

Ninepatch

Stitch - by - Stitch

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

Editor's note: Except for *Letters to the Editor*, this issue is dedicated to aspects of FRIENDSHIP.

June 2003

Dear Friends,

Amanda's cookie-loving husband and a bag of forgotten home-mades brought her back to my house. Earlier, she brought a batch of fresh-baked gems to share with our prayer group at lunch. In leaving, she left her husband's share of the precious goodies behind.

When we parted that noon, I was headed north for an after-noon of waltz, and swing. It was early evening when Amanda drove back to my house to retrieve her hubby's prize.

She came in and collected her forgotten Ziploc. As we ambled back toward the door she asked, "How was the dance?"

We crossed the shiny tile of my foyer. She was reaching for the doorknob when I responded, "Oh, I don't know..."

Something in my tone must have caused her to turn back to me and say, "Do you need to talk?"

I paused, not sure if I did or I didn't. My grandfather clock ticked once or twice before I found my voice, "Do you have fifteen minutes?"

She nodded, "Sure." She glanced at the cookies in her hand, "My hubby won't be home from work yet, anyway."

We returned to the sitting area of my living-dining room. I eased onto one end of my couch and she took the upholstered chair at a right angle-- close enough to reach out and touch. She said nothing, and waited for me to begin.

I don't recall everything I said. I know I told the story of dancing with Frank and all the emotion it had brought. When words failed me, tears took their place. Amanda witnessed my pain, not touching me physically*, but supporting me, being *with* me as I experienced whatever feeling was trying to find a voice.

Because she listened, I *heard* my own halting words, "I have to say goodbye to him *again*..."

Suddenly, I *knew* the reason I was so drawn to the older man I danced with so easily-- why so much emotion came up over small things. *He reminded me of my dad.*

I'd had a *flash* that afternoon as we stepped "the swing" in time with the music and each other. I realized Frank was the same age as my dad was the last time I saw him—

My parents had sold their Indiana home and were driving their packed-to-the-roof Cadillac to a new home in Florida. They stopped driving early the first afternoon because Mother was sick and throwing up. Daddy left her in the motel and drove to get her a prescription. He never returned. Daddy had a tragic accident that afternoon. He died twenty-three days later.

Not only was Frank Germanic and the same age as my father was then, but when I met him several weeks earlier, he was also within two months of his birthday—*just as Daddy had been*. That fact added to a growing list of similarities between the two men.

Wordless memories rose from hours of fun dancing, being close to Frank in a socially safe way without dating. During all those hours of happiness, old feelings awakened and, like ocean water before a tidal wave, gathered out of sight.

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I pretended not to see the rising wall of water. But when the dead-end aspects of Frank- and- Frances surfaced, dancing ended. Then the emotional wave I refused to see, struck. For days I was awash in sadness and grief.

With the support of Amanda and others in my spiritual circle, I eventually floated to the top. Then, once the waters receded, I saw *gifts* the experience produced. Among these I received the great blessing of a *listening friend*. On another level, I had also enjoyed again the deep essence of *my father* --the first man I ever loved and, too soon lost.

Frances Fritzie

Frances Fritzie, Editor observes, “Amanda’s caring, her presence in witnessing my pain, and supporting me without touch* or attempt to fix is a perfect example of spiritual friendship.” *The presence of such a friend is like a life- preserver bobbing me to the surface when treacherous emotional waters threaten to pull me under.*

*Touching a person in spiritual pain seems an attempt to soothe and quiet. This anguish is more like giving birth to strength. It is a process of trans-formation and needs to be *witnessed*, not quieted.

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

Dear Frances,

When I was reading my April '03 issue of *Ninepatch* I was moved by June's article, "Seeking Approval," where she mentioned trying to understand "who she is" It brought to mind this piece of poetry I wrote about myself many years ago.

**I am who I am today.
What is past is gone forever.
What is to be, has not happened yet.
I will hold onto today, just today.
I will savor and enjoy all the good it brings,
And let go of all else.**

Fond Regards,
Joan

Joan V. Spies (May '03) says she is leaving for a trip North. She's looking forward to spring there, crowned with flowers in bloom.

Dear Frances,

June 2003

I just finished reading the May '03 newsletter. Reading June's piece on Edgar Cayce brought back memories for me.

In the 80's when I discovered him, I read everything about his "readings," Atlantis, and medical solutions. That triggered readings into reincarnation by other authors as well.

Interesting stuff.

