

April 2004

Ninepatch

Stitch - by - Stitch

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

April 2004

Editor's note: Each month I share a life reflection from my spiritual journey.

Dear Friends.

It was a quiet sunny Saturday afternoon in the North Florida woods. As I assembled sandwiches for lunch, I gazed through the kitchen and out the living room window. There, more than fifty giant azalea bushes burst with blossoms in pinks and rose. Suddenly, the phone rang, and broke the peace.

I knew only two people who might call and jumped to pick it up. *Hello?* I ventured.

"Fritzie? This is Dorothy."

I held my breath. I feared I knew what she'd say: her mother, my dear friend Kathryn, had lost her battle with pancreatic cancer.

Monday that same week, Dorothy e-mailed me. She said her mother had gotten so weak that concerned friends had taken her to the hospital. Dorothy added she was flying to Florida early the next morning.

Dorothy said she thought intravenous fluids would get Kathryn back on her feet and she'd keep in touch. I looked down at my calendar where several weeks before I'd written a reminder, (visit) $\mathcal{K}\mathcal{P}$ in Thursday's box.

When I talked with Dorothy on Wednesday, she told me her mother was slipping away. I said I'd drive over the next morning. It was on Thursday that I would see Kathryn after all.

Traffic was light that morning I drove the seventy miles to see my friend one last time. As pastures and scrub of central Florida slid past the window, I considered what I might say. My thoughts rolled back to a day nine years earlier, when my mother lay in a different hospital dying.

I'd made my peace with her as best I could. Then I called my sons to have their chance. David didn't drive, so I picked him up from school – near the hospital. In the car that afternoon, I told David this was probably the last time he would ever talk to his grandmother. I reminded him that she could not speak, but was alert. She would see him and hear everything he said. David asked me what he should say. I suggested he just tell her about something she'd done with him – something he really liked.

Mother sat waiting, her bed cranked into a sitting position. David said "hello" and leaned-- elbows out-- to half-hug her. Then he walked over and sat on a chair near the window on one side of her bed. I pulled up a chair on the other side of the bed and looked on.

Mother turned toward David as he began talking. Before long, David's gaze shifted out the window in that unfocused way of remembering. As if watching some rewind movie, he told Mother stories. He detailed trips in their speed boat, watching fireworks, visits to a Florida beach... He seemed to recount every time they'd been together.

As I heard his simple, detailed telling, tears slid down my cheeks and dripped off my chin. In this ordinary way, David told my mother how much he loved her -- how very important her life was.

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I wanted to *somehow* do for Kathryn what David did for Mother. So, mile after mile, I scanned my memory for experiences Kathryn and I shared over the thirty-five years since we met.

Dorothy greeted me when I found her hospital room. I gave her a hug then glanced at Kathryn, small and frail on the bed. Her nurse was pouring some white liquid in her mouth. Kathryn obediently opened her mouth for the nurse. However, for some reason, she was not swallowing. The nurse shook her head to Dorothy then went on to put some clear medicine from a syringe into the IV line.

Dorothy whispered to me, *Morphine... You'd better talk to her before that takes a hold.*

When the nurse left, I squeezed between the bed where Kathryn lay and her IV pole. Her eyes were closed. I leaned over and said, "*Kathryn...*" She roused slightly and turned toward me. "*It's Fritzie.*"

She focused her eyes, then spoke a single, husky, syllable, *Hi*"

Dorothy had warned me, Kathryn seldom spoke, so I put on a smile, and began, "*You were on my calendar today ... I had planned to come (and) see you ... I did not think it would be here, though.*" She made no sign of response. So, I chatted along anyway as if we were having a conversation. As I'd seen David do, I told her one memory after another.

But, I choked up after a few. Too emotional, I stopped. I did not want to upset Kathryn with my tears. As I turned away, I recalled a day three years earlier when I visited Kathryn in Florida. That afternoon she calmly told me she had cancer and planned a serious surgery. I cried then, too, and embarrassed, fought for control.

Still, I was struck by her even statement of the situation -- and even more by the simple way Kathryn looked directly into my eyes and said, *Fritzie, you know I am not afraid to die.*

I shall always respect Kathryn's deep faith and quiet courage.

May her soul be at peace.

