

Ninepatch
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February 2005

Dear Friends,

Inside the church library, the air conditioner hummed. Its periodic breath cooled fifteen of us squeezed around a board-room type table designed for ten.

The chairperson welcomed all to our spirituality- centered group and then, we prayed aloud together. After a few readings, she announced our topic today was, *Surrender*.

“To God’s Will,” I thought. I try to live a “right” life — a kind of “God’s Will.” I also watch for clues to follow God’s lead.

One by one the ladies volunteered their, “experience, strength and hope.” Still, after forty-five minutes I had nothing to say. Suddenly, the chairlady began calling on those who had been silent. It was then the TV show, “*Joan of Arcadia*” came to mind.

In it, high school girl, *Joan*, takes on special projects for *God*. However, she does it because *God* suggests it. Under the guise of various strangers, *God* appears as a man or woman, old or young, and gives *Joan* a spiritual assignment.

Joan also tries to do “*God*’s Will.” It’s hard for her. Sometimes she tries too hard. Then, as her efforts go awry, she frowns at, talks back to and even yells at *God*. (*God*, however, is never upset and takes it all in stride.)

Thus, when the chairperson called on me, I began, “Lately, I’ve been living a “*Joan of Arcadia*” life.”

Like *Joan*, I had been trying too hard, working at what I thought was “right” -- being a good wife in social and family situations. Before the holidays, JK and I entertained house guests: two of his children, a spouse and four grandchildren. Not three days after they left, a couple came to help JK complete details on the new garage. These friends worked two days and also stayed over.

Being this “right” kind of wife drained me. My hard work left me worn and empty. However, unlike *Joan*, I did not blame God. Instead, I told myself I would *get through* this. If anything, I tried harder to fill the role I saw. However, after grocery shopping, cooking, washing, and lots of general conversation, I could not sleep.

Troubled, I did turn to God, but not in anger. Like a five-year old, kneeling at the side of my bed as Grandma listened, I said blessings: “God bless Mother and Daddy and ...” I repeated the process each time I awoke during hours of darkness. This cycle ended when aroma tendrils of brewing coffee announced my day was starting.

Later, during the last couple’s stay, JK and I developed a relationship problem. It was the last straw. When our guests finally left, I raged – not at God – but at my husband. I considered leaving, but was frozen and unable to take action. Soon, pressure of my inner pain and indecision led to hysteria. By midnight, JK quietly held me until I cried myself out. That night my prayers were not blessings, but pleas, “*Help me God! Help me!*”

Unable to say what I needed, I trusted God to know. But, in the morning, nothing much changed. I did not leave and still cried. Somehow, JK remained calm through my carrying on. During a morning bout of tears, he counseled me, "Try praying."

"I *have been!*" I wailed, "Over and over, *over and over!*" I sniffled and ended weakly, "God doesn't hear me."

Without a word JK put his arms around me and held me again until I quieted.

TV stories simplify life. They roll weeks into one hour. At each program's end, *God* encourages *Joan*. At the end of each story, *God* rewards her with a spiritual truth from the situation. In real time however, I endured long, sad days while my Higher Power remained silent.

Then, one day, out of nowhere, JK said to me, "Remember when you were praying and crying that God didn't hear you?"

I paused. "Yes ...," I said, suddenly alert and wondering why he brought up that sore subject.

He replied simply, "Well, *I heard you.*"

Like *Joan*, God finally showed me a spiritual truth -- my suffering had worth.

Frances Fritzie

Frances Fritzie adds, "There's a prayer that in its third stanza reminds me God always has a use for my experiences and that 'God's Will' comes in all kinds of packages. Now, I know my experience was a blessing."

**"...Therefore, I will trust God whatever,
wherever I am.**

I can never be thrown away.

**If I am in sickness, my sickness may
serve God;**

**in perplexity, my perplexity may serve
God.**

God does not work in vain.

God is aware of what God is about.

God may take away my friend,

may throw me among strangers,

may allow me to feel desolate,

may allow my spirits to sink,

may hide my future from me,

Still, God knows what God is about."

-John Henry Cardinal Newman

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

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(Letters to the Editor)

Dear Fritzie,

Your soulful yearnings about your hometown and the feeling of wanting to "go home" are familiar. For me, they have always been a source of inner tension, not to say conflict.

There's a longing to relive the innocence of early life, but also a sense of regret at having lost the opportunities of youth. Maybe there's more to this, but I don't want to think about it right now.

Love,
Fred

Fred (Jan. '05) says, Author, Maya Angelou, once said something like, "The more we ponder returning home, the more we realize we never really left." I agree.

*

Dear Frances,

Your January '05 letter was nostalgic; you seem to yearn for what used to be – or perhaps what never was. Artist Norman Rockwell captured the essence of such an *Americana* feeling so well in his paintings.