Love,

Gail

Gail (June '03) tells about her life, "My days are full of family stuff. I babysat for my year old grandson this morning. He wore himself out by 11:40; fell asleep in the middle of his pears!

I feel very fortunate to be available to my kids. It may in some way make up for their earlier life with me. I worry my faulty decisions caused unsettling situations. Heaven only knows how those two divorces affected them.

On the other hand, I have to believe everything is in Divine Order to survive, so I am grateful for what is, and that is pretty darn fantastic.

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

(Our Experiences)

FRIENDS: SILVER AND GOLD

When Frances asked me to write something for *Ninepatch* about friendship, my Girl Scout past immediately resurrected itself and reminded me of the words to one of my favorite songs we sang as a "round."

*Make new friends,
but keep the old:
One is silver,
And the other gold."*

I feel like *Ninepatch* has been a pathway for me to a whole new circle of Golden Friends. For several years, I was so isolated that I became afraid to make new friends. I wrote a song about it, to counter the Girl Scout song in my head. I'll just quote one line from it here:

*Can't make a new friend,
Or I'll know I'm lonely.*

I don't feel lonely, anymore. It is such a blessing to have been invited into this wonderful, supportive, gentle group of fellow spiritual seekers! I can give you a concrete example of a simple pleasure I enjoy that I now allow myself. It's the moon. A wonderful thing about living in Florida is how very bright a full moon can be. I love to go outside and revel in my moon-cast shadow. It can be so bright that it is easy to imagine the slaves traveling by night to freedom along the Underground Railway -- or nomads trekking at night to avoid the daytime heat.

Because I am wrapped in friendships that are Golden to me, I feel safe to share such fanciful notions. I can allow myself to dance with my moon shadow and revel in a feeling of happiness and freedom. What a glorious liberation of spirit that is for me!

Until I was invited into this circle (patchwork?), I had always thought that the "gold" friends were the "old" friends, but that is no longer true for me: I've struck it rich. I've found the Mother lode!!

JW/Joy (Apr. '03) adds, "It is a new thing for me to speak freely about my feelings. Practice has made it easier for me to express them. Being around gentle friends-- who encouraged me to let myself feel-- has allowed me to start naming them. I used to only be really good with fear; now I have a suitcase full of emotions."

EXTRA SPECIAL FRIENDS

Friendships--I am blessed to have had several really special ones.

The first was my sister, Virginia, who was only a year and a half older than me, but she was gifted with a wisdom and understanding well beyond her years.

We grew up like twins. Many people couldn't tell us apart. When she was only five years old, she had rheumatic fever. It left her with a damaged heart valve. All of the family, especially my mother, were very protective of her. Her illness helped form the pattern of our lives. She had to forego the rough games of childhood while I, a healthy tomboy, took an active part.

My parents made it clear to me at a tender age that it was my responsibility to take care of my sister. I was a tough kid, and I didn't let anyone pick on her.

She taught me loyalty. I always knew she loved me unconditionally --as I loved her. We bonded so tightly that we always looked after each other. I was often in trouble for infractions of the strict rules my parents laid down. Numerous times when I had been lax in my chores, my sister spoke up and took the blame. We both knew my parents would not punish HER.

She modeled humility. She was soft-spoken and gracious. She was totally unselfish; she never put herself first.

She showed courage. From somewhere she acquired a grace and patience that has eluded me. From a young age, she began to have severe headaches. Still in her twenties, and by then the mother of two young children, she was found to have a brain tumor. She endured recurring excruciating headaches. A spinal tap revealed that the tumor was causing pressure sufficient to expand her skull. Surgeons found they could not safely remove the tumor. A permanent drain was inserted to relieve the pressure. She lived ten more years, bearing the pain mostly in silence.

Right to the end of her life, Virginia modeled courage and integrity. With a rare inner vision, she knew her life was coming to an end. She tried to protect her loved ones from knowledge of her approaching death. She died at the age of thirty-nine.

She impacted my life in countless ways. She inspired me to live up to the high standard she had for herself. I never wanted her to be disappointed in me. Piece by piece, she built the inner core of who I am, by her love and example. Somewhere, deep inside, I knew that, even then. She taught me how to be a friend; and how to recognize the other special people God brought into my life. I am most fortunate.

She herself was a special gift. Everybody loved her.

June (Apr. '03) adds, "If there are guardian angels, and I believe there are, she is still watching over me."

MY BEST FRIEND

When I think *friend*, I think 'Cathy' ... my best friend and little sister.