Frances Fritzie

Kathryn,
Mother of Dorothy,
Grandmother of Nikkie,
Beloved friend,
Left this world on
March 13, 2004.

***Eternal joy grant unto Kathryn,
O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her.***

Frances Fritzie, Editor remembers, "*I met Kathryn in August of 1968. Newly hired by the assistant superintendent to teach third grade, I had gone in to meet her, my new principal. I appeared in the anteroom of her secretary-less office, toting my three-month old son, Brian, in a large molded plastic carrier. Then I was her new third grade teacher and she was my principal. It was our first relationship. Over the years, our connection deepened. After we both retired, she became my dear friend. Always my encourager, when Ninepatch incorporated, she was one of the first Board members. I shall miss her.*"

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

Dear Fritzie,

Our move was finished several months ago. I messed up a couple of times during that move. First, I lost my car keys. I was sure they fell out of my suitcase somewhere back in the Florida home we sold. I called the manager of the park. He looked and did not find them. I unpacked all my boxes—no keys. I am hoping the new owners will eventually find them.

About the same time, I *also* misplaced my wedding band. My finger got a fungus and I re-moved the ring and put it—not in my jewelry box, but some other place, *here*. I decided I had too much going on and needed a break. I told myself to also be more careful. About that same time, I found my way to the library. Since the weather was cold and snow would come soon, I picked up four books and pre-pared to nest and watch the weather.

About three months later I found my wedding band! It was in a purse I had changed from. By then I had already purchased another ring -- with less width. I decided I will wear the wider band in the winter, but in summer switch to the narrower one.

I haven't found my keys ...yet. Time will tell that story.

Ta-ta,
Patricia

Patricia (Mar. '04) adds, "Back in December, my husband and I talked about crashing your wedding. We would have loved to share that day with you."

Dear Frances,

You are right about time—it does evaporate! After I wrote and told you all the details of our last little vacation, I got to thinking: *That seems so long ago!*

Looking back, it seems like a better time and a better place. The new year began with funerals. We didn't even celebrate our wedding anniversary. What with colds, problems at work and the flu, then we had problems with our one daughter who always thinks *she* is more important than anything else that is going on.

Luckily, life is finally getting back to normal. I am tired of winter-- ready for *spring!*

Enjoy yourself.
Love and prayers,
Linda Sue.

LindaSue (Mar. '04) says, "Congratulations on your wedding, Frances. Hang on to your dreams and to each other."

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Dear Frances and JK,

It is February 20th as I write. Today is your wedding day, but in a larger sense, it is your time to celebrate the sanctity of relationship, the bonding of each to each. May God bless you both as you continue the exciting journey of unity. May you also have dedication to the honor of upholding the dignity of your individualism.

It is time to honor your union with a quote from Kahlil Gibran,

Sing and dance together,
And be joyous,
But let each one of you
Be alone.

Sincerely,
Gail

Gail (Feb. '04) comments on her own life and marriage, "I'm so happy for you, Frances, and for other friends who find joy in their mates. I've experienced intense joys and sorrows in relationship, but right now, I'm willing to enjoy my solitude. I thank God for it every day."

Frances & JK,

So sorry we could not be with you on your special day. My husband had some major health difficulties that day and I took him to the hospital at noon. It was later determined that he had another cancer, this time on the brain. Blood seepage was causing his trouble.

As I write, he is still in the hospital, however he has good vital signs and I expect that he will be released shortly. They will give him another Cat Scan tomorrow and then they will start radiation. This cancer responds well to this treatment.

We have hope and continue to pray for continued time together. Life is so beautiful even with all the "gray areas".

Joanne

Joanne (Oct. '03) adds, "I talked to a friend who attended your wedding and she told me what a lovely ceremony you had. JK, you're very lucky to have found Frances, and Frances, we both wish the two of you all the best."

Hi Frances,

Your wedding was so moving and uplifting. Everything seemed to go so well. The words Pastor Bill used, seemed so perfect. He put such feeling and caring into them, too.

Everyone I talked to loved the service and appreciated all the work you put into setting it all up as well. Also, I heard good comments about the food served at the reception . It was all good and I thank you!

