

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 a story from my ongoing spiritual journey.

February 2004

Dear Friends,

Through the humid quiet of afternoon in still-summer-like Florida, I hear wind chimes sing on the nearby screened porch. Strong breezes swirl fallen leaves outside open dining room windows. They rattle dryly as they swirl and cross a cement patio. I walk over to the windows and gaze up through the woods where I see a patch of sky. There, still-green treetops shake their leafy hair.

A cold front is moving through. Though the circulating air is still balmy, the temperature is dropping. Soon, it will cool beyond comfort. I bend and crank closed several glassed panels. While I'll miss the breeze, shutting the windows will hold warmth.

Just as I am today preparing the house for a weather change, I have also been preparing my life for alteration of my social status. After fourteen years of being single, this month I am marrying JK.

As I closed up the house to save it from cold, I've also taken protective legal steps to secure my future and my sons' legacy. First, I made a new will. Second, I updated a revocable trust made at the time of my divorce. Last, JK and I signed a prenuptial agreement. Though complicated with p-a-p-e-r -w-o-r-k, these official matters were the *easiest* aspect of change to manage. Alterations in my daily, weekly and monthly life have baffled me and set my brain spinning. Managing relationships has occupied my thoughts and often been the subject of e-mails to a few recently remarried friends.

My group activities --Twelve Step meetings, reading gatherings and dream work--dwindled during my recent travels since May. Also, I missed one-on-one chats with various gals. By the end of my summer trips, I had missed *weeks* of episodes that weave the fabric my friends' daily lives. Like the cooling air of the cold front, I felt the intensity of my friendships change.

Unlike closing the house windows, I did not know how to remedy the situation. First, I talked to myself. I reminded myself this was a part of an overall shift. I also assured myself things would even out. Alas, nothing I told myself helped. I felt like an island in a stream.

I puzzled over the situation. I examined it from all sides. I wanted to remain in the stream, to continue all my activities, just enjoy them less often. In a way it made sense, yet I remember how it was as a child in Sunday School. My parents were not every-Sunday- church- goers. After an absence, I sat stiff as a rock in classrooms where more regular students laughed with each other and raised their hands to talk about familiar topics.

In the months before the 2003 holidays, I began dividing time between my home and JK's. I also renewed my efforts to keep up with my friends. One way that worked

pretty well was e-mail. However, my server was limited by a toll call and-- for the first time-- *sharing* a phone line.

JK's woodland home brought another challenge, too. My cell phone did not work anywhere within ten miles. Thus, I faced the daunting use of a phone card. Often, I'd start dialing the *too-many-numbers* and MISS ONE. In frustration of having to start all over, I'd just hang up then stomp off near tears.

How will these challenges resolve? I don't know. But, the weather front moved on and the windows of the house can be opened again. I *trust* my Higher Power has a plan for me, too. It is developing even now-- and will appear when I stop pushing.

Blessings***

Frances Fritzie

Frances Fritzie, Editor adds, "Knowing spiritual principles is easier than actually applying them to my life. Old patterns die hard."

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

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(Letters to the Editor)

Frances,

Did I ever tell you how much I have come to enjoy *Ninepatch*? When I first got it, I thought a lot of stuff was "far out" and didn't know any of the writers. It was after my attendance at Twelve Step meetings for Adult Children that my *inner child* was revealed to me and my head became a lot clearer. (I thought my head was pretty clear so that was a surprise for me!)

Since I met *my child within*, I LOVE *Ninepatch*. Of course, I also recognize a few of the writers, now, too. Georgene even writes me post-its!

Merry and Happy,
Nancyann

Nancyann is married and mother of four grown children and eight grandchildren, ages sixteen to four. Since she retired, she is trying out many interests. She comments, "I love crossword puzzles, classical music, do Tai Chi, and generally enjoy every day."

*

Dear Frances,

Life here in Florida has been good for me in many ways and yet difficult in parts. I have been challenged to do some things that are new. I am learning a lot and am slowly getting a sense of how to balance it all during my work days. One thing I do for balance is to take a day off. Every Tuesday I vegetate at the ocean, a wild life refuge or some other quiet place. This helps to bring my soul, being and body into real peace.

Over the Christmas time, I was hungering to be with family. I drove to Key West to be with a delightful crew I met here. They take in stray cats, dogs and chickens – and even me! I am officially part of their family now. This little family was very much like my own – always an open door – it meant so much to be a part of them during this time.