When we were young, Cathy was the 'little creep' I was stuck playing with. Because we moved so often, we 'had' to get along -- we didn't know anyone else! Then again, as pre-teens, we were forced together when, after Mom left Dad and Dad died, I became something of a second mom to her.

Predictably, I suppose, we came to a time in our teens when we drifted apart. From time to time after I was married, Cathy popped up out of the blue and stayed with Hubby and me. But we'd become very different, so sooner or later, we would disagree and she would leave again.

Then about ten years ago, when we were living at opposite ends of Canada, we got talking on the phone. We shared how we hated always moving and changing. We shared how we hated being separated. It was then Cathy said, "I'm moving out there. Wait for me."

Getting to know each other as 'adults' was quite the experience! At first, when she moved in with me, it was a shock. I was a quiet, dependable, and a 'thinker.' She was vibrant, unpredictable, and a 'doer.' I worried about ten years down the road, and she couldn't plan for tomorrow!

But, as we spent more time together, something magical happened. We found we 'rubbed off' on each other. Unintentionally, we were teaching each other the skills and understandings that each of us had picked up on our separate paths through life.

Together, as adults, we learned to be sister, mother, daughter, friend – whatever the other needed most. It reminded us of when we were small. If one of us ever walked into a room alone, our father would always ask, "Where's the other half?"

Since then, out of necessity, we've moved again. Now Cathy lives sixty miles from me, so we only get to see each other occasionally. But when we do get together it's because we want to. Our time together is happy. We fish, shop, and talk kids and men.

We've become best friends!

TROR (May '03) says, "My sister is my best friend - the one who challenges me, angers me, loves me! Being separated from Cathy is like having half my soul cut away, I never feel quite so whole as I do when we're together."

*Friendship is a spiritual thing.
Without trust
There is no friendship.*

James (May '03) reflects, "A friend ship helps steer the course of gale winds into a gentle breeze."

June 2003

AN "OLD FRIEND"

I had no choice in the matter. I was only ten when my parents brought me to Pennsylvania from New Jersey. I didn't want to leave NJ, you see. I had so many wonderful friends there. I had already bonded with the girls and one sweet little guy who was like a brother to me.

I suppose it was in the middle of my fourth year in grade school. The mid-year move made things even harder. I was way ahead of the curriculum in my new school. Most of the kids thought I was strange and some sort of mini-egghead because I already knew most of the material.

And one day-- I remember like it was just ten minutes ago-- I was swinging on the play-ground when the bullies decided it was time to taunt me verbally and come after me physically. Then, suddenly, this girl I didn't know who looked like she should have been two years ahead of me came to my rescue! I thanked her. It turned out she was just tall and in my grade. We talked, shared lunch and became friends instantly! We spent the rest of our school years as chums.

Several situations threatened to keep us apart. One, our classes never meshed because we chose different career paths. Then, my family moved quite frequently, too. We remained in the same school district but our homes would be quite far apart that we never got a chance to visit outside of school.

Finally, in junior high, a year came when my family moved into her family's area! We could share a bus and also visit with each other using our bikes for transportation. We shared our adolescence with each other. Then my family moved far away from hers again. Our only connections were the phone and our common school.

Unfortunately, she got in trouble and left school. My mother was adamant about me staying away from her. She lectured me about how to choose my friends. By her standards, my friend was not one I should choose.

But after I got my driver's license, I could drive to my friend's house.! We shared our lives and our souls. The funny thing is, no matter what came between us during our early years, we fought to stay in touch with each other. After marriage, we both had baby boys. Since their ages (and sizes) were different, we even traded our boys' clothes back and forth.

No matter what came as an obstacle to our daily friendship, we overcame it; moves (several states apart for a couple of years), families, children, husbands ... all of it.

Today, after being friends for a little over forty years, we both moved back to the old area and settled in the same locale. We have the closest relationship imaginable. We share stories, church, family! Our bonds are strong! Somehow, I think we were destined to be there for each other.

Cat (April '03) says, " My friend and I grow closer to each other every day. She is the sister I never had in blood and our children actually grew calling the other, 'Aunt.' I love her dearly. Here's a poem that helps to describe our relationship. It's an old one and I don't know where it's from or the author-- it may be as old as the friendship in my story."

THE SPIRIT OF FREINDSHIP LIVES FOREVER

**Never lose an old friend,
No matter what the cause.
We wouldn't ever do it
If we didn't look for flaws.
The one thing worthwhile having,
Is the friend who stands the test,
And who has one friend such as this
Knows friendship at its best.**

FOUL WEATHER FRIEND

Friendship equals trust. *Friendship* is not an easy concept for some of us. Is it that we have much that we choose to keep hidden? Is it that we fear revealing our hidden parts? Have we been hurt in the past, preventing others from penetrating our exteriors today? By keeping others at arm's length, we feel protected. For us friendship is about intimacy. Intimacy is scary because whom can you trust?