Sending hugs and best wishes to you and JK.
Dottie

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Dottie (Oct. '03) adds, "I was impressed by your boys. They are both fine men and so courteous. I enjoyed talking to them both. David is so enthusiastic about life and intelligent, too. (My boyfriend also enjoyed him.) Brian was also easy to talk to. They both seemed very happy -- a tribute to their mom.

Our next SPECIAL TOPIC is,

THE BEST MONEY
I EVER SPENT.

*Please, think ahead for
June- Nov.-Dec. '04!*

Fritzie,

It was so good to hear your voice, even if it was just on a phone message.

I've been fussing and fussing about whether or not we can make your wedding on the 20th. The problem is that my husband and I are committed to baby- sitting. I have looked at all options up one side and down the other.

There just seems no way out of it. I can't come by myself because my husband really can't handle a two-year-old. (That would be my choice -- to come by myself. How inviting that sounds.)

Since I live only a few hours away and could actually consider attending, I am really feeling bad about missing your wedding. It would have been so wonderful to see you and JK bond in this beautiful way.

I've been thinking a lot lately about marriage -- partly because of things I'm reading, watching, "Dr. Phil" on TV, and also because of your up-coming marriage.

I've never been optimistic about the success of marriages, but I now see what it can be if effort and sacrifices are made on both sides. It takes a lot of maturity to make it work.

When I think of my own marriage, I don't know how we've made it this far. We are probably doing as well or better than we've ever done in this nonphysical phase of our relationship. (Amazing.) To sum it up, I've been trying harder and harder to be a better person and he is just extraordinarily kind, forgiving and patient. I think I chose to marry him because he had those many qualities that I was unaccustomed to knowing.

Stay well. You are loved.

Elaine

Elaine (Nov.-Dec. '04) adds, "Our third grandchild, a little girl, will be delivered by C-Section in late March. I'm feeling a little hurt and left out as I see my role as paternal grandmother being less than I'd like it to be. "

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Hey Frances!

How unfortunate you had to share your marriage week with a funeral. Where are you living now? After what you just went thru, I am wondering if you will be staying with JK at his house or living in your house? I suppose by now you are done with the mess of selling your other house but then, time is so obtuse to me right now, perhaps all this is so far in the past. Excuse me if that is the case... I lost a year of my life after my husband John died and am recognizing it is happening this time with my daughter's recent death.

On that note, one day, (funny story sideline here ... tee- hee) I was talking to my little brother outside his house. I looked over at his current vehicle and asked where his little ranger truck was.

"CAT!" he shouted! "What the h--- is wrong with you!?! I haven't had that truck for almost a year now!" I laughed ... that was a wake up !

Again, such blessings and warm wishes to you and yours and your new one, too!

CaT

CaT (Mar. '04) updates us with her grief counseling, "The counseling is teaching me about the mechanical brain patterns and physiological patterns associated with what has happened to me physically and mentally. It's a weird thing sitting and learning yet still not having any control over the situation. I guess there will be a gradual breakthru where I can snap outta' this ... I hope. The doc/shrink says I have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which is not like grief and depression; it embraces both. Whatever it is ... it's not fun."

Dear Frances,

In an e-mail, you mentioned feeling very tired. Be patient with your low energy level. Grief takes so much work-- it drains us. Maybe that's a good thing because it makes us slow down so we can process all the feelings that occur when there is a death.

Congratulations on your wedding, I wish you much happiness. I just had a short but lovely visit from my son and his bride. I held a luncheon for them and invited a few friends and a cousin. The cousin and one friend were both in my own wedding party years ago. They had not seen each other since 1957, the year of my wedding!

Joan V. Spies adds, "So often, current events in my life feel quite connected to the past they seem to somehow finish a full circle."

Dear Frances,

I read over your March '04 letter about your cousin's suicide. It's sometimes difficult for me to write about events that touch me emotionally. I sit at the keyboard and cry as I write.

I understand your grief and loss. We experienced such a death in our family ten years ago and it still is sometimes hard to cope with — for her family's sake, if not for mine. The question, *why* still plagues. Your experience was more than just a death--it was the ultimate rejection.

All of you are in my prayers. God bless you.

Bless'ed be,

June.

June (Mar. '04) says, "Sometimes I feel anger at the choice she made to leave us— not to be present for significant family events."