In telling our stories, often a reader sees things about us we don't see. When you talk about your sapped energies, I wondered if you might possibly have been bored or apathetic. We don't want to feel that way about our families — that's not Rockwell — hence we are conflicted. I often experience feelings about some of my family members that I would rather not feel or know!

Bless you, My Friend,
June

June Poucher (Jan. '05) says, "I love nostalgia. It lends a patina of value to what might otherwise be ordinary."

Hello Frances,

How are you today? I hope you found some time for yourself. We all need space, sometimes.

My husband and I don't do much in the way of trips in the winter months. We don't seem to do much with family either. After my mom died, my brothers went their own way and my dad travels a lot. He does stop in once in a while to see me. (See next.) One brother also checks on me from time to time. That's all that happens with my original family anymore. My husband and I get together with our daughters and grandchildren for Thanksgiving and Christmas. That is the only "family" we see any more.

Maybe that's why I don't like the holidays much. I miss the grandmas and our mothers who are both gone. I also miss the big family gatherings —hectic as they were. Nowadays, we usually go out to eat for special occasions then come back to our house for desserts. There's not the "visiting" that used to happen at the big gatherings.

I miss the old days... the *real* old fashioned holidays.

God bless you!
Love and prayers,
LindaSue

LindaSue (Jan. '05) adds, "Remember our old friend who is going through a divorce? I sent her a card. I hope she is doing alright. I remember when I was alone. It was a large adjustment. I kept to myself a lot until I found that meeting I attended. You said you didn't really like most things other singles did. I didn't feel comfortable with either marrieds or singles!"

Hello!

How are you? I've been busy with extra writing assignments which means more money, but also busy searching for more work. In addition to the free-lancing I do, I still need a steady job.

Back in November, I was looking forward to returning to The States — but not the North's cold weather. Yet, here I am, frigid temps and all!

My mother came to Costa Rica for a visit before I left. Then my boyfriend flew down and spent two and a half weeks with me before we flew back to The States together. (In March, my guy and I plan to find a place of our own — away from the three roommates!)

That's going to be a relief. I sometimes feel a little over-whelmed with all my responsibilities here; in Costa Rica I got so used to doing whatever I pleased whenever I pleased.

Hope you are well!
Christa

Christa Weber (Jan. '05) adds, "Before my visitors from The States came, all the curtains needed to be dusted, the floors scrubbed and the windows and sills washed. It was work, but at least it was exercise and something to whittle away the hours while I was waiting!"

Editor's Note: I am happy to announce that Christa has joined us on the Ninepatch Board of Directors.

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

REFLECTION

In reflection, not just for 2004, but for my entire life, I have seemed to bite off more than I can chew, overestimate my stamina, capability, and resolve.

I believe it has much to do with my addictive nature, my gulping life in all its forms: beauty of nature, informational materials, and rushing hither and yon, to taste all of life's experiences. It's moderation that I require — that *Easy-does-it, but do it!* Lifestyle perpetuated in my 12-step Program.

Alas, despite remaining in The Program, the past year was not as full of serenity solutions. I made fewer meetings, added less meditation, and hence, had a feeling of imbalance. It was a good year though — very good.

The attention paid me by a lifelong friend, high school classmate, late- life lover, spirited me into losing weight, through better sensible eating and an exercise program such as I never practiced in recent years. Previously, I hiked with clubs and even swam in summer. But in 2004, I swam almost every day — taking advantage of an indoor pool. As a result, I have a handle on my high cholesterol, and my weight. The best part is the feeling about myself that looking- good engenders.

The previously mentioned renewed attention from the late-life lover has developed into a long- distance relationship. This suits me, since I have an extremely busy schedule. I like being available for grandchildren and family functions. I also work part-time and find it a very rewarding job. In addition to these, I keep up with many long-time and new friends.

Life is good.

Gail (June '04) adds, "I didn't mention that I also love to travel and go as much as I can fit in my time off and budget. For example, last year I returned to Vermont for a class reunion. There, I experienced the rolling vivid Green Mountains, the bucolic nature of rock fences and winding rivers, valleys and farmland uncompromised by roadside billboards."

ANOTHER GARDEN OF INNOCENCE BURIAL

This morning my husband and I attended another *Garden of Innocence* service. The life of baby Mercy was celebrated and her death mourned. It had rained earlier and the rain still fell from the leaves of the trees as the wind gusted from time to time. The gray sky felt like it was suspended just feet above us.

Today is the first time an American Indian provided the eulogy. (Though non-profit, the *Garden of Innocence* is not tied to any religious organization.) It was so incredibly beautiful. He first sang a song about the birth of the spirit. (See next.) It was in his native language, Kumeyaay, but as often happens in times of sadness, the meaning of words you don't necessarily understand are translated in the heart.

