

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 I share another piece of my spiritual journey.

January 2003

Dear Friends,

With a smile I ripped open the envelope with my index finger. I pulled out three pages of a typed letter from a gal I worked with for many years. I seldom hear from her now. I started reading as I walked up my driveway. By the time I reached the house, I had read to the top of the second page. I padded inside to the couch where I finished it. One line stuck out, ...I look forward to reading your Christmas Letter... I sighed. I thought I would *skip* the annual summary. I sighed again, then nodded as I began to consider ways to organize one. Here are clips from that letter.

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My 2002 Calendar — Looking Back

I flip my desk calendar back.

January. Colors flash from a black - lined grid. Orange notes are church obligations. Green reminds me of Twelve Step meetings. Black denotes appointments and activities. Red indicates, *Don't forget!* Some are neat and even. Larger and sprawling, others show haste. My outer life speaks from these notes. Subtly, my inner life also appears, but only over time, and after reflection. For example, notice how my February *calling* develops over several months.

February's page looks colorfully like the first. However, during seven days indicated by an orange arrow marking a parish mission, I experienced a *calling*. Though I worked to understand its black-cloak image, I had no idea what it meant. I knew only I felt a strong longing for *something* religious, spiritual—or maybe, both.

March's notes show the same color scheme, and when I read my black written activities, I see walks, coffee dates and lunches I enjoyed with friends. Not recorded in black and white, I also know my calling continued. To express it, I looked at various spiritual study programs. One, nondenominational Shalem Institute, appealed to me. It offered prayer meetings for those who lived in or near Maryland. It also featured at-large study programs, retreats and pilgrimages.

April shows among crowded boxes, a blank set of five. Then, I traveled to a retreat with the Shalem group outside Baltimore, Maryland.

May's page indicates that, through Shalem, I found and visited a spiritual advisor. That month was sad, though. Both my sons celebrate birthdays in May. I was already committed to two trips north—one was for a forthcoming second grandchild's baptism—estimated for August. The other was ear-marked for a September 40th class reunion. Shaking my head, I told myself, *No matter what else happens, I will go to Michigan for those birthdays in May of 2003.*

June held a surprise! My second grandson was born a month *early*. The baptism would now be in **July**. This meant I could *squeeze* the Ireland Pilgrimage (Sept. 1-12) between his baptism and my class reunion. This felt right. I stopped looking at study programs and signed up for the Ireland trip.

July's calendar shows seven blank days-- my trip north for the baptism. After that, not many activities are listed. A reading list accompanied my pilgrimage acceptance. I bought six books over the Internet. I read and read.

August again shows some "white space." I was still reading. I also worked to mail September's *Ninepatch* early. Looking ahead, I organized most of October, too.

September's grid indicates I did not write much—on the calendar. Instead, I scribbled 170 pages of pilgrimage notes into a spiral- bound. In the Irish story, "St. Kevin and the Blackbird," I *finally* understood a little of

my *calling*'s black- image. (It continues to unfold.) Later, I visited in my hometown, for my 40th high school class reunion.

October pictures life continuing with the staple of church orange and 12-Step green. In the white spaces, I wrote. First, I typed three pages of class reunion reflections. One was in Nov-Dec. *Ninepatch*. The rest is on the web site: www.ninepatch9.org

November basics are a carbon copy of October. Added were black- dates for a *Ninepatch* Cut-and Paste, a "Read Around" book- sharing and a group study of Caroline Myss' Sacred Contracts. I also typed 150 pages of pilgrimage notes and memories. As I write, this draft spreads across my computer room floor. Dotted with clipped photos and scraps, pages overlap like a fallen train of white dominoes.

December shows more writing and a week's visit from my second son.

I have been blessed!

Frances Fritzie

Frances, Editor reflects, "Writing those annual summaries helps me to access my life. When I file the latest in my Xmas Letters folder, I marvel. Considering where I have been and where I am now, un- unseen guidance is surely at work in my life."

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

(Letters to the Editor)

Hi Fritzie,

I enjoyed your Nov-Dec. '02 letter. I especially liked your reference to author, Scott Peck. I read some of his writing about fifteen years ago, but nothing recently--probably because I don't read much nonfiction except history. Anyway, I very much relate to his thought that life events are over-determined. I know that there are many reasons that I do the things I do--but I don't give a whole lot of thought on why. You do make me do a little reflecting. Normally, I don't feel a need to do a lot of self-analyzing--I'm not sure what good it would do.