My husband proudly calls me a "foul weather friend." I'm right there when someone needs something, but I think it is harder to be a *fair weather* friend. Fair weather friendships require commitment and reaching out. They require closeness, intimacy and trust. How I envy the friendships I see around me. Perhaps I'm only seeing companionship and superficial relationships. Or, maybe I expect too much.

Twelve Step Programs are a perfect opportunity to practice trust. But for me, there's also a catch. There is always Program anonymity to hide behind. In a true friendship -- if I understand what true friendship is-- there's no place to hide.

This subject is difficult to write about. I've wrestled with it for a long time, and I hear pessimism and fear in my words. I've long felt on the outside looking in. In fact, in an effort to distance myself from this subject, I wrote much of this using the collective, "we."

I look forward to reading what others say about friendship. I suspect it will be all about kindness and caring and support. I have those qualities, but the deeper experience of friendship eludes me.

Elaine (May '03) adds, "I'm experiencing shades of my annual springtime depression. Perhaps gray clouds color my words. Oh, for a walk on the Florida beach."

FRIENDS
ALONG LIFE'S WAY

When I left farm life as a teenager and joined the Navy, my life changed in one giant leap. I received a new kind of training for the work I was to do, and the dangers I was to face in wartime. There were also many unfamiliar social contacts. The training I received from my parents and teachers guided me in my choice of comrades. Their good counsel saved me many perils of adolescence. They were good *friends* indeed.

My days as a breadwinner again provided me with many acquaintances. I worked hard and was a competitor. This combination allowed no fertile ground for friendships. Instead, it was a time when I had few comrades. At a low place of isolation, I was blessed to find a *friend* who sensed that I needed a new direction.

He invited me to a religious retreat. It was at this point that I made a personal connection with My Higher Power. As they say, I discovered *What a Friend I Have in Jesus*. Afterward, I recall a nine-year journey in a new world within myself.

Did I take Jesus' friendship for granted once I no longer felt the exuberance of His Company? That I don't know. Over the years, the essence of that connection seems to have shifted. Now, I feel it sometimes through other people. In recent years, I am aware --from time to time-- that I feel a certain *glow* when I make contact with a *writer-friend*. From this spiritual connection, I get affirmation and encouragement to keep reaching for the hand of the Almighty, and to share my walk and struggle with others.

I've had different kinds of friends along my life's path. No one is better than another. Each has helped me in a special way.

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Lee (May 2003) comments further on the nature of friendships, "Most obstacles in life lie within one's self. A friend's good counsel—when well received—can bring light to the most intimate recesses and dark corners in one's soul.

MOSTLY WOMEN FREINDS

I have just a few remarks on *Friends*. In general, friends are long term.

They help you through the tough times. My friends are mostly women and we have a common life experience. For example, two or three of my friends lived the after- marriage-single- again life with me. We discussed our experiences and thus we learned from each other.

Some of my friends are better at asking questions, some better at listening, and others cheer me with their humor. All these qualities have been valuable to me at various times.

Friends live both near and far. Most ladies live close by. So, in addition to telling our thoughts and happenings, we can also enjoy entertainment together. A few comrades live far away. One lives across the country. She and I met at a class we traveled to in Chicago. We just hit it off. Now, we stay I touch through letters, calls, or e-mail. Also, we have both visited each other in our respective homes. She and I follow the same religion, so often we exchange spiritual questions, or healings. We support each other in our spiritual growth. I feel loved.

My friends and I have helped each other during times of sickness, sadness, and celebration. I feel accepted.

I'm sure I have been a value to them-- if nothing more than sharing how *not* to do some things. Yes, through my friends I learned to look at life and laugh.

Diana (May '03) adds this note to the Editor, "By the way, Frances, you have been a wonderful friend to me and I greatly appreciate it. You encourage me to express myself in writing. I feel valued. Thank you."

DON'T ASK

Yesterday, I saw a woman I haven't seen in a long time. She said what women say- - the thing that I HATE that women always say. She said, "So, is there a man in your life?"

It was probably the third sentence out of her mouth. Why do we do this? It's 2003 for Goddess sake - why are we still talking to each other as if the most exciting new possibility in any woman's life is a new man?