Patience (Nov.-Dec. '03) "My ministry involves much of parish life—yet not all. One of my tasks is taking care of the church bookstore! I even have the privilege of preaching once a week at our morning Communion Service. All has been blessing! "

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

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(Our Experiences.)

Editor's note: Here is the end to Le's tale about his daughter.

A LOST DREAM FOR MY DAUGHTER

Despite counseling, parental financial support and love, my daughter Dee's deviate behavior trend began again after she was in prison. She got involved with drugs and crossed the law again. She also attempted suicide several more times --once with a firearm. The courts and their counselors determined that her problem was simply a behavior problem and the cure for that was incarceration.

As her parents, we were viewed with suspicion by our neighbors, and colleagues at our respective places of employment. We knew that in a small town like ours everyone knew what was going on. We could hear the talk behind our backs and caught the sly looks as well as the occasional look of sympathy. Attending church, school functions, civic affairs, and work became a daily trauma.

We pitied our other kids. Her two brothers and two sisters were terribly embarrassed. They refused to talk to or visit her. There was little we could do to make things easier for them. The courts blamed *us*. One judge (in front of a packed courtroom) read off a list of her deeds then accused us of being "poor parents". It's been nearly thirty years now. Dee's real problem has finally been diagnosed as schizophrenia. Despite many medications and continual counseling, Dee continues to attempt suicide. Her *voices* tell her to kill herself. She does work parttime, gets some disability income, plus some money from me.(Dee's mother --my wife-- died ten years ago and sometimes I believe that she was happy to leave.) Dee's condition has no cure and it will probably get worse.

My gifts from this child are few which makes them heartbreakingly sweet. One is a rare time when she exhibits her real self: that wonderful smile, a fantastic friend, a loving

daughter. She has also been a helping hand with my yard and house work. Then, too, we sometimes enjoy riding our bikes on a trail, taking a long walk in the neighborhood, or nearby park, and having a long peaceful lunch together.

Le (Jan. '04) adds, "Dee does live independently in a city about an hour's drive from here. We visit back and forth regularly but more often when she is hospitalized. Our many discussions of her condition often result in an anguishing, tearful outburst, I just want to be normal, I just want to be normal, nothing else, just want to be normal! It breaks my heart. I also worry that some-day I will not be there when she needs me."

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

CLEO AND OTHERS

Pets are very dear to me, and I've had them most of my life. My earliest memory is of an angel fish named Cleo. I loved it dearly. One morning my mother found Cleo dead under a sea shell. When she showed me, I felt more wonder than grief. It was my first experience with death.

My first bird was a parakeet named Chee-Chee Choo-Choo. That poor creature endured me pulling out some of its long wing and tail feathers. She became very tame in spite of it. She even laid an egg, but it never hatched. Chee-Chee met her end when my baby sister corralled her under a blanket and sat on her. THAT gave me real grief!

Following Chee-Chee's death, I had another parakeet and named him Papaya, because he was green. One morning I took Papaya out of the cage while I was drinking orange juice. I perched him on the edge of my glass to see how far he could lean over to sip the juice. As you might guess, he fell in head first. I panicked and hollered. Fortunately, my mother was right there. She dumped the juice on the table, picked up the bird, rinsed him off at the sink and put him back in his cage. I was ashamed of myself.

I learned wonder at life's changes, grief of death and shame with my first pets.

Carol (Oct. '03) adds "I also had a series of cats, and now I have my daughter's cat, because she has moved away from home. This cat is a male long-hair, white with black ears, tail and spots. (He's sitting on my lap as I type this.) Wrigley is extremely affectionate, He follows my husband and me up and down the stairs, and writhes on the floor until he gets his tummy stroked. One of his favorite tricks is to walk nonchalantly towards the front door when he hears the doorbell ring, and dash outside when the door is open and my attention is diverted. Now, I've learned to expect this and thwart him."

WELCOMING

I believe a pet, like a child, has mirror-like qualities that reflect its feelings. After an absence, a dog cannot welcome you back with open arms, so it contents itself with a loving wagging tail and smiling face.

A cat welcomes with friendly purring, a trip to your lap or a happy caressing of your leg. Such responses help one to relax, and give a warm feeling of acceptance and love.

James (Nov.-Dec. '03) adds, "Happiness is contagious."