In his talk, he spoke of how, in times like this, it is best to sit quietly and listen to the leaves. He ended with words that painted a picture of our hearts. First, they burn brightly in anger because we live in a culture where children are abandoned. Then, our hearts burn brighter in honor of the child. Finally, our hearts on fire light the way for Mercy to go to the Great Spirit.

From the moment this leader spoke, my tears fell for Mercy, for myself, and for my world — and the hope of risen Lord burned brighter than the fiery anger in my heart. This was all as it should be.

As balloons rose to celebrate the journey of Mercy to heaven, I was lifted by the promise of resurrection.

Georgene (Nov.-Dec. '04) adds, "Today we had a woman in the group that wept quite loudly—unusual for these services for abandoned children, as most volunteers weep quietly, if at all. I was told that it was Mercy's grandmother. When she found out the baby was born prematurely, died, and had been turned over for indigent burial, she looked for her. At the last moment the grandmother found out that the Garden of Innocence was going to bury the baby at the service this morning, so she came. Hard stuff."

The future will always become
the past.

James (Jan. '05) adds, "The path to changing the past is changing the future."

*

-H-U-R-R-I-C-A-N-E-S-
And Other Weather Stories
(Our Special Topic)

KEEPING PERSPECTIVE

The good Lord took care of me again, during Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Jeanne and Ivan. I had no damage until Hurricane Jeanne. Each time we had hurricane warnings, I went and stayed with my son and his wife. He lost power – and AC in the 90- degree

heat. I chipped in and together we bought a generator so we could sleep and cook. It helped take the edge off. Luckily, we had the generator because we used it for two of the three other storms. We used that again for one night.

One of the nice things that happened during my stays there is my daughter-in law did not work during the worst of the weather. It was nice to visit with her. (See next.)

In spite of the good points of our time together, the major storms were very stressful. They wore me down. I needed to pack up valuables and papers each time and then stay in another place. Just being out of my own home and bed — was bad enough.

I kept my composure pretty well due to my positive-thinking, helpful friends and also meeting regularly with other spiritual seekers. That helped me keep some perspective.

Helen B. (July '04) adds, "I lost my screened patio and car port during the last hurricane, Jeanne. But, from what I saw on my street, I am lucky to have a home at all."

FRANCES —
Editor or Hurricane?
(September 12, 2004—
an email)

Hey Frances!

You sure have caused a lot of conversation all throughout the state!! (Don't feel bad, the next one formed will be a "J" name so maybe they'll call it *Joanne*!

I hope you are fine and you are safely "up in JK's woods". That is probably a good place to be for a few more days. I see that Hurricane Ivan is on his way. Hopefully, he won't hit this part of our state.

Joanne W.

Joanne W. adds, "We continue to have a positive attitude about the various stages of my husband's cancer. We pray for the best."

*

HURRICANE MEMORIES

I just read the January '05 *Ninepatch* over morning coffee at *Einstein's Bagels* outdoor café, so I make these notes while the memories of our fall hurricanes are still fresh in my mind.

First, it's lucky you were out of state during the hurricanes, Frances, but sorry to hear of the damage to your house.

My wife and I sat through three storms in our home near Orlando: Charley, Frances and Jeanne. (Hurricane Ivan traveled up the West Coast.) We lost power once for thirty hours and cable TV for five days. However, we emerged relatively unscathed. It was a great help that a good friend, a custom builder, sent his crew to board up our windows!

We lost one oak tree, some of our stockade fence blew down and, of course, branches and limbs of our neighbors' trees cluttered yard and pool. I had help with clean up, too. My son and son-in-law came over and together we picked up the mess.

I was sad to see stately trees down all over beautiful, elegant Winter Park not far from us. There, some of my friends lost of power for a *couple of weeks*. (See next.)

We were also luckier than my friend, Michael, who lost his beautiful beach house at Ponce Inlet. Often, I visited there to write and recharge my creative batteries. It's also the place where, standing in the surf, I baptized both of Michael's children.

These losses affected me more than my own insignificant damage.

Don

Don (July '04) says, "I must share this bit of serendipity: while we were without electricity ...no lights, no TV, no computer, no microwave, hot water or sewing machine, we pulled out a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle that had never been opened and worked it by candlelight! It was an opportunity to share many things that drew us closer together."

HURRICANE HURRY
(September 25, 2004- - an email)

Okay, so we lied! We *were* planning on staying put through Hurricane Jeanne. However, the authorities called for *mandatory mobile home evacuation*.

So, we drove seventy some miles to the Comfort Inn at Bradenton Beach. Hard to believe but this time the west coast — near the ocean—was actually safer! There was a family in our central Florida area that we could have gone to stay with. However, my husband and I had simply been missing each other due to our work and volunteer schedules. So we decided to spend some quality time together.

