

# *Ninepatch*

*Stitch - by - Stitch*

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

**Editor's Note:** As in past Januarys, this letter is a reflection on my previous year.

January 2004

Dear Friends,

It is December and *fall* in Northern Florida. Doors and windows of my fiancé's house are closed to hold the sun's warmth. Outside, sunshine sends dark leaf patterns dancing as trees sway in a chill breeze.

*I sit at my computer in the front room with windows on my right and left where the view is mostly green trees and bushes. Straight ahead, I gaze through multi-paned French doors into a vibrant Pine, Live Oak and mixed deciduous forest. From this distance, the woods seem like a part of my life—one that is relatively unchanged.*

In the same way, my activities in 2003 are much the same as 2002. I continue to be *busy Fritzie*: writing for, editing and publishing *Ninepatch*. I also convene cut and paste parties, and another group that gathers occasionally to talk about books we've read. Sitting in silence and praying together has been a weekly blessing. I am grateful to have friends who share my interests.

Again this year, I visited my sons in Michigan. There, I also sipped coffee and exchanged stories with a few friends. Later, I stopped in my Indiana home town before returning to Florida. That branch of my kin gathered for a meal. Afterward, my cousins and their families sat in my aunt's living room and laughed, as we told new and old family tales.

*I pause in my recollection and look more closely at parts of the woods. Though emerald overall, I notice a few trees are even turning a sort of red and some are brownish and shedding leaves. Change is silently underway. In this, the woods echo another part of my life. I am also moving slowly into a new cycle.*

Last year's BIG event was my two-week Pilgrimage to Ireland. That journey released some adventurous energy which continued into 2003. In February, a girlfriend and I started driving to out-of-town singles dances. Laughing and telling stories, we spent happy hours rolling along and dancing from February through April.

That month, I met JK. The singles dancing continued a while, but I soon partnered only with JK. Since he lives over a hundred and fifty miles from me, at first we phoned. During an early conversation, we explored possible places to meet again. We were

coming up empty when he said the words that warmed my heart and eventually turned my life: It doesn't matter where we meet, as long as we are together.

In the end, he drove nearly three hours to see me that time and repeated the journey two weeks later. Since neither of us much liked dating, we just began a partnership. We traveled together over the summer and now, divide our time between his home in northern Florida and mine in the south central part of the state.

*I pause again and turn to gaze out windows on my right facing woods at the house's front. There, lush, azalea bushes flourish. A few bloom twice a year. They dot the green view with cheery red blossoms. These plants remind me of how my life seems, now that I am with JK.*

Azaleas are not native to these woods. JK brought each here as a small plant. He located it in a sun patch, watered it and marked it with a stake for protection. Each slowly adjusted. First, it must have put down more roots, then sent up new shoots and finally flowered.

After 14 years of single living, I am adjusting here, too. JK feeds, shelters and encourages me. The azaleas learned to share soil and sunshine. So I am learning to share space, and time. Scattered in JK's four acres of grasses, trees and shrubs, these ever-greens thrive and bloom happily. Once my roots are set, I will also send out new shoots. With maturation, blossoms will surely follow.

*As you journey into 2004, may you know the peace present in a silent wood.*

Frances Fritzie

*Frances Fritzie, Editor adds, "Each year before I write my annual summary-- which I use is a different from for my Christmas Letter-- I look over my file of previous letters. I am always a little surprised at what I "saw" in my pervious years. I am also thankful for that documentation of my life. It helps me gain a little perspective."*

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

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(Letters to the Editor)



Hi!

Thanks for your e-mail!

You asked where I was. We are traveling again—east and south. My mother is with my husband and me this winter.

I devour *Ninepatch* when I receive it. I so enjoy hearing what others are reading and doing as well as how they are feeling.

Love,  
Diana

*Diana ( June '03)adds,*

*"I have been attending a Bible study with my daughter one morning a week. I really miss being there when I travel. I hope I can locate a similar one wherever I am."*

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Hey Lady!

I agree that a FULL LIFE is the answer to letting a child move on *and* to reaching the needed balance. I'm beginning to explore what a full life -- based on *possibility* instead of *responsibility* -- will look like for me.

