

# *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.*

May 2002

Dear Friends,

We finished singing the communion song and the church pianist continued to play. An unfamiliar, slowly played melody floated from the baby grand. Spaces in the notes seemed to carry me away from my prayers and into memory as I knelt with friends in a pew near the front. Transported in time, I was again in Michigan several years ago.

That day I went alone to church. I liked to feel close to the celebration and chose a pew about three rows from the front. The sun was out and a narrow band of light touched that area. It was winter and the added warmth comforted me. The service was quieting and, after going forward to receive communion, I returned to my seat on the aisle, knelt, closed my eyes and prayed.

Suddenly, I was startled by a firm warm hand on my shoulder. My eyes popped open. I turned quickly to see who touched me. Tim was in the retreating line, stepping slowly toward the rear, but watching me. He smiled as I recognized him and sent me a waist-high sort of salute as he continued in the moving line. I returned the greeting, slightly lifting one hand as far as my shoulder. *Hello* passed between us. Then he disappeared among other worshipers.

I looked again to the front, closed my eyes and bowed my head, but my prayers had scattered. In their place were happy echos of the year Tim and I worked together. Safe and quiet in that pew, my heart opened, and tears came as I embraced the memories.

I first saw him across a crowded high school auditorium. It was after the district's annual welcome-back breakfast in August. We old-time teachers sat together, chatted and watched with some curiosity as the new teachers were introduced. When "Tim Manyon," was called, he stood, and the superintendent announced that Tim was to be the football coach. He was also the new guy in our English department. He was average height, medium build and donned black-rimmed Drew Carey glasses. Coaching was probably the reason he'd been hired. But, the fact was, he was also an English teacher.

That year, I was head of that department and before long our principal assigned me to be Tim's "mentor." Thus, we shared a common planning period and taught the same English class—the dreaded 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Teachers with more seniority snatched honors' classes and higher grades. Ninth graders were notoriously immature and wild, victims of raging hormones, we often explained. Since English was a required class, Mr. Manyon and I were in the trenches together.

Coach carried a gym bag and often wore sports shirts, but with a tie. His gentle speaking baritone was well-developed for shouting directions on the field. That voice, and an ever-present whistle on a lanyard, served him for classroom discipline. I, on the

other hand, employed more feminine tactics: I wore *I'm-in-charge* suits with high heels and relied on textbook class management tactics. We were miles apart in style and methods yet; somehow, we were *a match*.

I pause here in telling our story, stuck -- wordless to describe the shining memories, strung like bright beads, on the necklace of that one school year. Maybe soldiers under fire know the bond of facing the same adversary day after day. I simply call it love.

Today I know it's OK. I understand there are many kinds of love. That year, I unexpectedly learned about the love that grows from sharing meaningful work, about ties that form from shared solving of tough problems.

His hand on my shoulder that day in church was like the mark he put on my life: firm, warm, and happily memorable.

I am blessed.

Frances Fritzie

*Frances Fritzie adds, "It was a gift to have had that magic experience of camaraderie-- and, to have visited it all again."*

**--- A-R-O-U-N-D --- T-H-E --- F-R-A-M-E ---**  
**(Letters to the Editor)**

Hi Fritzie,

Yes, I've been an undependable compadre. Sorry I haven't written and sorry this will be so short. My now-18-year-old daughter has been doing her normal renegade teenager act (no damage), my friend, L., died, we lost our cat, and the creeks are rumored to be rising.

Before I rush off to a business meeting, let me THANK you for the great review you sent me about Jean Auel's new book, Shelters of Stone. I have already ordered it and can't wait to read.

Last, I really liked *Ninepatch* in March.

Have to run. Please know I think about you. Please write soon.

Fred

*Fred (Mar '02) adds, " My friend who died was one of several men-friends I enjoy. We gather occasionally and discuss the philosophical problems of the world... it is wonderful to share my thoughts with them. I will miss L. in the group."*

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**Documentation is available for a small fee on request.**

Frances,

You say you are looking for a spiritual director. I agree that it is wonderful (and for me, essential) to have a spiritual advisor. I feel so fortunate that I have one right here locally.

Much is happening for me in transitioning again. I am discerning what ministry to follow next. Keep me in prayer.

