

Ninepatch

Stitch - by - Stitch

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Editor's Note: This issue is dedicated to the theme, Gifts of Suffering. Since not all articles are on the topic, a **marks a theme item.

October

2003

**Dear Friends,

An afternoon sun peeked through summer's dark leaves creating a sun-spotted pattern where I parked. I picked up my half-full, Friends of the Library bag and strode toward the building.

The automatic door slid back. I took six steps and stopped to feed my volumes into the book drop's open mouth. When I held the last book in my hands, I stopped. I would not have time to finish reading, There Must Be More Than This by Judith Wright. I stood, opened it and again scanned the table of contents. My eye stopped at Chapter 12, "The Four Loving Truths." Still standing by the drop slot, I paged to the beginning of that part and began to skim its paragraphs.

I read more slowly when I came to the subtitle, THE SECOND LOVING TRUTH: LOVE AND PEACE ARE THE LEGACY OF PAIN. Here are a few of those words:

...Riding on the wave of your pain are the gift of peace and the gift of love. As you open up your heart to feel your pain, you open yourself to receive love and peace...

My eyes moved on down the page. The next paragraph began,

We have mistakenly believed that pain is the opposite of love. We haven't realized that pain and other emotions actually lead to love and can be parts of love. In addition, (my underlining) peace is not the absence of pain but the result of the acceptance and expression of pain.

My urge to reopen this book led me to look at my life in terms of our theme, *Gifts of Suffering*.

Living has taught me pain and suffering are not the same-- suffering rises from pain. I try—always-- but I cannot avoid pain *or* suffering. However, as the quotes above suggest, pain's outcome is best when *somehow* I move with it, not medicating or avoiding pain, but riding its current requires suffering. Unlike those who use a whip or scourge to self-inflict pain for a religious purpose, I never choose pain. No I don't. Instead, *Life* puts me in a position where I must.

For example, *Life* gave me a healthy, but *different* child. During his first two years I turned unsmiling concerned eyes on his developmental differences: lack of sleeping, over-activity and patchy learning. Accumulating pain in my gut —said *something* was seriously *wrong*. Yet, no one saw or felt what I did. Before he was three, I got only shrugs from family women and no support from "professionals."

Mothers and children smiled from station wagons I passed as I drove my child to doctors and specialists. Neighbor children shouted and laughed in adjoining yards. My

son sat in a dim-lit room, lost in his neon Light Brite peg patterns or spun, dazed on his Sit- and- Spin.

I read books and interviewed everyone I thought might know something— *anything*-- to help me guide my child. My gut clenched and my breath caught each time I felt women in public watch us. They'd catch my eye, glance toward my son's odd behavior then look back at me, their eyes questioning or brows drawn in a frown.

I breathed a long sigh of relief when my son's age three test results identified him as "Physically and Otherwise Health Impaired." This Special Education category offered *help* and special schooling. More than that, test results proved what I'd known in my gut.

But my special journey was still just beginning. I was increasingly absorbed with teachers, programs, doctors and other specialists. Meanwhile, my older son was also growing up. I did not want his childhood to be limited by his brother. My husband attended that child's social activities without us since whole family outings were impossible. My little boy could not "behave," and needed constant supervision.

Separated from *normal* and unable to change any part of it, suffering thawed some protective wall inside me. Its melting carried me into the sea of humanity. I joined those who suffer – whatever the reason.

Now I see my experience was a gift. Until then, I was a know-it-all. I judged others who floundered with life's problems. *Lazy*, I thought, *Not smart enough*. I believed there was nothing hard work and doing the right thing would not fix.

Thanks be to *Life*—to *suffering*-- and to God who knows what I need better than I do.

I am blessed.

Frances Fritzie

Frances Fritzie, Editor

adds," During the years I watched over my precious child, an unusually strong relationship between us. This alone is a rare gift..."

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(Letters to the Editor)

****Hello Good Buddy!**

Whew! I finally had my doctor's appointment! I've been in so much pain I thought it would never get here. He gave me a shot in each foot where it hurt the most. He also gave me a prescription pill sample to try.

The results are still out. I am able to walk much easier without the horrendous pain. However, my feet were on fire all night long. (I couldn't even rest them on my legs they were that hot.) So, 3:00 a.m. and I am becoming friends. Problem is, so is 7:30 a.m. I remind myself: *It came to pass...not stay.* and *This, too shall pass.*

Besides praying and meditating, since I still can't do much yet, I'm reading. My book is called, Stick a Geranium in Your Hat and Be Happy by Barbara Johnson. I keep chuckling as I read it. She calls bumper stickers, bumper *snickers*. I think that's really cute, because that's exactly what they are!

