

June2005

Ninepatch

Stitch - by - Stitch

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

Editor's Note: Here is a recent page from my spiritual journal.

June 2005

Dear Friends,

On the long white-topped table, coffee glistened in white foam cups and blue-labeled water bottles stood like place-markers before chatting and laughing people. Then, a cuckoo on the wall announced noon and our group began.

After a moment of silence, we recited *The Serenity Prayer*. Before long, the chairman asked if anyone had a topic they'd like discussed. Immediately, a young woman waved her hand. At the chair's nod, her words tumbled over one another, rushing to relate a crisis with her children. Wiping tears, she ended her story.

There was pause as we absorbed her story. Then, the chair suggested we discuss, "Acceptance" and "What to do when life doesn't go the way we plan."

Like popcorn when it just begins to pop, people took random turns at relating their experience. For about forty-five minutes I listened, absorbing it all. Then suddenly, words "came."

In a space, I introduced myself and began, "In this program, I have learned that life might bring pain, but I can choose whether to suffer or not... Others said when they asked their Higher Power (who I usually call God) for help, their suffering was relieved."

I went on, "I had a hard time doing this. It seemed silly. (God *knew* I needed help, right? So why ask?) Finally, one time when I was down -- in desperation I called, *Help me God!*"

I paused before continuing, "The amazing thing is that almost immediately I felt r-e-l-i-e-f. *Wow!* I thought, "*It works!*" After that first event, for some time, asking for help continued to bring immediate comfort. Then came the dark night I wrote about in my letter February of 2005. When I finally cried, "*Help me God!*" I did not immediately feel better. I thought I did something *really wrong*. I felt lost.

Six weeks passed and I was slowly healing when I wrote the Feb.'05 letter wherein I at last found something *good* in the situation. Over those l-o-n-g weeks, I wondered again and again why *Asking God for help* did not work.

Impatient, I sought answers. First, I phoned a girlfriend who shared my spiritual philosophy and had also at one time done a kind of counseling. I hoped she'd say my anxiety that night was a "panic attack." Silently, she listened to my story. Then the line was quiet a moment. When she spoke, she told me that panic attacks were not quite like what I described. Inwardly, I sighed. I hoped for a quick fix and armor against another "episode."

Next, I sought counsel from a professional psychologist. The youngish woman who sat with me also heard my tale without comment. At the end of our first session, she intimated I was suffering from *codependent* thinking and behavior. She suggested I read Melanie Beattie's book, Codependent No More.

I had not started the book when we met a week later, so the young woman tried sharing a similar experience of her own. She also suggested I try adding a different 12-step meeting (*See top, next page.*) to my

weekly assortment. Though I eventually read the book and also started attending a new group, I still had no *answer* for my suffering.

Then, after I published the February letter, I was able to visit my Spiritual Advisor. When she asked how I was doing, I said I had a spiritual issue I wanted to discuss. "I wrote about it," I added, and handed her a copy of my Jan. '05 letter. As she read, I watched her. Near the end, like a slight shadow -- a puzzled look -- came over her face. Finishing up, she looked up from at the page and said, "... You did see *good* -- God's hand in it ..."

I protested, "But I didn't get that relief of God's presence..." Calmly, she replied, "It doesn't always work like that."

She then pointed out small ways the spiritual process had progressed.

Now, after six months, I see it all as a *crisis of faith*. I endured pain -- but not because God deserted me. I suffered because my vision was limited. I looked for a *huge wave of relief* and never noticed smaller *ripples*. For example, the first little wave arrived when I was hysterical and JK held me, thus allowing me to relax and eventually, sleep.

Now, I am *living* the words I spoke in that recent meeting, I "... choose not to suffer..." Like all wisdom-learning, the experience was not easy, but still brought spiritual insight.

I am blessed.

Frances Fritzie

Frances, Editor comments, "Now I see my Higher Power was with me all along, I just had to continue my spiritual practice on *faith*, believing the power of doing the "next right thing."

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

(Letters to the Editor)

Hello!

Wow! An Antarctica Storm story! (April '05) My only storm story is about staying in my grandparents' house with my mom even though firemen had driven up and down the street in a large fire truck with a loud-speaker advising all people to evacuate during Hurricane Gloria. They lived right on the water, you see. I saw all the flashing lights and heard the message. I was very young and extremely frightened, so begged my mom to take us away. But she kept telling me it would be fine and that it was only a recommendation! We played games while the wind raged and the rain pounded on the windows. Somehow, I fell asleep. In the morning, it was over and the house was still standing, but trees were down all over the neighborhood and the sea had come through the yard and into the first floor.