It all worked out for the best.

Pam

Pam (June '04) adds, "The wind was already blowing pretty strong when I wrote the line above. So, I quickly threw things together and we drove west to safety – and had some fun!"

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

A DISCOVERY

I must share a new discovery with *Ninepatch*. All *seekers* all must get the book, Claiming the Spirit Within edited by Marilyn Sewel and published by Beacon Press.

This volume contains a collection of poems written by women. They are not just *for* women, though. Men will also benefit from reading these lines. They help one understand the *Feminine* Aspect of God and those ties to Mother Earth.

I know that readers will enjoy this book, but I offer a word of reading advice. This book is not written to be read cover – to – cover. Each aspect of these poems deserves to be digested and time taken to be assimilated.

Love, Joy and Peace

Lee (See next.)

Lee (Jan. '05) says, "This is a book that I have read with my wife, my adult daughter and a friend. It is a sharing of life's experiences, connecting men and women in the spiritual sense."

EXTRA READING TIME

Recently, my computer crashed. I had some time to read while I was waiting for all my repair components to arrive. That's when I read, Sand in My Eyes. It's a memoir in its 3rd printing and is certainly worth reading.

Author, Seirgniore Russell Laune was fifteen when she and her family left their servants, friends, and spacious home on the East Coast to homestead on the Texas Panhandle. She married an attorney (Mr. Laune) in Texas during July of 1896. Together, they traveled by horse and buggy (on their honeymoon) to Nebraska. After that, they continued on to Oklahoma. There, they settled in Woodward.

At that time Woodward was nothing more than a few houses, a few stores and a railhead for shipping cattle to the East Coast. The town had no sidewalks, no electricity, no paved streets, no library, no industry and no social organizations. However, in time, the Launes joined other pioneers in promoting municipal, commercial, social and educational facilities and institutions.

My overall rating is: excellent. This is a *must read!*

Le (Jan. '05) gives us his update, "I've been to one or two dances a week since I arrived in Florida. I've also done a little golfing, but lately I've been just trying to stay warm!"

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

HOW I SEE *Ninepatch*

Editor's note: in the next few months, we will give space for readers' comments about our newsletter.

You know, on the one hand I see *Ninepatch* as simply a group of friends keeping in touch, on the other it's about personal spiritual journeys. Frances' Editor's Letters almost always touch on this in one way or another ... and yet, it's more too.

Lynn/TROR (Sept. '04) says: "What do you say, readers? How do YOU see Ninepatch?"

OUR END-OF- THE- YEAR BOARD MEETING

It was December '04 when Georgene, June, new member, Christa and I were finally able to meet by telephone and discuss *Ninepatch* business.

June and I were on phones at my house in Florida, Georgene sat in California and traveling Christa answered her phone that day, in Nevada.

After asking God/ Higher Power/ The Universe to guide us, we began. Always near the top of our agenda is the financial situation. (At the end of this report, you will find our end- of- year numbers. These June adjusted to reflect December donations and expenses.)

After that we looked at membership numbers. Thirty-six readers receive our paper issue and another sixteen receive our online publication. (This is a no- art, no- columns and no- special print version of the paper publication.) We are not sure how many readers we have through the website. We can count only the number of times someone *looked at* the website – even if the *same* person looked a hundred times. The number for 2004 averages 25,706 a month! Of those who came to the site, the average number who looked into *more than the first page* was 1,961. We agreed these numbers support our continued website outreach efforts. If you have not visited our website, we encourage you to do so. Our web address is: www.ninepatch9.org

Another area we discussed was “special topics.” Last month we began “Hurricanes and Other Weather Stories.” Because of the many hurricane stories I received during Florida’s fall experience, “Kitchen Table” was moved and will begin in June '05. For January '06 our topic is “The Vacation.” (Don’t wait to send your stories! I’ll save them for the right time slot.)

As an additional monthly article, next month we begin the *Bernard Pivot Questionnaire*. Georgene will present the questions and her responses. We enjoy reading others’ comments and hope you will send us yours!

Finally, we shared outreach ideas. This time we agreed to contact readers who have dropped from our mailing list in the past few years.

We always welcome new ideas. If you have ideas -- kindly send them to us!

Editor, Frances

NINEPATCH Annual Summary, year ending 12-31-04

Cash carryover 12-31-03 \$402.93
Cash contributions \$930.00
Donations in Kind \$ 28.94

Cash on hand 12-31-04 \$421.88

Expenses:

Printing and copying \$348.42
Postage \$159.84
Office Supplies \$ 40.48
Website, AOL, LD . . \$252.00
General Ledger:
License fees . . . \$ 81.25

PO Box rent . . . \$ 38.00
Computer/virus . \$ 20.00

Annual totals: \$1361.87 \$1361.87

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