It's odd to be standing in the middle of the responsibility space I've created and to think, "Well - now -- here I am. What now? What do I want? What would I like? What will grow me? What shall I avoid or carefully not choose?"

It's a good place to be, but it's odd. The experience brings to mind Janis Joplin's lyric, *Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose*. The words seem negative, but that's just not true. It's more like, "I can lay this part of my life down now -- what shall I pick up instead? Why?" And, "For how long?"

No answers yet. I'm just coasting, waiting for my job to change since I suspect my company is about to sell. I'm also waiting for my son to graduate from high school in two and a half years. I'm waiting to see where I'll be and what I'll want then.

And who knows anyway? I'm just trying to sit still with myself and take it one day at a time. I'm trying to explore more social venues and make new friends. Currently, I have plenty of friends for a single mother -- but not nearly enough for a single *woman with a full life*.

Making new friends takes work. To me, it's going to new places and seeking out kindred spirits. This activity is what now fills the time that my son used to occupy.

Hugs,  
Sherryl

*Sherryl (Oct. '03) says, "Predictably, I'm more interested in spirituality than ever. That may even be an age thing since I'm creeping up on forty these days."*

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Dear Frances,

I have been "out of pocket"! I went to Mom and Dad's house for a visit. My mother took my girls and me shopping. When I starting unpacking this morning, I tossed out something unloved for every new item I hung in my closet – great progress with my cluttering.

One nice thing about being away from home, I came back with fresh eyes and recognized more I could toss. Another gift from my visit was seeing my parents' home FULL to every corner. I realized that in my tendency to save everything-- the apple didn't fall very far from the tree!

Love and prayers,  
Joy

*Joy J/W (Nov-Dec '03) observes, "Good grief! I discovered I have my school papers from elementary on up."*

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Dear Frances,

I want to comment on the sticky note enclosed in my October 2003's *Ninepatch*. It read. "*Some things have to be believed to be seen.*" That might be true with a water "diviner"... I wanted to figure out where to put my well on some property I am working on in Northern Michigan.

I was led to a water douser (diviner), someone who has the gift of being able to find good, abundant water using a willow stick. I met him that morning in the drizzle, an ordinary-looking fellow with a Detroit Pistons hat and jacket, about seventy, I'd say. He had three sticks that were freshly cut and looked like big Ys. I showed him the area where the well needed to be and he started walking around holding the two ends of the Y in his hands.

Every so often, the single end of the stick would be pulled to the ground and he'd mark that spot with his toe. All the time, this man is going on and on about all the successes he's had and also sharing that he tries to find two streams that are perpendicular so that there is less chance of missing the good flow of water.

Now the final spot is marked, he comes at it from several directions just to verify it. We mark the proposed well with a stake and he says, "Do you want to try?"

So he showed me the exact way to hold the divining rod and I walked toward that spot... and as I approached the stake, all at once the stick just pulled to the ground at that spot. I could hardly believe the strong pull even though I believed in someone else's powers. I think my strong belief in this process made me able to do it!

Anyway, that's my dousing story. I'll keep you posted as to how good the water turns out to be.

Love  
Palma

*Palma (Nov.-Dec.'03) adds, "The wild thing was that later, as we talked, we realized that thirty years ago for a period of six weeks, he had been my student teaching*

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*advisor. I hadn't recognized his name, a good Finnish name, as he had gone by "Mr. T." which was easier for the kids to pronounce."*

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**- - - - - F-O-R-U-M - - - - -**

From Readers to Readers

Dear Cat,

I visited the web page dedicated to your recently deceased daughter's memory. What a beautiful child -- and what a gift to your life. Thank you for providing a place for us to find out a small bit about her.

While viewing your site (<http://home.epix.net/catcan/index.html>) I prayed for your ache to lessen so you can get the rest you need. And, I grieved with you.

In Nov.-Dec.' 03 *Ninepatch* you wrote: "I look at the pictures I took (on a visit with friends) and it all seems surreal. I think," *My gawd! That's me! Smiling! Laffin'!...How can that be when the pain inside remains?"* There is nothing ridiculous in being surprised by the toll sadness and loss takes on one's smile and body... Nothing ridiculous in now being overwhelmed by those things that used to give you joy. I can't feel what you feel, but I can experience some part of it ...and I do.

