everything that happens in my life as a gift from which I can learn

and grow. Today I will find something positive hidden within a difficult situation and allow myself to be grateful. I may be surprised at how much a little gratitude can help. Quote: *"When it gets dark enough, you can see the stars."*--Charles A. Beard...*This did take place in my life this last two weeks - am I ever grateful for what I have learned this past year! I will keep practicing!!*
Take care ALL...xoxoxoxoxo

*

Frances,

I really like what you are doing with the *Ninepatch* prayer outreach. I'm in a small (four or five) women's study group. We are using [A Woman's Way through the 12 Steps](#) and a workbook. It is great reading. We enjoy the intimacy of the small group very much. We meet at the same member's house each time.

We had talked about having a Sacred Circle at one point. This is a loose term for a group who gather to share spiritual experiences or writings /teachings from any spiritual source. Its purpose is to elevate collective understanding and progress toward real peace. That's my own definition.

A group such as the one you have started would fit the bill. Circles are powerful unifying symbols. Technically, the "Sacred Circle" term may have come from Native Americans. Forming a circle strengthens group consciousness.

When our group completes the book we are using, we might do something similar to what you are doing. Two of the gals have been active in sweat lodges in the past. Perhaps we will move in that direction, too. Whatever we do, I think we'll stick together.

Prayer circles are so bonding. It is my experience that women stay close for long periods of time as a result of these gatherings.

All the best to you -- good health, good friends-- then you are rich.

Love,

Gail

Gail (Feb. 2002) says, "I'm learning how to put a newsletter together at work. Actually, the overall mechanics of it have been completed. I'm just collecting the news from three others, writing my own feature story, gathering fillers and typing. This is digging into my own time but I love laying out the newsletter, interviewing and writing a feature stories and collecting positive material.

This, along with babysitting, baking cookies, and knitting hardly leaves time to read a book anymore. Life is good though."

Dear Frances,

I am sorry it took so long for my response to your request regarding Sept. 11, 2001. My reasons are very personal and emotional. I found it difficult to focus my many painful thoughts into a logical letter.

On Sept. 11, 2001, at about 11:30 A.M., I received a collect call from my 27-year-old son. He called to let me know he was all right. (I was totally unaware of the tragic events in my home state because I don't watch TV during the day so.)

My son works about five blocks from the World Trade Center. He took the subway line that went directly underneath the Towers. He told me they briefly stopped his train in the tunnel after the first tower was hit. The train then proceeded into that station. He was

on the street walking to work when the second Tower was hit. He only had to look over his shoulder to see the horror and devastation. He got to his building, (next to the Supreme Court) and was in his office when the first Tower imploded.

The shock waves could be felt in his building. Before long, a decision was made to evacuate it. He and a friend ran into Greenwich Village to decide what to do next. While they were on their way there, the second Tower imploded. Later that day they had to walk back down to the Manhattan Bridge and walk across that, so they could get a train to where they live in Brooklyn.

It was several days before I was able to get through to speak to him on the phone again. He has-- of course-- been deeply shaken by these events and will always be so. A poignant comment he has since made is that he is sure most of the people who lost their lives so suddenly probably had a mental "to do list" complete with hopes, aspirations, and dreams. He said he now tries very hard to keep his "to do list" up to date and as fulfilled as possible.

I think that having to go back to that same area every day must be difficult for him and everyone else in a similar situation. My family and I are so very grateful that my son is safe.

I think we have all been quite changed by this tragedy. My heart goes out to all those who lost a loved one on that terrible day.

Joan V. Spies (July-Aug. '01) adds, "I had to have additional surgery on my hip. Complications have drastically altered my travel and every day life. I am receiving daily care and improving. I will be going back North to visit family and friends as soon as I am able. It is important for me to do that-- now more than ever."

Ninepatchers and Frances:

It has been some time since I have corresponded. I got an email from Frances, asking for comments on 9-11, so here I am. These days I am a thirty-seven- year-old wife and mother of two. I recently quit my job of eight years to go back to school to become a pharmacist. (I have a degree in business and have been doing employee benefits administration). My husband is older than me and is looking at retiring about the time I graduate.

Anyway, it seems just recently that I was sitting in my chemistry lab at school and the instructor was handed a note telling us about the terrorist attack (around noon on 9-11-01). I spent a few days being in a constant state of "verklemt" (being choked up at hearing all the news stories.) I finally realized my stomach muscles were sore from the stress of watching too much news.