Love,  
Patience

*Patience (Feb. '02) adds, "About a month after I wrote the above letter, I took the position as Religious Formation Director and will begin officially July 1. Lots of work ahead of me!"*

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Peace and Blessings.

Frances,

I can honestly say that just for today I feel surrounded by *Love*... Love of strangers who respond to kind words and innocent words of praise. I encounter these strangers in my work as an NYC Transit Conductor.

I presently work on the Platform on Fulton Street In Lower Manhattan. It is a place that was once called the World Trade Center—now *Ground Zero*.

Everyday I see pain and I see fear in the faces of the people who pass through my area. Still, there is also *Love*.

Peace and Love  
Egeria

*Egeria (Apr. '02) adds, "Recently I met a group of people—young and old alike--who were visiting from Texas. Their mission in New York was to extend a hand to the millions of people who are affected by the devastation that occurred on 9-11. Their contribution is, a prayer station setup in different areas around New York City: Grand Central Station, Times Square areas and around Ground Zero just to name a few."*

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Dear Frances,

It sounds like you have been busy. I agree--walking is good exercise. It feels good to be outside when I can. I will be glad when the weather is warmer. Then we can do things outside. A walk on the beach sounds good to me!

My husband and I have a quiet life during the winter. Once it is nice out again, we will go for walks, have picnics and go out of town for weekends. Right now, Life seems to be on hold ...except for our jobs.

Take care. Have some fun! Love and prayers,

LindaSue

*LindaSue (Apr. '02) says, "It feels like spring is finally here. The sun is shining. The birds are singing and my husband is at the (stock car) racetrack! "*

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Hi!

Good to see you today! I stopped on the way home and had my nails done. I always enjoy that.

We had our sports banquet tonight and that was a nice time. I was in such an uproar with the food. They had two items that I don't eat. I talked to one of my sponsors and she suggested that I call the restaurant and see if they could change the foods for me. They were happy to do that. I was just too upset at the thought of the wrong food and couldn't think of doing that.

Then, at the meal, they served me dressing on my salad. I did think to ask that it be served plain and they changed it for me. Whew!

So everything went fine. I just need help in making those tough eating out decisions. It will get easier with some managing experience!

Talk to you later.

Vicki

*Vicki (Apr. '02) says, "I do weigh and measure my food and I try not to eat out at all... if necessary no more than two times in one week. If I go out with my husband I try to pick foods that are in my home weight range: 4 oz. cooked. That means I order a 6 oz. steak or a chicken breast with or without the wing. If I order 8 oz., I cut it in half and take it home or leave it-- which I don't do every well."*

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Hi Fritzie--

Again I'm trying to find a job. I'm learning that I'm "too heavy for light work and too light for heavy work." Even a good temporary job seems hard to come by. While my computer skills are good, they aren't always as strong as the competition's. I have a possibility of a job, however. It's a 45- minute commute and it's not a sure thing since the new job hasn't been approved by the partnership.

Right now I'm spreading myself too thin, trying to do too many things that distract me from my first priority, which is finding employment. I need to say "no" to even little requests because I easily start feeling obligated and then I get anxious. It is as if I am the opposite of a "multi-tasker."

To calm the anxiety, I'm completely off caffeine except for one diet soda per day. No sugar or chocolate, either. I'm also doing lots of deep breathing, mediation style. Another tactic I'm using is practicing positive self-talk since I can beat myself up 100 times a day without realizing it. I'm on and off regarding aerobic exercise. Exercise is wonderful, I know, but I have a hard time becoming disciplined.

Thanks for the e-mail and for not writing me off in my silences.

Love,

Elaine

*Elaine* (Feb. '02) later reported that after a hiatus of 18 months, she started a new job. Getting back in the groove, including working effectively with new personalities, was exhausting.

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----- **F-O-R-U-M** -----  
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From Readers to Readers

Dear Cat,

When I read your poem, “ At Home for the First Time,” in last month’s *Ninepatch*, I identified with you immediately. I have been where you are. I would like to share some of what I learned that helped me to survive and grow.

At first I feared I couldn’t deal with the loss of my husband of thirty-eight years. Though he had terminal cancer and suffered for two years, I was not really prepared for his death. But, I told myself that for centuries other women had survived such losses and if they did, I could too. I searched for a way to nurture my memories of him without becoming morbid or obsessed. I had seen another family member become a martyr to her grief for thirty years and I resolved to find a better way.