Last Sunday I had lunch with a new woman friend. We've talked a few times before in a group setting, but this was our first one- on- one encounter. We talked about our values. We talked about our careers. We talked about the circuitous paths we've taken to get where we are. We talked about how we grew up. We talked about our religious past. We talked about our dogs, the restaurant where we were eating, and the neighborhoods where we live. Then we talked about when we'd meet again.

Guess what. I'm not sure if she's seeing a man. I don't know if she has a lover, or if she's dating, or if she wants to. She might live with a man -- I'm not sure. I don't think she's married -- but I'm not sure. It just didn't come up!

Another friend of mine has a beautiful twenty-four- year- old daughter who also hates this question. She wants you to ask her about her studies, ask her about her volunteer work at the animal shelter, or ask her about her environmentalist crusade. When her family asks about a man instead, she says, "It doesn't matter. Men come and go in my life."

This is a woman of the future - a woman after my own heart!!

Here's an idea. The next time you see a woman friend -- after you greet her warmly -- look her in the eye and say, "So - tell me - what's your latest insight?"

How long might we talk about that? How productive might our conversation be?

Sherryl (Jan. '03) adds, "Men are an important part of a woman's life. A new man can be exciting news. If you are talking with a woman, and she wants to share that information, she will. You don't have to ask."

MAKING FRIENDS IN A NEW AGE

Meeting folks on the web, once a concept relegated to the legions of pocket- protector wearing math-major computer jockeys, went mainstream some-time in the last few years.

This can probably be attributed mainly to America On Line, who marketed an easier to use Internet in conjunction with chat rooms catering to anyone from *40's Love* to *Celebrity Gossip*. Anyone with Internet access could branch out and meet people in the world's biggest get-together. It didn't matter if a person was shy or unconfident. Everyone was invited. And it was convenient! People could see if their buddies were online without having to actually reach out and touch them. Conversations between loved ones or total strangers could be started and ended without ceremony. And people never had to meet each other face to face if they didn't want to. It's a mixed blessing that has grown as more people get connected.

Meeting an online friend in person can be great. Both people already know that they have much in common, as long as both have been honest. (And there's the rub: it's easier to fib online, to level a quick jab, to be misinterpreted, to ignore or avoid someone.)

Don't get me wrong; I have made many friends online. And, at some point, they all ended up becoming real-life buddies with all of the real life ups and downs of other relationships. However, both parties must remember it's *real* and to work at it -- not take the quick and easy road all the time.

I have many strong relation-ships with people I met online—their friendships are some of the best I've ever had.

Christa Weber (Apr. '03) continues to work in her miracle job (Feb. '03) as a reporter for a weekly newspaper that tries to cover the news people can actually use. Her free time is spent exploring her new neighborhood and writing postcards for an on-going project called, "The People On The Train." It's a post-card project, wherein I send out postcards to people I know from the Internet and people I know in real life. Each postcard de-scribes one person or category of person I have seen on the train in my commute. So far I have written up twelve or so cards, and I have thirty total currently addressed. I fill in a few each day. I haven't actually mailed any yet. I didn't realize how many people I knew."

TOP TEN WAYS TO SPOT A GOOD FRIEND

#10 She will listen to your story—day, night or in between.

#9 She knows how to make and have BIG fun.

#8 She never tells anyone your true age.

#7 No matter how many foolish and stupid things you do, she *never* judges.

#6 She knows your secrets but would never divulge them to anyone.

#5 She tells you the truth, even when it is painful to do so.

#4 When the world falls down around you, she picks you up.

#3 She knows when to say, "lighten up!"

#2 She knows that chocolate will make all thing better.

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#1 She knows that your friendship is *priceless*.

Dorothy (Apr. '99) adds, "Be your own friend and tell a friend to do your monthly breast exam. You may save a life. You can put it anyway you like. This is an important issue to me because I have a friend who found her own lump and it was malignant. They got it very early. Based on conversations with friends, many women do not do this check."

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

TO PHYLLIS

Across the bridge table I met you,
New to your grown son's town.

When I drove you home
And saw you safely in,
Never did I guess
The common path
Our lives would follow.

The kaleidoscope pattern
Of months and years shifted.
We met in other places,
For other reasons,
And came to share
The *seeker's way*.

Prayer partner,
Dream-teller,
Reader/Writer,
Artist
And mentor—

Phyllis,
You were my *friend*.

Frances, Editor shares these comments about her recently deceased friend, Phyllis, whose poems usually appear in this space.

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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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