The author started the SPATULA group for parents just discovering their children are gay and helping them to adjust. They called it SPATULA because the parents first have to be gently scraped off the walls and ceiling before they can get started.

Her life has not been easy. She has lost two sons, one in Viet Nam and one to a drunk driver. Her husband was in an accident and was not expected to ever think, walk or talk again but came through it all successfully. About that time one of the two remaining sons announced he was gay. Yet her attitude is one of joy and celebration.

She speaks all over the country. I'd love to hear her some time. I'm also going to look up her other two books, Where Does a Mother Go to Resign? and Fresh Elastic for Stretched Out Moms.

All through the Geranium book I'm reading, are little inspirational poems, sayings and humorous comments. For ex-ample, she calls the grieving process: Churning, Burning, Yearning, Learning and Turning. It is really cool.

I hope and pray you continue to have fun and make the most out of life. Take care and keep in touch.

Love,
Pam

Pam (Sept. '03) adds, "The medication is working! I have energy to do things I'd forgotten I wanted to do! I have energy just to walk into another room! If I need to go to the store, I can! I don't feel like crying because I have to go to the store. I forgot how much quality pain sucks from one's life. I also had no idea how small my world had become, based on how far I could walk. I have had two full nights of sleep and I feel like Superwoman! However, as much as I would like to go dancing, I think I'll stick to occasional little 'jigs' throughout my home! God is SO good."

**Frances,

Good to hear from you! Sorry your vacation is about to end but we'll look forward to seeing you again around here.

You asked how my husband was doing. He finished the radiation but is now taking (See next.) chemotherapy -- one treatment every three weeks. He is to have three more treatments which will take us to the end of the year.

He is doing OK with it.

He would like to get to the Midwest to see his daughter after his chemo, but I'm not sure if the cold weather there will be advisable. (These days, I find myself saying, *One day at a time*, more and more.)

On the other hand, he is still playing golf, mowing the lawn and all the usual things. We are blessed.

I look forward to seeing you soon.
Joanne

Joanne (Feb. '03) adds, " I guess what is also important at this time is that I take care of myself, both physically and emotionally, so that I can be there for my husband. My spiritual group meetings and prayers are more needed now and I am trying to keep busy with my volunteer work at the hospital, walking and keeping in closer contact with friends and family."

**Frances,

I am thinking about the October theme, *Gifts of Suffering*. My wife and I ran the Red Cross disaster shelter for Hurricane Isabel in York County, Virginia. It opened Wednesday September 17 and closed on Saturday, September 20, 2003.

When we returned to our home, we found a tree on the house, and no power. We had to attend a wedding in Phoenix, so we flew out to the sunny southwest where I got a hot shower.(It felt great.)

We returned late last night and found the power restored. We still lost everything in the refrigerator and freezer so we have to start stocking up.

We are in much better shape than some of our friends who lost *everything*. Already I can see several ways we were lucky. As time goes on I expect to see more and more ways we were blessed.

Bill

Bill (Sept. '02) adds, Things are slowly getting back to normal. Yesterday we had a crane lift the tree off the house so the tree service could cut it up and expose the roof damage. Today, I started getting workers lined up to make repairs: roofer, carpenter, drywall and painter. We'll go shopping tomorrow to replace frozen foods that were lost when the power went out. Then I'll spend the rest of the day with the chainsaw cutting up logs and limbs on the ground. The good news is we'll have a lot of fire wood this winter."

**Hi Frances,

I just read the September *Ninepatch*. I am interested in the October theme, *Gifts of Suffering*. I wonder, *What are the gifts?* Is it the joy of being delivered from the suffering?

Oh yes, I can tell you about the suffering... many, many days, nights, weeks, months, years--past and present-- of suffering...mine, my family, others... here and abroad... during WWII years ago... and now.

Do the days and weeks of suffering outnumber those of non-suffering? What brings on the suffering? Is it my own doings or those of others? WHY? Will it ever end? Is there joy after suffering?

Sorry I sound the way I do, but days of suffering seem to outnumber those of "gifts".

I'll be interested in what others have to say.