For about three months after my husband’s death, I felt an umbrella of love and protection over me. Then, it was gone pretty much, although I still have fleeting moments of sensing his presence. What helped me most was accepting that people mourn at their own pace and in their own way. I learned to do what worked for me -- what made me comfortable. And I never let anybody tell me how to feel, especially people who have not been where you and I have been.

The title of your poem tells when the realization finally hit you that John was gone. With me, it was the day I received a check in the mail for my husband’s life insurance. Then I knew he was *really* gone.

I would like to give you one final assurance. If you work at it, it will get better --it will never go away completely but it will not always hurt as much as it does now.

May God bless you,  
June

*June* (Mar. '02) adds, “Reflecting on my experiences helps me, hopefully, to glean a bit of wisdom.”

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----- *F-A-B-R-I-C-S* -----

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Our Experiences

MIRACLE MAIZIE

I am a cat-lover. I've always had cats. Our church organist is a cat-harbinger. After mine died a while back, she introduced me to the cat I have now. Maizie is adorable. She doesn't say, "Me-ow," she says, "PURRRRp" That's right, she's trying to talk. (First cat I've had like that!)

She used to do a fascinating thing with John's tube feeding pump. It had a monitor and alarm on it. When it was done or low it would emit a steady, *beep, beep, beep...*

The very first time it happened, I was so tired I didn't attend to it right away. She jumped on my bed with fervor and woke me. Later, when I was not sleeping in the same room as John, she'd jump on me first, then him, then me... She'd keep it up until someone tended to it. Cute, eh?

Well, when John died, Maizie ran away. So sign of her anywhere. I had given up hope of ever seeing her again. Then Happily, two Sundays ago she showed up ... only one foot left in life...but she is steadily improving and seems to be happy to be home now.

*Cat (Apr. '01) adds, "Who says cats don't feel human pain! There was always a lot of empathy between Maizie and John ... sometimes I wonder if she was the first to know he was ill."*

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SACRED SPACE,  
A Container for the Holy  
Field Trip Journal #4

That summer's day, friends and I had chosen the Yorktown Battlefield National Park for our nightly seven or eight-mile bike ride in preparation for the coming 150-mile event. The park offers a lengthy segment of service roads that are sparsely traveled.

One particular segment of tour road makes me feel one with the natural environment-- even when I'm riding with my biking friends. I feel separated from the pressures of my work place, enclosed by nature and clean. Although cars do use these tour roads, I seldom see them on one special stretch. There, we are the only intruders in a bird, squirrel and deer habitat.

This stretch is a one way, one- lane roadway with space for only two of us riding comfortably abreast. Tall trees provide a lacy canopy and a low growing understory of greenery encroaches on one's shoulders making a kind of natural tunnel. Its winding path hides what lies ahead while, at the same time, promising something new at every bend. The undergrowth allows sunlight to filter in and is thin enough that I catch sight of wildlife darting through the trees. Even on overcast days there is enough light here to ride safely. Sounds add to the atmosphere of the place. Bike tires click over twigs and crackle dry leaves on the pavement. An occasional rustle in the undergrowth tells of deer or squirrels nearby.

My friends and I ride this area twice a week and I have the same calming feeling each time we go. It is, indeed, a *sacred space*.

*Bill (Apr. '02) adds, "With the beginning of daylight saving time I will begin riding Wednesday and Thursday evenings. I really need to get more 'saddle time' to prepare for the 150- mile ride this June."*

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## EPIPHANY

I awoke that morning at 4:45, not an unusual hour for me. I was immediately aware of a particular sense of peace and contentment. My body was not crying out with its usual assortment of complaints, the stiff muscles and aching joints that are common to me and most of my contemporaries. My mind was calm and receptive rather than its customary wild rehearsal of the upcoming day's activities. I slipped out of bed, picked a beach towel from its peg on the bathroom door and stepped outside.

An eerie calm pervaded the atmosphere. It was that distinctive tropical pre-dawn stillness, punctuated by the sounds of insects, the hoot of an owl near-by, the whistle of a train in the distance. At my pool, I slipped out of my pajamas and slowly circled the pool whose mirrored surface reflected a half moon semi-clothed in a wisp of clouds directly overhead. A handful of stars struggled to be seen in moon's glow. I breathed in deeply, absorbing the rich moist air of the still night-morning, and inhaled the spirit of the moment, the beauty of the universe.