Weep as you must, and take some comfort knowing that you will smile again-- even if it's never the same smile you had when your daughter was physically present in your world. Most of all, remember that others grieve with you.

Your *Ninepatch* friend,  
Georgene

*Georgene* (See *Ninepatch* spirituality comments later in this issue) says, "There are times when I wish the people in my circle approved of wailing and keening. It's not right that one must muffle pain of great magnitude."

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**- - - - - F-O-R-U-M - - - - -**

(Letters from one Reader to Another)

A CROSS TO BEAR

Years ago I met a guy known to be much of a macho man. He was *boss*—he set the rules, even to the point of being brutal to his children. His idea of loving his mate was to keep her pregnant and at home. (Luckily, she was very sturdy, even to the point of delivering her own children.)

Their twelfth child was a girl born with Downs Syndrome. There was something special about this child. She altered the man’s prevailing attitude. This child was treated with a love and kindness that had not been witnessed by relatives or acquaintances.

As this special child grew up, she was spoiled to a certain degree. The other children were also treated like they had never been before. No more hollering and screaming from dad—and-- no more spankings. The lady of the house was also treated with the dignity she deserved.

I was in their home for Sunday dinner once. Several members of the family were present. During conversation at the table, the man’s son- in- law said, "It must be very difficult to deal with Fanny in her condition."

With a smile and a twinkle in his eye, the father answered, "We all have a cross to bear."

From that statement I learned what *sacrifice* is all about. It is not what you do without. It is what you learn to do **with**. Later, I saw that after the birth of this little girl, the man—somehow-- learned how to be gentle and generous with those he loved.

I always admired him.

*Lee (Oct. '03) adds more to his story, "Fanny grew up to be a very loving person. At forty- two she was confined to a nursing home because her mother was physically unable to tend to her needs. They say even there she went around cheering up the other people confined with her."*

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**Reality cannot be fenced in.**

*James (Nov.-Dec. '03) adds, "What is, is."*

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### CHANGE-- A CHALLENGE

Change is hard. It can be challenging. When I was married to my husband the first time, I did everything his way. We were both unhappy. Hard times led to parting.

Now we talk over everything and make decisions together. During the tough years apart, I had to learn to be myself, and to be honest with myself and others. Bit by bit, I accepted myself and my husband just the way we are.

Now we are married again and life is going much better. Yes, the change I went through was hard. But, that doesn't mean it was bad. There is good and bad in everything. I found the good.

*LindaSue (Sept. '03) adds, "Being married to my husband again, my life was different. At first I drifted from my usual activities. In time, I again found my friends and the things I used to do."*

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### WHAT LIFE FOR MY DAUGHTER?

My daughter, Dee-Dee, was 15 when she returned from a Girl Scout Camp and related what had happened to "one of the girls". She said this girl had a fantastic nightmare or real- life experience which was entirely new to us. The girl had heard voices which urged her to do great bodily harm to herself and even take her own life! Shortly thereafter, one of Dee's teachers informed us she was inserting needles into her arms and hands. Her grades suffered and her personality changed from a happy, fun-loving and friendly teenager to a belligerent, distant person we hardly knew. We consulted a guidance counselor then took her to a well-known center in an adjacent state. After several months she was released and pronounced "stable".

One night a girl friend of hers called to tell us that Dee had taken an overdose of aspirin to kill herself. I frantically searched our small town and luckily found her and had her stomach pumped. It revealed that she indeed had ingested a large quantity of aspirin. Next, she and the same girl friend ran away. Several days later they were located in a distant town where they had broken into a store and stolen a truck and camper. Dee took the blame for it and was sentenced to the state "Reform School." After that, she moved away from home. She joined up with a guy and stole a car. Again, Dee took blame. The result-- prison!

My wife and I drove the 250 mile round trip twice a month to visit her where we went through the security checks, barred doors, locks, slamming of cell doors and all the usual security measures. Her time was not completely lost, though. While there, she earned her GED and talked of attending a vocational school.