I also really liked your last couple paragraphs specifically your last two sentences, *I am a mental, physical and spiritual survivor of the class of 1962. I am blessed.*

It's a great way to think about returning for a reunion. I could never have put it into words but you did a beautiful job of expressing why many people return. I'll think about it until our 50th.

C.

CLS (Feb. 02) says her life is busy, "I seem to have a meeting almost every night. (The other night when you called,) I heard your clock chime for 7 o'clock, and I knew I was late."

Hey, Frances,

You asked where I had been. I've been right here most of the time, but my mind is often somewhere else! Here's what I've been up to.

January 2003

I finished my life story, They Call Me Padre. It's a hundred pages and some of my recollections of a good life. I have shared copies with my children, brother, sister and cousin as well as to our reunion last September. Have circulated a copy to friends in the area and received much good feedback ...so good, in fact, that I am starting a business of helping others do the same.

At the same time as all this, I have been evolving a spiritual practice drawing on David Elkins who wrote, Beyond Religion and James Redfield who penned, God and the Evolving Universe. I really believe those new readings have drawn me into my recent work. As Tennyson wrote, "Some work of noble note may yet be done, not unbecoming men that strove with Gods."

I ramble. I'm still tutoring, gardening and of course the daily visit to Panera, my office annex. I'm waiting to hear more about your Ireland trip!

Pray for Peace.

Don

Don (Sept. '02) adds, "I am so remiss in responding to you and to Ninepatch. I have lots of excuses but no reasons. My excuses: my birthday, my grand-daughter's birthday, writing, Thanksgiving, the daily chores of the household and just goofing off..."

Hi Fritzie,

Are you feeling blue? Since you have returned from Ireland, your e-mails give off a little note of blueness. I hope not, although I am sure an experience like you must have had there might cause everything else to be a let down.

Maybe it's like the day after Christmas. Remember that, as a child? I do. Mom always made our Christmas very special. Sometimes I think of my parents and wish I had been a better child. I am sure all children go through that at some time in their life, especially after they have children of their own. At times memories and thoughts filter through.

But I don't dwell on them. I don't take guilt trips.

Take care. I will talk to you later.

Patricia

Patricia (July '02) "It is snowing and it is lovely. I took my cat, Maggie, outside on the deck while the snow was coming down and she hated it. Had to bring her back in. These cats of mine crack me up."

Dear Frances,

I received a surprise phone call from my niece. She said she needed to ask for forgiveness. She felt ashamed because she never came over to see me the night of my mother's funeral.

I had already heard from my sister-in-law about this. Family jungle drums are so weird. Parents who apologize for their adult children seems more like parents apologizing for being "bad" parents who didn't teach their children to send their own thank you notes or something.

Anyway, my niece was genuinely upset. I had already forgiven her and it was nice to be able to tell her so. She and her husband were staying at my brother's house the night in question. She said he made it clear that she should mourn with them rather than with me. In my family, sibling rivalry never ends.

It's always an atmosphere of scarcity. Somehow, if I get something my brother always feels it's because he gets less. (How can a person deal with that kind of discord?) My niece said she just stayed in their room with her baby and felt sick over the whole thing. In the end, we had a nice catch-up conversation.

Peace,

Georgene

Georgene (Nov.-Dec. '02) adds, "Everyone I know has family challenges. We all have our own doozies to work through."

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

MORE FAVORITE FOODS:

Margy's Favorite Foods

My favorite food is ice-cream and our Thanksgiving meal wouldn't have been complete without company, in fact my favorite family recipe is turkey dressing. On my birthday I always asked mom to make a birthday cake—so, she bought one at the store. To get rid of my anger, I always pull out ingredients to make supper. I am most well known for my recipe of chocolate fudge. I used that recipe as an activity to entertain the grandchildren when they came over to visit.

GRANDMA MARGY'S FUDGE

- 1 club aluminum pan or kettle
- 4TBS cocoa
- 1 c. sugar
- 1 c. evaporated milk
- 1TBS vanilla
- 2 TBS butter
- pancake syrup—optional
- 2 grandchildren for more fun

DIRECTIONS: Mix cocoa and sugar. Add evaporated milk. Cook on high and bring to a boil, stirring constantly. After it boils, cook over low heat until the fudge drops off a spoon and forms a small ball in cold water. Then let it cool a little. After that beat it with a spoon until it gets real thin, then pour on a greased plate or pan.