Sorry I've been so slow in getting back to you. So far, we're settling nicely into our new place. However, this weekend we are going to my mother's house to gather the last of my things. It's sounds so simple: the last of my "things" ...but this includes a heavy couch and love seat, two bookshelves, two trunks, a great deal of kitchen things, and clothes and books and a ton of other stuff. (*See top of next page.*)

My man and I are renting a biggish truck, of course. This is no fun since he is not much of a driver (more of a bicycler) and doesn't have a license. I've also never driven a truck through toll gates before, and I suspect it costs much more than a car!

June 2005

Still lots to do here, it's back to work, for me!

Best,
Christa

Christa Weber (May '05) adds, "I'm way behind on my furniture refinishing projects, but I'd like to have at least one piece done before summer. In our foyer, there is an antique curio cabinet that is topped with a motley assortment of paint cans and heavy things because the top panel is warped. I'm hoping a slow pressure will inspire it back to straightness. Of course, I don't know squat about refinishing furniture so this is an adventure."

Dear Frances,

I enjoyed hearing from Julie Keefer again in the May '05 *Ninepatch*. That woman has a gift of exuding a peace-filled spirit.

Your letter and story was a bit disconcerting. I'm never sure how much I'm being intuitive about where you are or how much I overlay my own fears and place when I read your stories. In "She-Waited," it feels like the marauders that carry one away from sisterhood is marriage. Not the only marauder, of course, but a big one.

I'll write again soon.

Hugs,
Georgene

Georgene (May '05) adds, "My boss came back from a vacation with the news that he intends to sell the company. He says he will try to hold onto my job in the negotiations but I think the answer is truly 'slim to none' that I will be working here in a year. I'm adjusting to the news. I guess after this happens enough a person learns to handle it without the anxiety attacks. We'll see."

Dear Frances,

I just want to let you know I just flew to northern California to be with my sister, Janet, who is dying of cancer. She is in her last stages.

It is a real privilege to be here with her. Please keep Janet and our family in prayer as we help her walk this last part of her journey to God.

Love,
Patience

Patience (Apr. '05) will share more about walking the last part of her sister's journey to God with her next month.

Perfection is an elusive goal.

James (May '05) expands, "Striving for perfection, however, puts you on the path of self-improvement."

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

MORNING PRAYER

***"...maybe just looking and listening is the real work. Maybe the world, without us, is the real poem."
-Mary Oliver***

My morning practice is a simple one. I sit at my kitchen window and watch, actually gaze at, the world in our backyard. I watch the sun moving slowly across the grass, filtering through the branches of tall evergreen and slowly pushing the shadows of the night to the edge of the yard. Birds come in flocks to our feeders -- sparrows, woodpeckers, cardinals and the yellow finches flashing their bright colors. And now humming birds are showing up. These little ones stop and rest briefly at their feeder before taking flight and disappearing faster than my eyes can follow. Sometimes the birds get along with each other but often they squawk and push each other out of the way, hogging the food for themselves. Even so, there is plenty for all.

The neighbor's cat is also there stalking the perimeter of the yard while fixing its steely eyes on potential prey. One day when I glanced up I saw a squirrel die. Right underneath the bird feeder, it rolled over and took its last breath. I don't know why. The birds and other squirrels seemed to notice but then continued their morning feasting. A little shock ran through me, the surprise of being present at that threshold between life and death, the awareness that in the presence of death, life goes on.

Often there are deer in the back yard. Sometimes they sleep over, taking the high ground under the trees where the pine needles are soft and the lay of the land feels safe. Just recently a doe and her fawn have come around. The doe moves slowly, grazing quietly. The fawn runs and leaps like a puppy, exploring everything, charging through the birds' feeding ground, the squirrel's dying ground, now the fawns playground. I watch it and laugh. Such dappled beauty and exuberant exploring make me want to run and play.

This is the way I pray -- watching, gazing and enjoying the beauty and complexity of the day as it wakes up and I wake up.

Today a friend sent me a poem by Mary Oliver, "Five A.M. in the Pinewoods." She writes about seeing the hoof prints of two deer under pines, and so she went in the dark to sit there under the trees and wait for them. They came, stepping closer, Oliver writes, seemingly unafraid until, "one of them ... could have come into my arms." The other one warned against it, and they both took off through the trees.

This isn't a poem about a dream, Oliver writes, "This is a poem about the world that is ours, or could be."

Every day as I sit at the kitchen window waking up, I marvel at this world that is ours, or could be."

(See top, next page.)

Watching, gazing, appreciating, opening my heart to the feasting, the dying, the slow and the quick, the shadows and light, the rambunctious and the cautious, I take the day, the world into my arms.