I was very angry, and perplexed at how to explain the event to my children aged 9 and 11. (*There's that combination of numbers again!*) Like so many others, they asked, "Why do these people hate Americans so much?"

I feel much more on the defensive these days - not toward my fellow Americans, but about life in general. I feel like I need to be more on guard to protect my family and to be prepared for any eventuality. We cannot easily predict if and when more at-tacks on our country will happen and what form they will take. I feel like I need to be ready for survival and not take safety for granted. It's a wake up call. It said, *Hey you got to live well and easy during the last decade (the 90's), but your reality may be changing now.*

You may have to buckle down and go through some tougher times like your predecessors did during WWII.

Life goes on.

Maeve

***Maeve** (May '99) adds, "My daughter and I had been reading a Dear America book - a fictional journal of a girl whose dad is in the navy during 1941 and 1942. It was very interesting, but her experiences seemed far removed from our daily lives. Then, when I heard of the attack, my mind went to the girl's story and I wondered if our lives would start to resemble that girl of long ago."*

Dear Fritzie,

You mentioned there were times you woke up alone in the night and you were scared. There have been several times in recent years when I've been home by myself when I awake, and suddenly realize I'm alone-- and there's only one heartbeat-- sent from heaven (I hope).

I'm reading Lonesome Dove by Larry McMurtry and am reminded about how alone the people were as they were settling the western U.S. Also, there's the series by Jean Auel :Clan of the Cave Bear; Valley of the Horses; The Mammoth Hunters; and Plains of Passage. These are all about a young girl named Ayla and her growing into a woman about 30,000 years ago during the last Ice Age. Talk about alone!

Sometimes, I think we've lived those times before and some of the feelings we now have are mainly a continuation.

***Fred** (Oct. '99) adds, "Ayla, by the way, learned how to take care of herself both physiologically and spiritually, so there's hope for us!"*

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Dear Frances,

Sometimes life is over-whelming. My husband and I are looking after his sister in a nursing home, then his daughter died up North and he went for the funeral. He came home with a terrible cold that developed pneumonia and further to congestive heart failure. I thought he was dying and even called 911. I was praying and praying all that time.

Then when my husband was better, our cat disappeared. Again I was praying and praying and calling the cat, Bandit, too. Well, the Lord answered all my prayers but not as I thought. My husband got better and the cat did come back.

But when we found Bandit under our picnic table out back, his back legs were cut off. I don't know how he got home. It seemed impossible for that cat to get here on just his front feet. Even though we had to put the cat to sleep, HE did bring Bandit home to us.

Love you.

Margy

Margy (Feb. '00) says, "The Lord really answers prayers."

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

LIFE THEMES

The beginning of a new year always brings me to a contemplative mood -- with a look backward and a look forward. This year is different, in ways I am trying to discern.

In the wake of Sept. 11, I tried to pull the corners of my life together, to examine its elements--to name the treasures and talents that God has given me.

In late fall, I read Life on the Other Side, by Sylvia Browne, a renowned psychic. In it, she describes forty-four life themes from which she says we choose two (primary and secondary) before every incarnation. I wanted to find my theme so I studied them carefully but could not identify my primary thesis.

Then one day it came to me in a flash—it's responsibility! When I looked back on my life, I clearly saw the pattern. From the time I was a toddler looking out for my sickly older sister, I carried a heavy load. Intuitively, I also knew my secondary theme was loner. It has always been so -- and in my solitude I long to find my own truth of who I really am. I want what Thomas Moore calls, ... *more than what is*.

All my creative urges—writing, oil painting, and hands-on projects, things I do for me-- require privacy and deep concentration. Even reading and watching good movies are solitary pursuits.

In addition, I have come to realize that I am increasingly sound-sensitive. Each small noise is a tiny stab into my concentration. In order to preserve my alone downtime, I have a strong need to retreat, even temporarily, from the weight of my *responsibilities*.

I sometimes take off for the day and just wander around alone. It helps me renew my resources. I think there will always be a struggle between these life themes. I will have to consciously MAKE time in my *responsibilities* for the *loner*. Otherwise my responsible side takes control. It tells me to stop wasting time and do something practical.

June (Nov.-Dec.) says, " While I don't really enjoy yard work, I do appreciate it as a time to meditate or mull things over. "

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SACRED SPACE.