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Dear Frances,

I was so glad to see you to-day. It is such an affront to have life seem to go on as normal when a family member has been lost. Your comment, "A bomb hit our family." is so accurate. When I returned from the separate funerals of my mother-in-law and my little brother, I remember how very strange I felt looking at people leading normal lives. Didn't they know a tragedy had occurred? Couldn't they feel the pain emanating from my personal space? I think our auras get affected when we are wounded. You "felt" very fragile and tentative to me yesterday. (I hate the way my school schedule interferes with my ability to reach out to people. I wanted to sit next to you and listen to your story of the past week and I couldn't.)

It is as if someone interrupted our journey down the river of life and told us we all had to get out of our large, warm, and comfortable raft and get into separate, smaller rafts. We can still see each other, and the rafts occasionally ride side by side, but we have different currents tugging us.

Hopefully, by the Friday when you get married, I will be able to float alongside and give you my undivided attention.

Love and prayers,
Joy

Joy/JW (Jan. '04) says, "I will finally graduate with a BA this May! I am having trouble processing the end of this long, complicated and arduous struggle to accomplish some-thing that pleases ME. I wonder what the bend in the river will hold for MY life."

Frances,

I just started back to school in an accelerated degree program (Bachelor's in Business Management) and I will finish sometime in late 2005. There's no way to know what is really going to happen around my job but there have been rumors. Time will tell.

My son is separating quite a lot. (He is just sixteen.) I'm adjusting to the changes. He moved out for a while and was living with his dad, but he's back now with an intention to stay. That will evolve with time as well.

That's really the other reason why I decided to get back in school. When he was gone, I was so bored. Now that he's back *and* I'm in classes, I'm busier than I want to be - but it's OK. It will all even out in its own way.

Hugs,
Sherryl

Sherryl (Mar. '04) adds, "You've got to read a book I just finished Frances. It's called, While I Was Gone by Sue Miller. After that I also think you'll LOVE - For Love also by Sue Miller. In fact, The World Below -- the first book I read by Sue-- was also unbelievably good! I think it's safe to say that she is my favorite 'new' writer."

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

A mistake is not a mistake if you learn from it.

James (Mar. '04) says, "Don't be afraid of making a mistake. If a bird were afraid of falling, it might never learn to fly. Instead, make errors, learning experiences."

-----P-E-T-S-----
(Our Special Theme)

MORE ABOUT
BERKELEY

My dog, Berkeley, is a member of our family. Here's an idea of our family dynamics. I'm the one who found and bought the dog. My kids had been BEGGING for a dog for years and I couldn't hold them off anymore. At that time they were eight and nine, finally old enough for some responsibility.

I had never had a dog before because I grew up in apartments. My husband had had many dogs. His only objection to getting a dog was that he would get attached and then it would break his heart when the dog died.

Anyway, Berkeley, the little stinker, immediately bonded with my husband and has ever since worshiped the ground that man walks on. (I think it's an alpha male pack behavior thing.) Berk even went through a phase a couple years ago when he growled at me and my kids if we tried to get physically between my husband and him! Anyway, Berk and my husband have a mutual admiration society.

As a member of the family, he travels with us. When we took a family vacation to Yellowstone National Park in 2002, my husband made Berk a special perch out of wood (completely upholstered with foam & material.) It fits onto the inside of the driver's side door of the car. Berk likes to lay in that exact space so he can see out the window as we go down the road.

Now that I think of it, maybe Berk is the alpha male!

Maeve (Feb. '04) adds, "One more thing: Berk is sooooo cute (I should send you a picture!) He adds to the esthetics of my life! Anyway, I'll stop now before you have me committed"

STINKER

I've had many dogs over the years, but my favorite was a knee- high, black-haired mutt accidentally named "Stinker." Actually, he got his name one day when I had him outside and all of the kids came to see him. He was chewing on my shoe and I called him a *little stinker*. The kids picked it up and kept calling him that. No matter how hard I tried to call him something else, he never answered to anything but *Stinker*. Later, he really earned the name. He'd come home after a visit to a nearby sheep pen wreaking of dung. After chasing the animals around their field, he would roll in their pen. Then he'd strut into the house like he had on Chanel #5!

One day Stinker became angry because I had been gone all day. When I came home, I found my baby's dirty diapers all chewed up and strewn about the house. Needless to say, I was furious. I yelled at him constantly as I stomped around slamming non-breakables in the process of cleaning up.