MAIZIE-THE CAT WHO CAME BACK

Before my husband, John, died of cancer in August 2001, we took in a young stray /outside cat who lived in a friend's yard. I named her Maizie for the brilliant yellow color of her coat . It was I who fed, watered, brushed her and took care of her litter box, but she instinctively clung to John.

Now, John was not exactly the biggest cat lover. Looking back, I swear that the reason the cat was so devoted to him is because she "sensed" his cancer before either of us knew about it. Later, the doctors told us the tumor they removed in 2000 was probably there five years, undetected.

After John passed, I went to stay elsewhere a while and returned four days later. Maizie seemed perfectly normal for my initial return, but ...within an hour, she started jumping to the window and looking out over and over again.

Next, she proceeded down the hall producing an eardrum-splitting caterwauling. She cried up and down the house from the living area to the bedroom. Back and forth, she went, back and forth. I was sure she was looking for John.

It had been our custom to allow Maizie to go out to the front yard and romp around with us. Above all this wailing, I asked her if she wanted to go out. I held open the door, she bounded out and I followed. But, to my surprise, she didn't play -- she took off! She just ran into the deep woods at one side of our country property. She didn't return that night-- or any night soon.

Over the next few weeks, there were sightings by neighbors. (Keep in mind neighbors are half a mile away.) From time to time at night when I went out and called her, I actually thought I "felt" her near.

One day in December, (over three months later) I opened the door to sweep some new fallen snow off the front walk ...and there she was!

"PURPPPP!" she greeted me!

" MAIZIE!!!" I cried, dropping the broom, "You came back!" I gathered her into my arms.

A cat psychologist friend suggested Maizie was mourning John's passing just like me. When I returned without John, she may even have gone out to actually search for him. During her absence, neighbors and other locals pinpointed her for me. Using an arc pencil to plot the sightings, I could almost draw a circle with a one-mile radius around our house.

It seems that when Maizie couldn't find John, she finally returned. She was pounds lighter by then-nearly three- paws in the grave. Apparently, she was ready to live with the fact that it was just the two of us.

It's amazing what some cats will go through and still manage to survive.

CaT (Nov.-Dec. '03) up-dates this story." While Maizie was away, one month to the day after John's passing, his youngest sister passed away. I inherited her cat, Jessica. Maizie immediately discovered she now had to share the house with a new boarder. I think she could sense healing this time. She joined right in grieving and mending with Jessica and me. It was great to have her back."

BERKELEY

I have a beloved four-year-old Maltese who nearly caused a family feud among my husband, daughter, son and me at Christmas. I insisted that the dog go with us to Colorado on a ski getaway. However, the condo we rented would not have dogs.

Our little fellow is only nine pounds. Berkley travels very nicely, and he doesn't shed, dig, chew, and hardly ever barks. As my breeder told us, his species was bred to sit on laps and love people.

After some "discussion," I got my way. We had a nice *relaxed* vacation and have not been charged the \$250 fine for having an animal. Peace has returned to the family.

Maeve (Feb. '03) adds, Maybe I didn't get caught but, I have to admit that I was being deceptive, and sneaking the little guy in and out...It was not a good lesson to teach my children..."

A RED TALE

Our family once owned an Australian Shepherd named Red, because of his beautiful russet coat. He was a smart, sweet, totally housebroken dog. Red loved everybody but he knew he was my husband's dog. Milton drove a pick-up truck and took him almost everywhere he went. He would say, "Load up, Red!" and the dog would jump into the back of the truck.

Red was very intelligent and well-behaved, so we had only a few rules for him. His constantly shedding hair caused problems in several ways. So I didn't take Red in my car with its velour upholstery; and he was not allowed on any of the household furniture. For the same reason, and to avoid his toenail scratches on the hard-wood floors, he was not permitted to go into the living and dining rooms. He was very obedient 99% of the time--but that remaining one percent could be surprising.

After Milton died, Red seemed to understand that we were on our own and he attached himself more closely to me. I talked to him as a human and he understood. One Sunday afternoon as I prepared to leave for a meeting, Red waited at the back door, all set to go with me. I explained to him, "No, Red, you can't go. You'll have to stay home this time." He gave me a baleful look and turned away--his feelings were hurt!

When I got home, Red was lying nonchalantly in the kitchen. It was unlike him not to greet me at the door so I knew he was still peeved at me. Later, in the living room, I saw that he had left a deposit on the oriental rug. We understood each other perfectly!