Le

Le is widower, father of five living children and one infant, deceased. Two sons and two daughters are married. He has eight granddaughters and one grandson. He is a

Snowbird who travels from the Midwest to Florida half the year. He enjoys ballroom dancing (including Zydeco & Cajun), canoeing northern lakes and rivers, hunting for driftwood, golf, biking trails, and walking wilderness trails. He adds he recently read Sarum by Edward Rutherford. He says, "I was stationed in Salisbury, Wiltshire, England for a year prior to Normandy invasion, and knew the town and its cathedral."

**Gosh, Frances,

It wasn't until I read this email from you, that I realized I hadn't even been online in several days! It feels like I have been in another world: the world of life and death and the threat of real disability.

The email from you represents the "before" world that I had almost lost track of. Not only did I help our mutual friend J. for two days over the week-end, but I was also concerned about H. and her medications. Then I also had my across-the-street neighbor to take care of in another emergency. I thought SHE was having a mild form of stroke. I took her to doctors all morning Monday and today and her stroke was confirmed.

This afternoon I was with J. again at her cardiologist's. Tomorrow I'll go with her to a special hospital miles away for an all-day test. I feel a little like I did right after 9/11: a refocusing to the very here-and-now, outlining every moment in crisp detail.

I'm going to have to mull over that image for a bit. It feels like something I need to study. Is that one of the gifts of pain and suffering? Does a crisis make me live each moment with three times the intensity? Maybe I only live in complete awareness a third of the time during normal days. Thanks to God that I no longer live that *thin-as-a-stretched-out-wire* intensity that comes from living with a serious drinker.

These medical emergencies didn't make me feel *nervous*.

My emotions were more dense, almost tangible.

More later,

Joy

Joy/JW (Sept. '03) says, "Vividly living each moment happens to me when I am sympathizing with someone who is enduring pain and suffering. When I was in the hospital last year, 'outside' time didn't really exist for me. I truly 'let go and let God.' The aftermath and/or 'other side' of pain and suffering seems to be mostly gratitude."

Hello!

I'm heavily into the topic of saving money right now. I'm hoping to move in with my boyfriend in about ten months. (This is scary. It will be my first time living with a boyfriend and it also requires moving to another state.)

I am going to need quite a bit of savings to make this move. I will also need to be free of credit card debt. So, I'm doing a lot of research on thrifty ways. I'll be happy to write something about it. What do you think?

I hope you're enjoying what looks to be an early entrance into fall. (Here's hoping!!).

Christa Weber

Christa Weber (Sept. '03) adds, "Ninepatch readers, would you enjoy reading my research on easy money-saving tips that anyone can use? Tell Frances."

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

 (Our Experiences)

**WHAT CAN I SAY?

When I first heard we'd be revisiting 9/11 and speaking of *suffering*, my first reaction was, "What could I possibly say?" I wondered how I could speak of petty hardships I might have had in my life when so many suffer-ed so very much...

Oh, sure! I've lost family and friends to accident and illness, but as hard as it was, I learned from those experiences. I learned and had my faith strengthened. I've also dealt with illness -- my own and my children's-- but then these things, too, lead to learning.

And you know what? That's when I realized something. For every thing that's ever caused me pain or *suffering*, there's been a lesson ... a gift ... that's enriched my life!

Lynn/TROR (June '03) adds, "Thinking about finding the good in the bad reminded me of what Swami Chinmayananda said about life being like the ocean-- you can let yourself focus on the surface waters, get caught up in the emotional highs and lows like waves... or you can remove yourself from them and focus on the deeper, stiller waters below. Next time I find myself thrashing about – drowning in day- to- day troubles, I'll have to remember that, just be-low, there's a stillness just waiting for me to see it.

**It is often easy to forget blessings
 and appreciation of one's own
 good health and happiness.**

James (Sept. '03) adds, "One of the gifts of suffering is the joy of pleasure."

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**MIRACLE IN SUFFERING

I awoke from a nap in my room in a Bahamian hotel with an overwhelming heaviness about me. I began to greet my friend, but the words wouldn't come out and my chin started to quiver. Dejectedly, I started down the dusty road to the beach alone, my shoulders slumped, my feet dragging. Something wretched and overpowering was growing inside me and sapping every bit of my strength.

At the beach, I felt barely aware of my surroundings. I curled into a ball, hugging my knees with all of my strength, trying to keep whatever was inside from completely overcoming me. All at once, an irresistible force, it breached my inner defenses, and spewed out in a wave of wretchedness-- in cries and sobs, gasps and tears. Finally there was nothing there but emptiness and silence.