*Le (Oct. '03) adds, "My wife and I were hopeful. We financed and encouraged Dee to look to the future and associate with friends who would be good for her. We provided her with cars, clothes, money, love, counseling, and whatever we thought might help." (More next month.)*

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### HOW I KEPT BUDGET WOES FROM CAUSING CHRISTMAS BLUES

Christmas without credit is something that used to seem impossible, but this year I left my plastic out of my holidays. It wasn't easy, considering my writer's life had hit a lean streak and I was worrying about groceries, not gifts. I had to teach myself to shop

smarter, not harder. I avoided soaring January balances using advanced planning, homemade gifts and *creative redistribution*.

First, in mid-November, I made a list of who I'd give gifts to. Friends and coworkers were out this year and I told them why when asked. Next, I assessed what I had. For example, there was my never-opened George Forman grill and a number of free books I'd also received. Through *creative redistribution*, I considered how to use these. I thought of my grandparents who enjoy cooking and my mom's "significant other" likes to read.

I thought on. I asked myself who might be happier with something sentimental. One answer was my father who wanted more of my baby pictures.

Many holiday gift-giving obligations were also fulfilled with my oil paintings, several drying on my radiator. I had to do multiple coats of paint to have them look nice. Paintings multiplied, and drying propped against furniture, they added a rainbow of unmixed colors to my room. I used paintings and supplies I already had. I even primed and painted over an unfinished piece to save money on canvas.

The centerpiece of my Christmas creations was *The Table*. Born out of my boyfriend's and my promise that we would exchange homemade gifts that reflected trying something new. (In other words, no paintings from me were allowed.) *The table* for him was my first attempt at carpentry. Supplies cost forty dollars -- by far the most I spent on any one gift.

The *real* gift this year? Something that no credit card could buy: my time and effort.

*Christa Weber* (Oct. '03) continues working to pay off her credit card debt, aiming toward a goal of June when she plans to quit her job, move to Boston where her boyfriend now lives and rely entirely on her free-lance writing. She recently began editing her novel which is finally done.

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

A READER'S RESOURCES

I always enjoy discovering what the "Patchers" are reading. I also like reading the weekly [bookreporter.com](http://bookreporter.com), a weekly discussion of books authors and things literary. For example, a recent issue featured a poll of what best-selling authors are reading.

Magazine readers may wish to check out, *Utne* (rhymes with chutney)*Reader*, a digest of articles from the alternative press.

*Don* (Nov.-Dec. '03) adds, "I celebrated birthday 75 with the purchase of a garage-sale bicycle and now to the applause of my neighbors run my Wire Fox Terrier alongside for two miles daily."

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

Second in a series:  
NINEPATCH :  
SPIRITUAL OR NOT?

Our *Ninepatch* Board has had several discussions about the continued use of the term, "spirituality" to describe our fellowship. So, for the next few months, each Board member will comment on how she sees "spirituality" and how it relates (or not) to *Ninepatch*. This month we hear from Georgene.

When I originally pondered whether or not we should continue to include "spirituality" as a one defining word for our fellowship I thought:

*Spirituality is where Ninepatch started, but I can't say that is where we are today. Moving off that as a defining word is probably a good idea. What we replace it with will take some discussion.*

After taking more time with it I've discerned that I am comfortable with including "spirituality" as one of our essential descriptors.

Sharing our spirituality with one another is simply sharing one dimension of ourselves—one dimension of many when we share our stories. Granted, many of our earlier *Ninepatch* submissions often included perspectives on easily defined spiritual subjects such as prayer-life, temptation, God, Higher-Power, the Christian tradition, and exploration of other religious and contemplative paths. But just because these topics are no longer at the forefront of the subjects shared does not mean that spirituality has disappeared from our musings and mandates.

I think it is our need for community, which includes a longing for spiritual connection, that we return to our *Ninepatch* circle again and again. Our stories cross a breadth of subjects because we don't impose limits on what we share. We don't strictly define acceptable subject categories—spiritual or otherwise. Yet, if we assume our spirituality is not contributing when we share our stories, then we erase and ignore an essence of every contributor.