Red had a sense of humor, too. Late one night as I was closing the house, checking door locks and turning off lights, I patted him on the head and said, "Time for all red dogs to go to bed." When I went into my bedroom, there he lay; on my bed, with

his head on my pillow! I had to laugh—it didn't seem right to scold him for being on the furniture, when he was such a clown!

June Poucher (Jan '04) adds: *"I miss old Red; he was a faithful friend. He spoiled me for owning another dog."*

ALL I CAN SHARE NOW

Being a pet-person from way back, until a few days ago, I'd been looking forward to our *Ninepatch* talk of pets. Then, on Wednesday evening, Rudy, my beloved dog-friend, suffered a most untimely passing. Now, I'm caught between avoiding the topic for fear of bursting into a new bout of grief and wanting to talk about this dear, dear friend. So, as a middle ground, I'll share this.

Until now, I'd thought that years of *alone time* had taught me to deal well with some inner *loneliness*. Now though, as I stare out at the field where Rudy and I once played, I think of all the days that stretch ahead of me -- empty without him -- and I realize that I've been fooling myself.

I haven't learned to deal with my isolation. As long as Rudy was around I was never really alone.

TROR (Oct. '03) adds: *Rudolf Valentino Van Doherty was an awfully big name for such a tiny puppy, but he was one of the truly great 'loves' of my life. Rudy was a great com-fort through all the years my hubby was in the military and away so often."*

PRETTY IN PINK

Sometimes I wonder about the surges of cause and effect that ripple about in this world; how one little happenstance sets in motion a force that tugs, diverts, even picks up and drops in another place. When that thought sequence occurs, I inevitably ponder the case of Charlene -- the wild piglet brought to our family compound, and how she adapted, survived, and even created a joyous world in the unlikely situation in which she found herself.

Charlene, a mere two handfuls, was lifted from a wild litter with no mother. She arrived, and immediately made her mark. Put on the ground, she fearlessly squealed her way into the melee of dogs, cats, puppies and kittens and snuggled up with the littlest ones. With that, a wild creature defined herself in an alien setting using only her instincts and her intelligence. Charlene quickly dominated the yard. She could turn on a dime, outrun and out-think all of the others. If one of the much larger dogs nipped at her tempting tail, she could wheel around and butt the offender almost before the offense was committed. In retaliation, squealing, she would shove her head under the back legs of the dog, and flip it over. In no time at all, wherever Charlene went, she had a coterie of animals around her, enveloped in her incredible force field. We, too, were honored when she trotted up for a head-scratch.

Then Charlene started to grow, biiiiig, her appetite became voracious, formidable, even fearsome. She never had enough to eat, and complained loudly, rooting up the lawn and garden. Soon she began to forage in the woods, and discovered the RV park down the road where she began mooching from sympathetic campers. She raised a ruckus there and

I was afraid that someone would not realize she was a pet and shoot her, so I bought her a wide neon *pink collar*. We soon realized, however, that Charlene was simply getting too big. We were in trouble with the RV park authorities and now none of our pens would hold her. Life in the wild was out of the question, as she was fearless of humans. We felt like parents of a nearly three-hundred pound, out-of-control adolescent daughter. We fretted and argued about what to do.

Finally, soft-hearted friend with a ranch offered to take her. Upon her arrival there, she flipped all of the dogs and quickly established her leadership role. Everyone rejoiced. Then, another crisis loomed. The owner, a deputy sheriff, found that Charlene's wild scent was interfering with his training of attack dogs for his department. He apologetically told us he had to take her to a wild-animal rescue shelter.

She was accepted, and cared for. Missing her, we went looking at the shelter. There was a pen full of wild, squealing hogs, but no Charlene. The shelter manager explained that wild hogs tear up the habitats of native Florida animals, and have to be killed to keep them under control. As a matter of fact, he had just had a wild hog barbecue to raise money for the shelter. When I sadly informed him that one of those hogs was our erstwhile pet, Charlene, he laughed. No, she was still alive. She was so personable, with her *pink collar*, always coming up and offering her head to scratch, that he had given her to another shelter on the east coast that needed a "star" attraction.