Then I remembered what I had been hiding in my deepest heart, afraid to reveal and to release. It was remnants of the pain of losing my two children. Better to hold the grief, it had seemed, than to lose them altogether. The sorrow had fed upon itself and grown like a poisonous living thing. It grew out of me and dispersed when I could no longer contain it.

Turning my attention inward, I discovered that I wasn't completely empty, as had seemed at first. I felt a tiny seed of love, that, given space, expanded and filled me with peace, and warmth that I now realized I had allowed to be smothered. As I filled with new energy, I began to feel buoyant and alive. I stood, aware for the first time of the beauty around me, the green water, shushing waves, whispering breeze, and gull cries. I was one with them and they with me, with my lost sons, all souls everywhere, and also with the two baby manta rays that glided to the shore at my feet, lingered, then wandered away .

I returned to that beach daily for a while, to find that beautiful, still center again and again. I knew God was in me. One day I remembered that God was inside me, no matter where I might be, and that I could take that feeling with me. And I did.

Sometimes, especially when I most need it, I forget this beautiful healing place and my pain and discord drives me there. Other times I remember that it is inside me, always available. Then I pause-- no matter where I may be, or whatever good or ill may be visible and apparent-- and still my mind. I wait in silent expectation, knowing the inner doorway will open.

Looking back, it seems a miracle that we humans have the capacity to transcend the visible and apparent, and find an inner place where we feel whole, part of all, and with our God, and that is as real as anything else in our awareness. The truth is this ability is an inherent part of us, one I can access at any time. The real "miracle": is that suffering can be the paradoxical catalyst that takes us there.

Joan H. is unmarried. She is mother of two sons, both deceased and one granddaughter, a college student. Joan enjoys reading, a spiritual- growth group, and doing on-site research on ancient mysteries. She loves "spontaneous" travel and exploration, and wants to develop her writing skills.

**WORDS TO AN OLD FRIEND

It's funny you'd mention the Oct. *Ninepatch* theme, *The Gift of Suffering*. I was just e-mail-ing an old friend who is one month past a quadruple by-pass. He's

disappointed because the medication he's taking causes impotence. Here's what I said to him.

I've about concluded that everybody has their cross to bear; and that bearing it well is essential. I don't know WHY. Maybe it makes us more compassionate to others. That may be the only reason -- and if so it may well be good enough.

So far, the strategy that I've found to make the burden lighter is to focus on the positive and blow the negative off. You are alive. You didn't have to suffer the pain of a heart attack and the resulting damage and chaos in order to get your heart fixed. You can accept life on life's terms and look beyond sexual fulfillment for ways of celebrating life. Who knows what you'll find? You have more time left to leave a legacy, what would you like to leave?

I think about my own suffering, and this is all I can come up with: Change it if you can, if not bear it well, be compassionate to others, and celebrate life anyway.

Sherryl (July-Aug. '03) adds, "I still hate suffering. I just like the idea of having a strategic outlook that may help me to accept it and then move on and find the joy!"

*

** SUFFERING

I believe that *suffering* is a matter of choice, one way of responding to one's circumstances. John McCain in a Viet Nam prison camp, Jesus on the Cross, Anne Frank, and scores of others have endured what we consider incredible hardships without considering it suffering.

Personally, I lived through the Great Depression in *poverty* before the word was commonly used. The ribbons on my moth-balled uniform speak of Korea, Viet Nam, Antarctica, death, mutilation, separation from country and kin, yet I never believed that I suffered.

Suffering is a state of mind and a matter of choice. St. Paul writes: "I have learned whatever state I am in, therewith to be content."

Don (September '03) says, "In September I returned to my roots in Minnesota to reconnect with siblings and assorted kinfolk. I wish Peace and joy to all who chance upon these lines."

A RECENT CUT AND PASTE PARTY

Yesterday was a friend's cut -n- paste party. The three of us went out to lunch before hand. Upon arriving at my friend's house, we entered her new office, sat down around a large table and snipped pictures and words from old magazines as we talked. I created five cut-n-paste pieces-- a new record for me.