Still enraged, I realized Stinker hadn't been 'outside' yet. I opened the door and shouted down the hallway, "The door's open! Get 'outside'." He looked like he was in one of those combat movies where the guys crawl around on their bellies to avoid being shot. (I didn't know the dog could run with his belly on the ground!) When he hit the door, he took off full tilt.

An hour later, Stinker still hadn't returned, but that wasn't unusual, as he commonly explored the country side. I ate supper and then walked up the road to visit my friends. When I walked in everyone was subdued and trying not to laugh out loud. I asked them what was going on. Their response was, "*Maybe you should tell us!*"

Confused, I asked, " *Why?*"

They informed me there had been a noise at their door and when they answered it, there was Stinker.

He was looking some what forlorn, sitting up and begging. They invited him in and he slinked in on his tummy, his head low. One friend was petting him in another room when Stinker heard me come in. At the sound, the dog scrambled and hid under their couch. He stayed there the entire time I visited them.

When I left, I called to him, but he didn't respond so I said good night and left. Stinker stayed with my friends for three days. Then one evening there was a scratching on my door. When I opened it, there sat Stinker begging while shaking and trembling. It seemed all was forgiven so I invited him in.

Anyway, I always thought Stinker was a pretty smart dog to run away to a safe place and wait until I had calmed down sufficiently to return home.

Pam (Nov.-Dec. '03) "My neighbors always loved to tell the story about the time Stinker ran away from home."

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

NINEPATCH—SPIRITUAL OR NOT?

Note: Following is a fourth comment on the existence of a link between *Ninepatch* and “spirituality.”

Ninepatch is a distinctive journal where persons can relate incidents in their lives that are not merely mundane stories. The reason is that we-- for the most part-- have had spiritual experiences that have changed our lives for the better. This distinguishes us from being *just* the highest mammal on the evolutionary scale. This spiritual dimension of the human race goes beyond the rational experience of day- to- day existence. For those of us who aspire to the higher life, it gives us an opportunity to explore and share the vital force that sets us apart from the people whose lives are in utter chaos. Hopefully, the present *Ninepatch* format will prevail.

Lee

Lee (Jan. '04) adds , “I will be forever grateful for Ninepatch's contribution in keeping The Spirit alive in me. Frances, may your blessings be returned to you a hundred-fold!”

- - - - T-H-R-E-A-D- - - -

(Our Knowing and Our Spirituality)

NINEPATCH-LAND

**My *Ninepatch* friends live near
and far,**

They're different as can be.

All of them are strangers,

But they're very dear to me.

Through letters, books and artwork,

We have shared bits of our lives.

And the common goal of bettermen,

For which we each have strived.

And though we'll prob'ly never meet,
I see them all the time,
When I visit *Ninepatch*-land --
A place inside my mind.

In *Ninepatch*-land I wander,
Without caring where I go,
'Cause every way is just a path,
To friends that I can know.

So come with me to *Ninepatch*-land!
(It doesn't cost a thing.)
All you do is close your eyes,
And let your mind take wing.

There we'll wander golden paths,
Our *Ninepatch* friends have made.
They lead beneath pipe-cleaner trees
Whose paper leaves make shade.

We'll listen to the rubber-band,
That plays there in the park
And marvel at their singers:
Three finches and a lark.

We'll watch the origami-swans,
That sail upon the lake,
And vie with cardboard fishing boats
For tinsel-trout to take.

We'll watch the glowing
 peach-sun set,
On mountains made of rhyme,
That reach up to the cotton clouds,
Silver-tipped, they shine.

Or drink from fountains full of words,
Our *Ninepatch* friends create,
Or dance beneath a starry sky --
Of poster paint and slate.

My *Ninepatch* friends would laugh, I think,
To hear these things I've said,
About my secret *Ninepatch*-land,
I've seen inside my head.

Or maybe they would join me,

April 2004

**(I hope that's what they do!)
I'll leave this little sign here,
And hope you join us too!**

TROR (Mar. '04) says, "I wrote this one day when you (Frances) came to mind. I thought, I wonder what Frances is up to...? I pictured you in a cut-and-paste world, busily cutting and pasting the next issue of Ninepatch together. Silly me!"

INFORMATION ABOUT US

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