Stepping into the water, I rolled over into a lazy back-stroke, sharply aware of the water on my body, of my well-practiced muscles pulling my skeleton through this aquatic ballet. After several easy laps, I climbed out and stood *au natural*, sensing a oneness with the earth's flora and fauna, with the planets and stars and galaxies of the universe. There, amid my carefully tended garden framed by silent palms, my inner voice spoke: *I am Adam, the first man, the only man, and all this is God's gift to me*. I listened afresh to the sounds of nature awakening, saw with new eyes the perfect order and beauty of the universe.

Eastward the black sky was touched with purple, heralding another day, another opportunity to choose good, to choose peace and love for myself and the world. The words of the ancient scriptures memorized long ago now echoed in my ears:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...and the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden, eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom He had formed.

The Creator, the Man, the garden. Why seek more?

*Don is married and father of two adult children and grand-father of a college freshman and a six year old. He reads widely in the areas of spirituality and personal growth.*

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- - - - - ***I-N-S-T-R-U-C-T-I-O-N-S*** - - - - -  
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**(Reading and Listening)**

HELEN'S 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, we hear from Helen and Lynan.

In February of this year, I told about Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas by James Patterson. Since I retired from teaching a *second* time a year ago, I have lots of time to read. Following are other books I read before our Read Around Sharing Group, which met in March of this year.

1. Gap Creek by Robert Morgan. This is a fiction from Oprah's Book Club. This story tells the life of a most unusual woman living in Gap Creek. Julie Harmon works "hard as a man," so hard that at times she's not sure she can stop. People depend on her. Later, as she marries and moves on, she discovers the modern world is complex, but she carries on this hard work. To survive, she and her husband must find out whether love can keep chaos and mad-ness at bay. I was anxious to turn the pages of this book.

2. Deep End of the Ocean by Mitchard is another fiction from the Oprah Book Club selection. This story shows the strength and love of a family. Tragedy comes suddenly when the youngest child is kidnapped. As the story unfolds, it shows us the effect of this event on the older brother who was with the kidnapped child when it happened. I found the evolving story wonderful and I shared in the characters' reward at the return of their child.

3. Rose Cottage by Mary Stewart. This is another fiction and written by a long-established English author. In this story, set in the English countryside, Kate searches for truth. This search brings her together with childhood friends and neighbors—a few of whom are suspicious of her return. However, most are eager to help. Her inquiry leads her down a trail of family bitterness, jealousy and revenge—into an exploration of her own past. Despite problems, Kate finds true happiness and true romance where she least expects it. This book kept me curious as I read about the changes and welcome Kate found in her life.



(See below.)

4. Stormy Petrel is another tale by Mary Stewart. This is an enthralling story of mystery and suspense, with the touch of romance—writing I enjoy. Rose looks for a quiet holiday off the west coast of Scotland. She had thought a remote and lonely island would be the ideal place to get away from it all. But, things do not turn out so idyllically—the peace of the island is shattered into a web of memory and suspicion. This is a story I did not want to leave.

5. October Song and Sanctuary are by Beverly Lewis. Her husband chimes in on Sanctuary, which gives the book an exciting flavor. These are both tales of the Amish-Mennonite religious communities. Frances gave these books to me. She grew up around these religious groups and I did too. (She wrote about these stories in March of 2002.) The stories brought many good and happy memories. The Amish people came to the small town in New York State where I lived before Florida. They were plain, simple, sod-loving people.

*Helen B. (Feb. '02) adds, "When I return to NY State this summer, I shall take a ride through their country. These people are shy, so I won't see many. But, the country farms are well kept, their white-white washes hang on the clotheslines and everywhere I see the simple, good life they live."*

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### LYNAN'S 2002 BOOK LIST

Here are books I have read so far in 2002.

1. Dalai Lama, My Son by Diki Tsering

Diki Tsering tells the story of her family and how her son was chosen to be the Dalai Lama. The Chinese Communist invaded Tibet and Diki Tsering tells of her family's escape and exile into India. It is also a story about the Tibetan culture and the Buddhist ideals of compassion, faith, and equanimity.