A Container for the Holy--

A Second Field Trip Journal

A

Roman Catholic Church

Although I had several friends who were members of the parish, this was my first visit there. I did not like the exterior design of the building, but, I was pleasantly

surprised when I stepped inside. It was more orderly. I felt open and engaged with the space. Overall, I found the structure and form comforting.

The nave (main part) was approximately 40' X 100' and about 30' high. The walls and ceiling were plastered and white. The floor was resilient tile. Rather than pews, individual chairs provided seating. The middle third of the seats faced the altar. The east and west sections faced the middle.

Light came from several sources. There were recessed ceiling fixtures that directed the light straight and exposed track lighting. Also, two trapezoid glassed areas were built at opposite ends of the nave. These made the outdoors visually a part of the space. Like skylights, a band of windows at the roofline, added to the airiness of the space.

Mass was over when I arrived, and several small groups were still present, but I did not feel an intruder as I looked around. I talked to one parish member before I sat by myself for a time.

I found the space peaceful and after thirty minutes—I felt so comfortable, I wanted to return. For me, this was a *Sacred Space*.

Bill (Feb. '02) adds, "Part of my ease of acclimation to the space was that the guide was a friend. I (also) have a personal affinity to a liturgical space. "

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(Reading and Listening)

ALIAS GRACE

I just finished a new book - it's a novel called Alias Grace. The writing is exquisite: Here is a sample:

It's 1851. I'll be twenty-four years old next birthday. I've been shut up in here since the age of sixteen. I am a model prisoner, and give no trouble. That's what the Governor's wife says, I have overheard her saying it. I'm skilled at overhearing. If I am good enough and quiet enough, perhaps after all they will let me go; but it's not easy being quiet and good, it's like hanging on to the edge of a bridge when you've already fallen over; you don't seem to be moving, just dangling there, and yet it is taking all your strength.

Here's another example:

She was an imposing figure of a woman, and a very different shape out of her corsets than in them; but when she was firmly laced in, her bosom jutted out like a shelf, and she could have carried a whole tea service around on it and never spilt a drop.

The author is Margaret Atwood who also wrote The Handmaid's Tale. If you like books that draw you in with descriptive writing, this one is great because the storyline is strong enough to keep you riveted to the book until you find out if this tragic woman regains her memory--and thus discovers if she is really a murderess.

I enjoyed it.

Georgene (Feb. '02) adds, "I couldn't put this one down. I was so curious to know the answer."

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FRANCES' 2002 BOOK LIST

Editor's note: Several readers are keeping a list of all books we read in this year. (We hope you will do the same!) This month, Frances leads off.

My current first love in reading is non-fiction: biography, autobiography and memoirs. In that category, I read, a memoir, Larry McMurty's, Paradise. In it Larry takes a trip to the "end of the world", the Marquesa Islands in the South Pacific. On this trip he intended to write about his parents and their marriage. And he does. He reflects on them and growing up as well as his fellow passengers. He also considers what life may have meant to Gauguin, the French painter who exiled himself in those islands at the end of his life.

Then I read two books in a fiction category I like: Amish-Mennonite books by Beverly Lewis. She writes stories of women and their families. These folk are untouched by "the world" and strive to live close to God. I am much taken with the Amish. I observed many *Plain People*, their houses, black and blue clothing and horse and buggies while growing up in northern Indiana.

First, I read her newest, October Song. This is a collection of further developments in the lives of several women she wrote about in her other books. Next, I read, Sanctuary. Beverly and her husband wrote this book. Its flavor is more exciting. It is even a sort of page-turner.

Another book I read in the non-fiction category was Labyrinth of Desire: Women, Passion and Romantic Obsession. I thought sure this would give me some insight into my endlessly romantic nature. Alas, I did not read anything new. The author, Rosemary Sullivan, agreed that, in the end, all things have a cycle—even desire, romance and passion.

I also keep a list of books to read. Here is that list, too!

1. Fearless by Gavin DeBecker. I read his first book, Gift of Fear, which was very helpful to me.

2. Sacred Contract by Caroline Myss. I saw Dr. Myss interviewed on "Oprah" and was quite impressed with her perspective. I thought the book would be worth a look. I also paged through Myss' book, Women's Bodies, Women's Lives.

3. The Red Tent. I did not list an author for this one. I know it is about women of the Bible and how they lived their lives. For example, during their monthly menses they

gathered. (In those times most women had their “periods” at the same time of the month—probably at the full moon. The reason for the group menses is another story.) According to a review I read, the women gathered in “the red tent.” No men were allowed. The idea intrigued me.