Margy (Nov.-Dec. '02) adds, "As Paul Harvey says, here's the rest of the story. I usually had two or more grandchildren with me when I made this recipe. They loved to think they were making it. I let them mix all the ingredients. They took turns and sometimes it would take an hour or longer. I cooked it, but when it had cooled enough, they took turns beating it. They ate the candy that was left in the kettle and on the stirring spoon. After it was put on the greased paper plate, they were happy to carry it home to their moms and brag they made it for her."

(SEE BELOW.)

January 2003

DUCKS IN A ROW

Recently I've been struggling. It's taken me a few days to define the source of the struggle. At my CORE, I feel happy, at peace, and strong. Staying close to my Higher Power, and turning to Her regularly for comfort and guidance seems to accomplish this nicely. I've finally learned that my petitioning does not need a structure. I simply talk to Her when I'm feeling doubtful or anxious, then LISTEN to what She is saying. If She tells me to do something, I do it. And either way, I relax.

When time permits, or when I'm in pain, I like to structure a ritual. Going through the motions soothes and reassures me. But on a day-to-day basis, I only have to be quiet and draw inward. She is always there, She always has feedback, and it always helps to soothe and redirect me. This is the source of the happiness and peace that I cannot deny overall which waits patiently at my CORE. This center is never affected by external events.

More and more, I'm able to classify the dramas that rage and boil around me as just that - somebody else's drama! I work hard to stay detached. When that is impossible, I try to filter the bull and keep it from affecting me. Sometimes that filtering process is quick and 100%-efficient.

At other times, it takes months of restraining, and looking at other issues that are stirred up in the process. But eventually, I'm pretty successful at keeping unnecessary dramas at bay and living my own life according to my values and desires. So I would say that, externally, I'm also feeling quite efficient and successful.

But recently I've realized that there is an in-between layer, a level that seems to be driven by my need for self approval. I like to call this area, HAVING ALL MY DUCKS IN AROW. This layer is tricky and important, since it seems to provide the strength that allows me to efficiently filter the external. It works like this.

The "ducks" are my goals - the concrete expression of my values -- the things I like to do on a daily basis to keep my life on track. When I'm doing them all, I feel in control. External events still careen on, but as long as I'm doing what I know is important -- I seem to keep the right perspective.

However, when I'm unable to get it all done -- when my goals get neglected, or I suddenly find myself seemingly incapable of doing what is most important --I stumble. My barrier against the world feels weakened, and other people's dramas start to bug me.

Having only recently come to this conclusion, I've been wondering what to do about it. Initially, when I feel the barrier weakening and see the ducks flying hither and yon, I struggle to gather them all up. Like a loving but stern mother I try to self-correct, offering as much support as I can in the form of new ideas or outside input, or often, just time off.

It isn't unusual for me to take a day off, buy a new outfit, or go somewhere and do something fun. I employ those self-care techniques regularly and often find that, when I return, I'm able to quickly realign the ducks and get them all moving in the right directions. However, lately, that hasn't worked. So I've been perplexing, trying various things to correct -- but not successfully. Lately it seems I just can't manage to get those quackers straight!

Thankfully, a friend of mine came up with an idea. We were talking about one duck -- the *maintenance* duck. Six months ago I began counting calories and exercising, and I succeeded in losing 37 pounds. For the last eight weeks, I've been trying to replace the "weight loss" duck with a *maintenance* duck.

My complaint to my friend was that the duck is flying around wildly. Some days I hit my 1800-calorie goal, but others I'm up to 2000 or more -- and lots of days I don't even count!!

Thankfully, my weight is NOT moving in the wrong direction. Its duck is happy to fly around as much as five pounds in a single day - but it never goes above my original goal of 155. This is precisely why my friend made her suggestion. It applies not just to the weight maintenance duck --but all of them.

She said simply, "You've had that duck tied up by its little throat for six months. Don't you think it's time you moved it to a more spacious pen? Keep it in the pen, but relax a little. Give yourself a break."

Wow - what a novel idea!! Maybe my ducks don't have to be in a row all the time. Maybe my ducks can waddle and quack and fly around in a little pen?

Maybe it's even OK to occasionally have one or two ducks dancing wildly on the edge of the gate on one foot! Why not!! After all, if most of the ducks are placid and ordered, maybe I DO need to let go in one or two areas from time to time. Otherwise, duck-tending can be an arduous task, instead of the pleasing privilege that living one's life according to one's innermost values should be.

And maybe, as life goes on and I become stronger at the core, I will be able to make the pen a little bigger. I can't imagine myself with no pen at all and ducks flying everywhere! But I can imagine a spacious pen that allows a moderate amount of room for error, ambiguity, and just plain laziness on occasion. After all, nobody's ducks are perfect 100% of the time!