The first two were about the shoulder and upper arm pain and weakness. (I am feeling the need to see a doctor.) The third one was about sexual and artistic passion, balance and strength, things I lack. I admire them but do not covet them. The fourth one was about beauty and gardening. It was the most involved. The fifth one was a page full of phrases with little rhyme or reason. One's title was, **What do I want to do next with my life?**

I've saved most of my creations from other gatherings. Looking back, I see that --like this time-- journals and words as a design are a recurring theme. So are serenity and spirituality. Other themes that recur are sexuality and tension.

All together, they surely represent parts of me.

Carol (Feb. '03) adds, "I have seen the doctor who referred me to a therapist. My shoulders are beginning to feel better but still have a long way to go."

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

ENGLISH AND IRISH AUTHORS.

I just finished Death on Account and Speak for the Dead by Margaret Yorke. I have to confess that when I put a book down after I finish and start another, I usually have to go back to the first book and read the front to remember the story. (Strange I know, but true.) Anyway, now I have read all the Yorkes they have in this local library system so I will have to find another author.

Even though female English and Irish authors are limited, I don't think I will run out. My recent writer, Margaret Yorke, has penned over eighty books and she is still alive. Another writer I like is Anne Perry who produces two or three books a year. Those are just two in the field.

It seems the Anne Perry books are the only ones I can recall after reading. That's why I keep a folder filled with English female authors and titles of books they have written. I check off each book after I read it.

Patricia (Aug. '03) says, "We are still trying to sell our Florida home. We've had several look and like what they see. However, I think the problem is the size. It is not very big. Anyway, we will see. Hopefully, it will sell before year's end."

EXCUSE ME, YOUR LIFE IS WAITING

This book, written by Lynn Grabhorn, presents a captivating premise. The author states that all of us are electromagnets that attract good things or bad things according to our vibration. She compares people to tuning forks, which respond only to another tuning fork on the same frequency. Happy feelings are on a high frequency--worry and fear on a low frequency. However we FEEL about something, we attract like situations, people and circumstances. This is the law of attraction. She compares our lives to a room full of tuning forks, all set to different frequencies, and sending out conflicting vibrations. No wonder our lives are often full of discord and chaos!

She says it's not what we THINK about something; it's how we FEEL about it. On page 55, she writes, "It takes only six-teen seconds to link up vibrationally to

whatever we're focusing on... In that brief time we start to vibrate on the same frequency as whatever it is we've been emotionally thinking about ..."

She offers several ways to change our focus--such as a simple smile, and actively practicing appreciation. At the end of the book is a helpful list of do's and don'ts. One of my favorites is on page 300: Replace your "things to do" list with a "things to feel" list.

Grabhorn is also the author of, Beyond the Twelve Steps: Roadmap to a New Life . She writes in a light-hearted humorous style that is enlightening and yet easy to follow.

June Poucher (Sept. '03) says: "I am blown away by the implications of this idea!"

LEE'S RECENT READING

I've been reading, The Princesse de Cleves by Marie de La Vergne de La Fayette, published March, 1678. It was considered The First French Classic Novel. It still contains great historic background for Women's Lib, and morality. Nothing is really new in 2003. My advice then is: relax, love and be loved, the world didn't end in this crisis before. Did it?

Lee (Sept. '03) adds, "Be with the one you love."

*

TALKING TO HEAVEN

I recently read, Talking to Heaven by James Van Praagh. If you question life after death, I would recommend you read this book. In my mind, it confirms a spiritual world and gives inspiration to lessen the fear of loss.

Van Praagh states your friends and family who have passed before you do not forget you. They are more accessible to you in this new state than they were living. They know about your soul's path and motivation. They check on you often.

This book gives guidance to opening your own ability in communicating with those who have gone home. He suggests envisioning a white light of love before meditation. (This color that represents Christ's light of love.) Also he says to set the same time to meditate each week.

Since I lost my life-long husband four years ago and my Mother a few months ago, this was very comforting.

Dottie (July-Aug. '02) adds, "I'm starting to read Body Reflexology by Mildred Carter. I thought it might help with some physical problems I've been having. Years ago I had many sessions of foot reflexology with my herbalist in the Midwest. They were painful at the time, but later always felt good like a full body massage."

**Copyright 2003
Ninepatch, Inc.
P.O. Box 1263**

Avon Park, FL. 33825

ISSN 1094-3234

E-mail: Ninepatch9@AOL.com

Website: <http://www.ninepatch9.org>

Newsletter suggested donation rate:\$15-\$35.

*The IRS recognizes Ninepatch, Inc. as a nonprofit corporation, category
501c3.*

Documentation is available for a small fee on request.