Because I trust that our belief systems add color, texture, and dimensions to the stories of *Ninepatch* contributors—even when the stories themselves don't mention traditional spiritual words—I would like to leave the word "spiritual" when we write our purpose:

*Ninepatch is a community of women (& men) stitched together by a common desire to share personal mental, physical, and spiritual growth.*

*Georgene (Apr. '03) adds, "As I've grown older I've discovered how much more my spiritual beliefs make up who I am and not just what I do. I hate the wrinkles, but I sure love what I discover on the road of life."*

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IS THERE A PET STORY IN YOUR LIFE?

The February '04 issue is dedicated to pet tales. In pre-paration, I continue to think of the animal parade that passed through my childhood. I suppose it was because they could not give me a brother or sister that my parents mostly indulged my pet requests. Yet, a kitten was one pet I was late in acquiring.

My mother's parents lived on a farm where Grandma fed table scraps to *the cats*. She regularly supported a wild colony of eight or ten. She claimed they kept the rats and mice under control. Every spring there'd be at least one new nest of kitties. My cousins and I would enjoy petting the newborn furry balls when the mother cat was away. Early life was the only time we could get near the young animals. After a few weeks, even the newborns were wildly unapproachable.

My father always answered my kitty pleas with, "Over my dead body." Still, one day I brought a "very young barn kitty" home from Grandma's farm. Daddy fussed, but she stayed. Before being neutered, one night Sally gave birth to a litter of three kitties in a corner on our enclosed back porch. Mother and I peered in from the doorway—watching with wide eyes.

After my third grade year, our house also saw a succession of birds First, I had a canary. After she died, we bought a blue parakeet. When the bird cage was again empty, one noon, I looked out the window next to our dining table and saw our cat holding something green and fluttering. I rescued Pepper, unharmed. Sally perched on the couch and watched that bird every day. I think she wondered what she'd missed!

None of these fowl include the pastel Easter chicks and ducks that appeared from year to year. They lived in our basement until summer. After a summer, penned in our patch of grass, my dad always found "a farmer" to take my by-now- house-inappropriate pet.

While reading through my pet parade, I hope you thought, " *I remember a \_\_\_ I once had...* " HOLD THAT THOUGHT! Take pen in hand (or walk to the computer) and tell us your story!

***Frances Fritzie, Editor***

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

(Our Knowing and Our Spirituality)

**OLD AGE**

**Do you have hair  
You can spare?**

My head is barer  
All the time.

Do you have steak  
As tender as can be,  
So I can chew  
More easily?

Is there moisture  
From the sky  
To loosen up  
My eyes so dry?

When lights are low,  
Do wrinkles show,  
Or do I just know  
They are there?

Oh my—pie in the sky—  
I'll be young again  
Bye and bye.

*Phyllis (Sept. '03) Several years ago, Phyllis sent Frances a bundle of poems to use for Ninepatch. This is one of the last and is dated Aug. '96. Phyllis died in January 2002.*

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#### ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Blinding fire on the horizon  
electrified my senses, jolted me  
into mesmeric reverence  
on November 20, 2003.

This sunset, like the flaming sun  
on snow in the red rocks of Sedona  
one March, was full of promise.  
Illumined turquoise  
lakes lay above the glow,  
with two roostertails racing  
for the shining shore.  
Was it speedboats in Eden?  
Had Lake Michigan ascended?

Mountains of cranberry peach light  
hung suspended above  
in a hallelujah chorus of brilliance.  
My brain went white. A feast of  
color layered the gentle rich hue  
of robin's egg blue  
with baby pink stretching into  
deep purple, darkening in the east  
to smoke and pewter.

**The world really had turned  
upside down or it was a glimpse  
of the Great Hereafter.**

*Gail (Nov.-Dec. '03) adds, " Since my car recently burned up in a near head-on  
and I walked away unscathed physiccally, the trauma prompted me to take care of my  
Will. My attention has been on my end times, and perhaps the exceptional sunset that  
day really jolted me out of morbidity and into the glory of heaven on earth. "*

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