2. The Horse Whisperer by Nicholas Evans

While riding her horse, a teenage girl has a terrible accident. The girl's mother senses that if the crazed horse dies something in her daughter will die, too. To save her daughter, the mother enlists the help of a horse whisperer (a man who heals horses.). This book is about healing and redemption. In his book, the author has a message or meaning that he is trying to get across. To figure it out, you have to carefully read the story.

3. Wouldn't Take Nothing For My Journey Now by Maya Angelou

If your mind is tired and you do not feel like reading a novel, this is the book for you. This book is composed of short stories that will take only five to ten minutes to read. Maya tells tales of her experiences. She talks about living well, power of the Word, voices of respect, jealousy, complaining, style and many more topics. Just page through the book and read the topic that interests you.

*Lynan is married. She has three grown children and three grandchildren. In her spare time she is taking watercolor lessons. She tells about her life, "There is not enough time in the day to do everything I want to do. Most every morning I walk almost three*

*miles and I practice yoga exercises. Once a week I participate in a meditation meeting. I find that meditation enriches my spiritual growth and relaxation time. Since I live on a golf course, I occasionally play golf in the late afternoon since I can't tolerate much sun. I enjoy golfing with my husband or friends. But, there are times when I play alone. Then I enjoy the feeling of peace and solitude. I find that being a housewife is a fulltime job. My work is never done, but I wouldn't have it any other way. As long as I can find the time to read some books, I am happy."*

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

**THE QUESTION**

**Is it just my fantasy,  
Is this truly intimacy  
At our very core?  
Is the moon mere lunacy,  
Or is this truly intimacy  
As I said before?**

*Phyllis (Mar. '02) Frances shares this from her private collection.*

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**THE CEDAR WAXWINGS' ANNUAL BANQUET**

**It is April 7.  
Outside my window  
Three flowering crabapple trees  
Hold their annual feast.  
A regal waxwing flock  
Crowns the lacy treetop,  
Claiming the dried fruit  
In their new kingdom.  
Robins and cardinals politely  
Give them free reign.  
Soon they will be gone  
As quickly as they came.**

*Gail (Apr. '02) adds, "This annual ritual always gets my attention -- it's another rite of spring."*

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(More below.)

**- - - -M-A-N-A-G-I-N-G—T-H-E—H-O-U-S-E- - -**  
**-**

**(Ninepatch Business)**

### LOOKING AHEAD

I opened my borrowed book, fresh from a request I'd put in at the local library. It was, THE RED TENT by Anita Diamant. I'd heard it was about how the rarely mentioned women of the Old Testament lived. I was curious to take a look through this volume. I flipped the pages, then looked at *Acknowledgements* and a multi-generational character chart.

I turned to the first page, titled, "Prologue." On the first full sheet of print, I read, "If you want to understand any women you must first ask about her mother and then listen carefully. **Stories about food show strong connection.**" (My bold.)

This line stuck out as if it were highlighted with yellow. I thought again about my request for stories or poems about family food, meals or recipes. (I am still hoping that each story will also include the recipe it centers on.) I know more stories are out there waiting to find their ways to *Ninepatch*.

If you still have the survey from last month's issue, you can also just write your responses to the questions on a separate sheet of paper and send that to *Ninepatch*. You can also post in the forum at the web-site, e-mail me at [Ninepatch9@AOL.com](mailto:Ninepatch9@AOL.com) or write to us.

You can mail us using the postal address (below) included on this issue.

Here's the timetable for special issues:

July-August—recipes and family

tales

October—Sept. 11, one year

later

January 2003—Miracles

A memory-jogging list for recipes and food is included on this page. So, write on the back of an envelope if you have to, but send us your stories!

*Frances, Editor*

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**SEE FOODS LIST BELOW:**

## *FOODS*

*Comfort food, love food,  
Holiday feasts and birthday treats.  
MAD FOOD, happy food,  
Your favorite meal or  
Your secret family recipe.  
A favorite snack, party food,  
Kid food and potluck dishes.  
Your Favorite take-out, care packages,  
Dad's specialty and fountain sodas.*

*Share your stories!*

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Dear Reader,

We hope you have found something in these pages to take with you in your voyage across the seas of life.

Frances, Editor