*Joan H. (October '03) adds, "I keep thinking about the moral of this story. Is it: 'Leave helping the displaced to the experts?' or, 'We can learn from the wild and the free?' Maybe, 'Seize the moment because it won't last?' How about, "Sometimes there's no clean moral to every event in life.' I know one thing for sure. No matter the pros and cons of attempting a wild-animal rescue, I would not want to have missed the opportunity to meet a delightful pig with a **pink collar** named Charlene. "*

DOGGONIT

Lassie, Shep, Sport, Duchess I, Duchess II, Gretchen Gidget, Tassie and Maddie; a Collie, an English Shepherd, one of questionable parenthood, a German Shepherd... make that three German Shepherds (plus a dozen puppies)...., a Miniature Schnauzer and two Wire Hair Fox Terriers.

These are dogs I have owned and loved. They were baby sitters, herders, "Circus" performers, hiking partners, home security guards and all companions of the first order. Perhaps "owned" is an ill-chosen word much as one does not "own" one's children, spouse or best friends.

"Which is your favorite?" people always ask. It's like asking "Which is your favorite child?" I guess, if pressed, it's the one nudging my leg for her walk as I type these words. Or, perhaps it's the one whimpering for a snack as I pass her kennel. No, it must be the one begging for my lap as I settle in for a TV movie. Well, you get the idea. Now in my 76th year, I have known wonderful friends, family and lovers, but none more loyal and faithful than my four-legged tail-waggers. Excuse me now, gotta' go, someone's crying for a game of catch.

Don (Jan. '04) says, "If you really want to know about dogs, read first Jon Katz', A Dog Year, then his, The New Work of Dogs."

*

MISTRESS GAIL

by Miss Kitty Good Girl

.....the garage door! She's home.
I'll meet her at the door --
 my curiosity, you know.
She always says, "Hi Miss Kitty Good Girl!"
A little high cry will tell her
 "I'm helpless here alone.
 Where have you been?"
She's mine. I rub her legs, her feet, her shoes,
sprawl seductively in front of her.
I nibble her feet, lick her toes,
wrap my soft furry white legs around her ankles.
She will reach for me, pick me up,
snuggle my face, and I'll wriggle away.
We like a quiet place.
I'm always alert and full of fright
for unpredictable squealing grandchildren.
Is there a cat who has not felt the pain
of a child fascinated by a swishing tail?
I have been known to do a pirouette mid-air,
and streak out of sight.

Gail (Jan. '04) gives us an update, "Since beautiful and healthy No. 10 grandchild arrived on January 3, my life has not been my own. I love it, but I'm grateful to return to Miss Kitty and my own bed."

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

(Our Knowing and Our Spirituality)

MY HAIR

It's my hair again.
It is straight,
Shoulder length,
Growing longer.

I wash it once a week,

Dry it in the sun,
Pull it back
Olive oil on my palms
Glistening the strands.

I wear my hair pulled back
Into a G. Washington bob-tail,
Held by a sift ring
Or on my head,
Tacked up with combs.
It's fun to play!

Gone are the days
Of beauty parlors,
Of perms,
Of haircuts,
Of styles,
Of money spent.
All dropped away
As though they never were.

It's my hair again
And I love it-
And it's beautiful!

Phyllis (Jan. '04) Phyllis was one of my mentors and supported Ninepatch from its beginning. As a tribute to her spirit, over the last year, I published miscellaneous poems she gave me and her friend Father Lou Anderson before she died. This is her final Ninepatch poem.
Frances, Editor

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

JANUARY 2003 BOARD MEETING

It was a Sunday afternoon in January. Board member June and I were talking long distance to Georgene who lives in another state. We had spent nearly an hour discussing business matters and had come to the last topic on our agenda: special themes.

We first discussed topic suggestions we'd previously assembled, exchanging ideas about past "successes." After a few minutes, we came up with a new tactic for our special themes. It has two parts. First, we will not confine all submissions to one issue. There will still be two themes a year, but each one will continue for five months—half the *Ninepatch* year. This change allows time for stories (and poems) and also gives space

for those tales that are inspired by another's. So, starting with this issue, special theme stories and poems will appear after general topic anecdotes in **FABRICS**.

The first 2004 topic, PETS will continue through May. The next topic, THE BEST MONEY I EVER SPENT, will begin with the June issue and continue through November-December. The last topic we chose was for January-May 2005: THE KITCHEN TABLE.

We hope this change and new topics will encourage more readers to participate.

Frances, Editor

Frances Fritzie adds, "I always enjoy reading the stories, so varied in subject and express-ion. I hope now more of you will consider contributing! "

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