I hope you enjoyed reading about the books I have read and the ones I want to read. I encourage all *Ninepatch* readers to send us their reading lists!

Frances, Editor

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(Our Knowing and Our Spirituality)

**THE LAST THREE
DAYS**

At John’s bedside
The entire time.
Hafta’ force *myself* to eat now.
He’s not been lucid,
He’s comatose.
Still, I try to comfort him.
I stroke his arm gently,
I talk to him
And read scriptures softly.

There are no choices today.
He said *Goodbye* to me Sunday.
And now I must say *goodbye* to him.

It all happened so fast—
Even though I’ve seen it with my
own eyes,
I still can’t believe its happening.

He wanted to stay at home...
You know, to be at home to ...
(Gawd, this is so hard to say...)
To die.
But we had a deal
One we made before he got bad.
If he fell into a coma,
Became violent
Or did not know where he was,
I was to bring him to hospice.

But I know,
You know,
He still has a remnant
Of consciousness.
He *knows* where he is.
I am sure he knows he is not home
Any longer.

It's killin' me
Have I betrayed him?
May God help me.

Cat (Feb. '02) says, "I have asked John for forgiveness, and God, also."

My task is to be...

A simple, open, elegant, bowl
of creative mystery
Whose task has everything to do
with the placement
and arrangement
of beauty
In the most ordinary,
yet extraordinary
of ways.
A beauty that emerges from within
and reaches out
to beautify the world around it
With gentle, radiant petals
of tender love,
Dropped as offerings
to a soul starved world.

Julie D. Keefer (July-Aug. '00) adds this blessing, "May this year be one of opening more deeply to the child's wonder and awe letting it carry us back to the Heartbeat of Love's presence, which throbs with love for all."

MYSELF, SHADOW SISTER

The hooded falcon sat at rest
On leather-gloved wrist
of shadow sister.
Her sword did glisten white,
Her frozen clothes were
silver deep-fastened.
A cruel pair, falcon bird
and shadow sister.

Phyllis (Feb. 2002) from Frances' personal collection.

---M-A-N-A-G-I-N-G—T-H-E—H-O-U-S-E---
-
(Ninepatch Business)

NINEPATCH PRAYER CIRCLE

At this report, our prayer circle has met for six weeks at members' homes. We began with three people and now have four. I hope others will join us as we continue.

Here's our general format. First, we address the four directions for energy and blessing then we take part in some gentle yoga-like exercises to open our bodies (chakras.) Following this, we invite the God of Our Understanding to be with us while we sit quietly for twenty-minutes.

Unexpected things happened during our first quiet times. For example, one member's dog, closed in another room so she wouldn't disturb us, whined. Another time, the phone rang. Now we know to take the phone off the hook ... and the dog? Well, we are trying different ways with her.

After meditation, we share whatever "came " to us during the time: a thought, a song, an idea or an image. Then, we move into praying for others. In this segment, we mention all those who ask us to pray for them, for concerns of loved ones for the country, the world... for whatever is on our minds or our lists. We also include a moment to offer the wordless prayers of our hearts. Last, a member reads a thoughtful bit from a book of her choice. Following that, we sit down to a simple soup meal.

Please, add our group's effort to YOUR prayer list. We ask that our energies might move quietly in the world like ripples on a glassy pond.

Frances, Editor reminds readers, "We will pray for YOU—be sure to let us know your requests: e-mail Frances at Ninepatch9@aol.com or write on the website FORUM at: www.ninepatch.org."

MINI POLLS

The following poll was on our website for two months. Here are the recent results:

***Ninepatch* Mini Poll (#1)**

**What types of resources
Would you find useful on
this site?**

- * spiritual tips 38%
- * computer tips 0%
- * book reviews 25%
- * links to sites 19%

Another poll is now on the site:

***Ninepatch* Mini Poll (#2)**

Are “spirit” and “soul”
the same thing?

*yes

*no

*I don’t know.

The above poll is on the *Ninepatch* website. Please go and vote:

http:// www.ninepatch.org

(OR send us your vote in a letter.)

COMING!
RECIPES and FOOD STORIES

Preparing food, meals and family recipes are a source of many stories—some handed down from generation to generation. These stories and favorite recipes are part of our inheritance.

Later this year, *Ninepatch* plans an issue with family food stories and recipes. We will be accepting stories, letters and poems right away. We will hold them until we have a number sufficient for the *special* issue.

Take a look in your recipe file, today!

Frances, Editor

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