This then is my morning prayer.

Carole Crumley is the Co-Executive Director and Program Director at *Shalem Institute*, a spiritual non-profit. They are located at 5430 Grosvenor Lane #100, Bethesda, MD. 20814-2142. (Web site: www.shalem.org) This article was written for their newsletter *Shalem News*, Summer 2003. *Ninepatch* Editor Frances, went on a pilgrimage to Ireland with a group formed by this organization and Carole was one of the leaders.

- - T-H-E- - K-I-T-C-H-E-N- - T-A-B-L-E- -

(Our Special Topic)

KITCHEN TABLE

My kitchen table is one of my favorite places in the house. The table itself is an old oak table that was in the basement of the house where I grew up. One of my sons rescued it from its retirement and refinished the rather marred, old tabletop. He put a “bar” finish on it and replaced the legs with a pedestal. That was twenty years ago and I have been using it ever since. It still looks beautiful.

My chair faces a window, and that’s where I have my bird feeders and suet. There’s a regular small bird feeder with sunflower seeds and also a thistle feeder for the finches. I not only get to watch lots of birds, but I also can watch the ingenious squirrels that raid the sunflower seeds. Needless to say, I have mixed feelings about these marauders, but it’s fun to try to outsmart them -- even though I haven’t succeeded, yet!

A pile of books sits next to the lamp on my right by the wall. Several candles and holders grace the back-center of the table. A wooden fruit bowl occupies the rear on the wall side and on the far side of that stands a plate holder. This plate stand holds some of the many cards I receive. (I need to add that I am a letter/note writer of the old school, and honor many cards I get.)

The rest of the table is sometimes clear -- when I’ve finished all my projects in process! The clear space on the table often has several piles of ‘to do’ and ‘to take’ business as well as a few cards and/or pictures I’ve just received. A roving salt shaker and pepper grinder complete the table’s contents.

If my kitchen table could talk, it would have many stories to tell. It is where I read tea leaves, serve dinners, talk on the telephone and do much meditative and fun reading.

I believe in *kitchen tables* where people gather to talk, pray, laugh and cry.

Palma (Sept. '04) adds, “In the spring of '04, when the war in Iraq was underway, I was clearing out some old National Geographic maps that I had saved for years. I ran into one labeled, “Turmoil in the Mideast”, from September 1980. I taped it to the wall by my table and burned a candle every day to honor those people -- ours and theirs -- who were experiencing warfare.”

- I-N-S-T-R-U-C-T-I-O-N-S-

(Reading and Listening)



Editor’s Note: In April ’05 several *Ninepatch* readers met to discuss the various books each had been reading. The first three reviews in this section originated at that gathering.

THE SCHOOLING OF CLAYBRID CATTS

Janis Owens, the author of this book, is a native of West Florida and the daughter of an Assembly of God preacher. She is uniquely in tune with the setting of this novel. She speaks the authentic language of the natives with its distinct flavor and tone.

The story is told in the voice of eleven year old Clayton Catts as he deals with a series of abrupt changes in his life. Early in the book, his father, Michael dies. Although he doesn’t fully understand his loss, the one person who loved him unconditionally, and gave him the fond nickname of Claybird, is gone from his life.

The looming possibility of having a stepfather frightens him. Thus, he and his older siblings conspire to get Michael’s brother, Gabe to return from New York and marry their mother. Although Claybird has heard vague rumors which he doesn’t understand about why Gabe left town, he accepts his uncle as stepfather.

When a vacancy occurs in the history department of Claybird’s school, Gabe agrees to accept the position. Claybird is moderately dyslexic and when he insists he “cain’t read” and “cain’t write”, Gabe offers to help. He hires a scribe to read to him.

Then Gabe launches a class project to encourage his students to study their family history. He suggests Claybird use a recorder to tape his interviews. As he asks more and more questions, Claybird uncovers family secrets that everyone seems to know except him. Finally, he discovers one huge secret that drives him out of his home.

Feeling “left out of the family loop” only adds to his burden of anger, awkwardness and confusion. For a year he lives with a doting aunt. By this time, he is entering puberty, and to the extent of his understanding, he is beginning to learn about life in the same way that all of us do.

June Poucher (May’05) adds: “This is an enjoyable easy read. At the same time, it takes me back to my own early struggles with family contradictions.”

AUTHOR, DAN BROWN

I’ve read two of Brown’s books. First, I read The DaVinci Code. In it, hero Robert Langdon is a professor of religious symbology. He and Sophie Neveu , a cryptologist, are drawn together in the murder investigation of Jacques Sauniere, curator of the Louvre Museum. Jacques was murdered for the secret code to locate the Holy Grail. As Jacques lay dying of a bullet wound, he realized he had to pass on his secret or the truth would be lost forever. So he wrote a cryptic message on the floor where he soon died.