Sherryl (Sept. '02) adds, "After I wrote this piece, I identified four ducks that are flying around, but twenty ducks that are perfectly in line and marching forward! I've decided that 20 out of 24 is an excellent ratio that I can not only live with -- but that I can be proud of. A few dancing ducks makes for a more interesting woman!"

GO WITH THE FLOW

"River Spirit" is *Ninepatch Online's* first photo essay. It elaborates on the recurring theme of 'Sacred Space'. Begun with *Bill (Feb.- June '02)*. In this essay, more than a dozen pictures of famous Niagara Falls help tell an Iroquois legend of the thunder god, HE-NO and Iroquois maiden who loved him. It also tells, *and shows in pictures*, my personal scared space, the Niagara Gorge.

TROR (Nov.-Dec. '02) adds, "The regular website address will take you to the website. Just wait. The essay is featured as a "pop-up" once you get there. The Ninepatch site is: <http://www.ninepatch9.org>

CUPS AND MUGS

Unfortunately, we are unable to show you the drawings readers send in. Instead, the following are comments two readers made about their cup-drawing analysis(Gift: Nov-Dec. '03). The drawings appear in our paper issue.

Thank you, Frances.

The Nov.-Dec. '02 enclosure is a lovely gift helping us to confirm or more deeply understand ourselves. It validates the "offbeat" creative sense that I feel about me: drama, coldness, and clean, clear statements, certainly are aspects of polka dots and aspects of myself that I have or want in my life. A blue interior of this cup would be beautiful. The handle resembles an ear: the better to hear my truth.

Gail (Nov.-Dec. '02)

Dear St. Frances,

I sketched this art quick. Seems I'm a combination of #2, polka dots and #4, waves. I don't know as I'm "generous," but I help volunteer delivering meals. I know I am off-beat and eccentric which is why it is so hard for me to keep to a routine with the kids.

Here are some thoughts about my colors on my white cup. The waves are a vibrant red, the dots are black and the center drawing is a sort of tree-thing and is a vibrant forest green. (My son is going on eight and my little girl is just two in February. I need to climb a tree and slow time down!)

I love the shape of this cup because rarely do I see anyone drink from ones like these. I am reminded of a womb for some reason. Just as a baby is kept warm in a womb, the coffee or tea remains warm in the cup.

Goddess Bless, St. Frances!
Malaina (Sept. '02)

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

(Reading and Listening)

ELEANOR AND HARRY

I joined a book club at our local library. The book we are reading is Eleanor and Harry by Steve Neal. This book is a composite of letters written from Eleanor to Harry and Harry to Eleanor until 1962 when Eleanor died.

I really liked the book because it is written in journal or letter writing. (Those are two of my favorite things!) There was humor and genuine respect for each other. They had disagreements, but they were able to achieve great conversations. A statement at the end of the book covers it all. This was said at Eleanor's funeral, "Harry was an organizer and Eleanor was a reformer. It takes both to make a beautiful world."

MM (Nov.-Dec. '02) adds, "My dad owned a grocery store/ gas station in the time when Eleanor and Harry were writing letters. One time my dad even got tires off the black market for our preacher. "

THE RED TENT

In this book by Anita Diamant, the first sentence reads, "We have been lost to each other for so long." This is the voice of Dinah, only daughter of Biblical Jacob, son of Isaac who was nearly sacrificed by his own father to the Hebrew god, *El* (*Shadiah*).

Dinah is talking to us, *her sisters*. She goes on, "This is not your fault or mine. The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men, who had no ways of knowing."

Somehow, these few words spoke to me, saying again, what I have known for over ten years: *I have been lost*.

When I was younger, I blamed my mother. I'd bare my teeth and spit, "She *lied* to me!" And she did. She consciously lied to me about her life and the nature of women, but she *unconsciously* lied to me, too.

Consciously, she lied to me about herself. She told me stories she *wished* were true about herself-- a far cry from reality. Perhaps it frightened her to see I wanted more than anything to be like my capable, beautiful, intelligent and much-sought- after mother. Mother probably hoped I would grow up to be like the woman in her *story* — not her-- and thus avoid the pain of her real life.

The unconscious lies Mother told are explained in Dinah's next sentence, "This is not your fault or mine..." *My mother did not know the truth...* " nor, did my mother, her mother, or her mother's mother. It is no one's fault. It is simply the way our Judeo-Christian culture evolved.

This book will widen a reader's perception of how-things-once-were and how women's lives possibly evolved. It will also help some readers recognize new aspects of themselves as women.