Brown is exceedingly creative. I could not put this book down. I liked the story so much that when I finished it, I also read his novel, Angels and Demons. (See top of next page.)

This tale is another spell- binding mystery and page-turner. It’s a story about science versus religion. A powerful time bomb has been hidden in Vatican City, and a murdered physicist was found with a symbol branded on his chest. This time, Robert Langdon is paired with Vittoria Vetra, a bio-entanglement physicist. Together, they work to save the Vatican from destruction. They also discover an underground brotherhood called, *The Illuminati*. More secrets emerge from this discovery.

June 2005

Lynan (May '05) says, "Dan Brown is now my favorite author. His stories are always fascinating. I became glued to his books -- and I don't mean Elmers' Glue, I mean Super Glue!"

A DELICIOUS COLLECTION OF WOMEN

Not long ago, a friend gave me a book he'd picked up somewhere and said, "Here's a book I found for you."

I had to wonder about the book he handed me, Places in the World a Woman Could Go, by Janet Kauffman. So, I read it.

Anyone who has lived in a mid-western farming community will recognize bits and pieces of women who walk the lives there. This volume is a collection of stories about them, and made real and remarkable by the author. That she is also one of these women is made clear by the joyous familiarity with which she describes them.

These women know who they are and their lot in life very well, and never bow down to circumstance. Take Celia for instance. Looking like, "something refrigerated, sweetly doughy", she has fled from her husband to a shack in the woods. She advises readers the best way to get out of town. Another example is Lady Fretts who "reigned like a plunked-down legitimate deity," keeping the twin calves born on the day of her husband's funeral for twelve years, before she is finally able to dispatch these humongous souvenirs of him.

Then there's the hippie lady who named her chickens with ladies' names and the rogue farm rat, Ratzatratz. She tells how Colleen her "dullard" hen led the others in a call to arms, finally killing the intruder rat.

Joy is in the author's descriptions, both choice and "delicious", as one cover critic put it. Reading this book set my mind to remembering. In memory, I saw the people on the farms and in small towns of my past with a new eye -- an appreciation for their uniqueness.

Joan Hanley (May '05) adds, "These ladies were like a handful of wild flowers, each strikingly unique, and together -- a beautiful blend."

I'M AN ANNE PERRY FAN

I have read many of Anne Perry's books. She writes two to three novels a year. She has four different series going. Two of Anne Perry's series are historical Victorian mysteries. She started with a character and his wife, Thomas Pitt and Charlotte. (That first book of this series was made into a TV show.) The second set of characters are William Monk and his wife Hester.

The third set of books I have not read. I think they are taking place during World War I. She also writes a series of mystical books which do not interest me.

I like some of Anne's books so much that I read a few books twice a couple of years ago. I felt I had missed some things. They were also *good* the second time around! (*See top of next page.*)

Anne has new a book coming out soon, I think. I usually wait a couple of months and then request the title at my local library. Even then, I still may have to wait on her new book, Long Spoon Lane.

While I am waiting, I am reading books by Elizabeth Palmer. They are not mysteries but they are pretty good. My favorite book of hers is called Old Money. I wish I could tell you about the plot, but when I read these books, they immediately leave me. I usually have to read the review in the front of the book jacket to recall if I have read a title or not.

Since I always read what it says about authors on a book's dust jacket, I know the author is English. I noticed Elizabeth is very elegant- looking. Sometime when you are in the library, pull one of her books and look at her picture.

Patricia (Mar. '05) adds, "My oldest grandson and I are going to the Columbus annual Art Fest. Art is our special thing -- something we don't share with others. He likes art and understands it much better than I do. He likes to really take his time and look. So do I. That makes it fun."

- - -T-H-R-E-A-D- - -
(Our Knowing and Our Spirituality)

SPECIAL LIGHTS AND LOVE

In my life

**there have been
very few special people
who touched me very deeply
even though briefly.**

They touched my spirit,

**with theirs;
knew them well
the first time we met.**

They represent to me,

**the finest things
of the human spirit.**

They are like rainbows,

**and beautiful sunsets,
touching all around them
with their very special light
and love.**

(See top of next page.)

Joan V. Spies (May '05) says, "This poem talks about some of those extra-ordinary people I met after my husband died. It was actually written with two very special people in mind. One was a hospice patient I was with just days before her death. The other was a person I gave a eulogy for at her memorial service."

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