Frances, Editor adds this about the author, "Anita Diamant wrote five previous books about Jewish women. In addition, she was a visiting scholar in the Dept. of Women's Studies at Brandeis University."

Several readers recently shared lists of books read in the past few months. In coming is-sues, we will share these mini-reviews. This month we will see Lynan’s list and June’s biographies. First, here’s *Lynan’s Reading List*.

1. Left Behind is by Tim Lahaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. This is the first book in a Christian-fiction series. It is a story based on the Rapture, a Bible prophecy about the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. In an instant, millions of people disappear and global chaos takes over. Those who are left behind are the non-believers. Somehow they must find their faith to overcome the darkest days that awaits them. This is a captivating story that unfolds and leaves readers wanting to continue on to the next book. That book, Tribulation Force tells about the birth of a group by the same name. Their purpose is to fight the enemies of God and the Antichrist.

2. Wherever You Go There You Are was written by Jon Kabat-Zinn. This book is a simple guide to mindfulness meditation. Through it, we learn to awaken to the present living moment. *Mindless*, we live our daily lives automatically without noticing a beautiful sunset, a happy smile, a tasteful meal, or a warm touch. *Mindful*, we stay in touch, pay attention, become aware, and to listen to our intuition. Mindfulness meditation enriches your life more fully. This reading is worthwhile.

Lynan (Sept. '02) adds, “ I am temporarily putting my reading on hold. Preparing for the Christmas holiday can be hectic. My daughter and her family will be visiting us. I hope to have a delightful time with my two grandchildren. Somehow, when little children are around, Christmas becomes extra special.”

Next, here’s *June’s Biography List*.

1. George Orwell - Battling Big Brother, is by Tanya Agathocleous. Orwell is best known for his books, Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-four. The latter was written in **1948**. He simply reversed the numbers for the title. That book is a classic and has added words to our language. Such words as *newspeak* and *doublethink* were originated by Orwell.

Born Eric Arthur Blair, he was a man ahead of his time. He was well educated --but pretty much a loner because of his un-conventional ideas. He and his wife and one adopted son remained poor most of his life because he refused to compromise his integrity. He died of tuberculosis at forty-six.

2. Max Perkins; Editor of Genius, was written by A. Scott Berg. For many years Perkins was chief editor at Charles Scribner & Son, Publishers. He worked with such notable authors as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Taylor Caldwell and James Jones.

The author takes the reader behind the scenes and shows the difficulties some of these writers fought. Fitzgerald and Wolfe, especially, suffered bouts of depression and self-doubt and relied heavily on their editor. Perkins was a surrogate father, a source of strength and a trusted confidante to his list of authors. Max, and his wife Louise, had five daughters but no sons. In many ways that void was filled by some of the young men he published.

This is an excellent book. Berg has done a thorough job of research and written a story that flows easily.

June (Nov.-Dec. '02) says, “I like biographies because they show how the subjects dealt with the quirks and foibles that affect us all.”

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(*Ninepatch Business*)

January 2003

FEBRUARY 2003

LET'S TALK ABOUT MIRACLES

February will honor the month known for its connection with love by dedicating a special section to *Miracles*. We are looking forward to collecting stories of all kinds. These might be the miracle of love, the miracle of recovery, the miracle of birth/rebirth...

Everyday miracles

*

Incredible miracles

Please send your stories or poems to Frances at *Ninepatch* by January 20.

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

The job of Membership coordinator has not yet been filled. This volunteer position needs to be attended twice a year. During these two periods, there will be paperwork. First, you will want to coordinate membership lists with Frances. Second, you will write a letter to be sent to each person who is eligible for renewal. (We have samples.) These letters can be sent from you or Frances can put them in the proper *Ninepatch*. The choice is yours. We will reimburse you if you decide to send letters yourself.

We hope you will consider donating your time and talent to help out our cause. A spiritual principle that works for me is, *The more I give, the more I get in return.*

Editor, Frances

EXCITING EVENT

Freshening winds before the storm,
Cool my face, whip my hair,
My body zings
In this invigorating air.

Powers are gathering up above
Clouds and energies moving along,
Excitement breathes,
I feel myself vast and strong.

I hear the rolls of thunder great,
A scent of lightning on my cheek,
The lion roars
Awe and wonder way down deep.

I move slowly towards my door,
I hesitate to ask for more.
There's only me and I can see
There's more in heaven than
There was before.

January 2003

Phyllis (Nov.-Dec. '02) died in January 2002. This poem is shared from Father Lou Anderson's private collection.

THIS AND THAT

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