

Ninepatch

Stitch - by - Stitch

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

Editor's Note: Following is a recent lit page from my spiritual notebook.

May 2005

Dear Friends,

Soft with humidity, the summer night air whooshed through my partly- open car windows. Dense roadside trees obscured the sky and the road was empty. My car headlights lit a neon orange trail as I wound my way toward my husband and his four wooded acres.

As I drove, the trees suddenly gave way to an empty field that allowed a panoramic view of the star- lit sky. I held my breath a moment in awe. Then, I noticed the star group Indians called, *Orion, The Hunter*. The constellation seemed *enormous* and lay on its side above trees at the field's edge.

The three stars of *The Hunter's* belt pointed to where I drove. Like looking for the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, I focused on the point where its belt met the trees. I exhaled and thought, "This is where *She- Waited's* journey ends."

She-Waited is a fictional Indian girl whose story I've been unfolding over several years. Her tale came to me like a still frame from the movie, "*Little Big Man*." In the picture, I saw an Indian girl in labor. Unlike the movie tale, where the main character (played by Dustin Hoffman) finds her, my Indian girl is undetected as she gives birth.

She-Waited was separated from her retreating tribe while having her baby. Afterward, the new mother walked out into the night desert, using *Orion's* three stars like a map. They would lead her to her sisters and then the tribe's desert place of refuge.

In the June and August 1997 issues of *Ninepatch*, I shared parts of this saga. Even though more of the story came to me during the next three years, I could never imagine its ending. Now, seeing *Orion* so near seemed to open more of *She-Waited's* tale. The following is a prologue for the newest episode.

This chapter's main character is not *She-Waited*. It is Fron, a woman from *She-Waited's* group. She is one of those who walked ahead, escaping their men's war.

Fron is with the resting band when it is attacked by renegade Indians. The mounted marauders cut down and shoot many of the women and children. The rebel leader grabs Fron, and carries her off.

At the mercy of three rebels, Fron does what she must to survive. Then, one night she has a dream. It is a vision, sent by surviving sisters *She-Waited* has found. In the dream, *She-Waited* and two other women sit in a circle. They tell Fron they are ready to continue their journey to the place of refuge. Waking from the dream, Fron feels hope for the first time and plans an escape. Once free, she also follows *Orion's* belt stars. She finds and then hides in the place of refuge. For several moons, each night she slips from the cave and, under cover of darkness, watches the surrounding desert. She seeks a sign of her sisters who always travel by the stars, at night.

A SPECK ON THE HORIZON

When Fron first saw the little band approaching, it was only a black speck against a dark sky at the horizon line. Her senses pricked as she watched the dot move slightly toward her. Hope lit her eyes, "My sisters!" Then, she sobered, considering the harsh reality of other possibilities.

Other tribes also used these rocks for rest and shelter. The little group might be wounded warriors. It could also be a lost band of displaced souls such as she and her sisters were. They might even be the renegades. Fron shivered at that thought before quickly reminding herself those men would not be on foot. By now, they would have caught the horses she set free or stolen others. Whatever that moving dot was, it slowly came toward her.

Fron knew she must prepare for the unknown that moved steadily her way. She climbed back into the cave- like space where she'd lived for many moons. Fron held her torch high and glanced around the main room for sign of her stay. She was thankful she had used only a little of the dried foods others had cached here. Her escape drained all her energies. But, once she rested, she hunted.

She was skillful and patient, able to kill small lizards and snakes. She also peered into the rocky crevasses where she found insects and grubs. A few nights, she also ventured out onto the desert floor where she gathered cactuses.

Hastily, Fron gathered her few belongings, and stowed them into her vest, tying its edges to carry. (See next.)

Luckily, ashes in the fire- pit were cold and would reveal little. She held the glowing torch aloft again and checked for other evidence of her stay. Seeing none, she picked up a stick from the firewood cache and smoothed the dirt floor of her footmarks.

Then, near the door, she rolled her torch in dirt, extinguishing its light. She returned it to the niche where she first found it. In darkness again, she felt her way out of the cave. There, sheltered by large rocks, she resumed her watch on the dark spot that grew steadily larger.

As the minutes went by, Fron looked around for, avenues for possible retreat. She knew not which way the night-walkers might climb to the hidden place. Her plan emerged quickly. If the band were foreigners, she would slink back into the cave, and push the entrance rock in place to hide the small opening. If the travelers were like herself but unknown, she would hide away from the entrance and watch them awhile. Later, she'd decide to flee or to show herself. Even if the group appeared to be her sisters, she would watch first to be sure they were alone. For now, she waited.

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Here is where the story ends -- for now. Like *She-Waited* and Fron, I await the muse's blessing -- and more of this tale.

Frances Fritzie



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

Hi Fritzie (and JK),

I finally read the Feb. and Mar.'05 issues of *Ninepatch*. The only comment I have to make at this time is concerning you and JK. (*See top of next page.*)

Having known you, Fritzie, for several years and having had the pleasure of meeting JK, I believe that it is no mere coincidence that you two have met. You are great together and have the support for one another that will keep you functioning for the rest of your lives.

Love blooms -- even at harvest time.

Your friend,

Lee

Lee (Feb.'05) adds, "It has been my pleasure to have known the both of you personally. God bless you."

Hi Girlfriend!

When you sent me the March proposal for *Ninepatch*, you also chatted a little. You said, *I keep thinking I will try my hand at something more than Ninepatch...*"

I understand how you feel. When I retired ten years ago, I told everyone I would
1) go to clown school, 2) take writing courses 3) volunteer at an elementary school and a hospital
4) get involved with others retired from my profession.

For five or six years, I did all of those things! I attended clown school for seven weeks. I got involved in story-telling to children and adults at the local library and school. I also took five or six writing classes and became a "lifetime learner" at the nearby community college. Last, I held an office of my fellow retirees' group — luckily, there were only four meetings a year!

Now my life is not the same. I am in a care-giving role at home and no longer belong to any organizations. I do go to church, though, and get involved with neighbors who I can help!

I have one little job helping a neighbor. Five days a week she makes a five hour round trip drive to see her husband who is in a VA hospital. I ask her to call me when she gets home and watch for her if she is late. The woman is taking a class the other two days of the week in order to get recertified in a certain area. I had the same class a before I retired and so I help her out a little.

It's good for me to help. When I see how much she is doing, I often feel I have it easy!

MM (April '05) adds, "In her Apr. '05 letter, Frances mentioned a writing group she attended when she first came to Florida. That is where I met her! Though I have not been back in several years, I occasionally see and catch up with other friends I made there."

Hi Frances,

Well, I'm not going to New York this summer to visit my long-distance friend, high school classmate and late-life lover. That trip is off the table. We are kaput. Our relationship just created more unhappiness than happiness for me. (It's a bummer when you can't even do a relationship from 800 miles!) Guess I just had to (*See top, next page.*) get to the "tipping point" where the bad times outweighed the good ones.

I miss his nightly call, but I don't miss my distrust and the feeling of being "less than." Now, I'm feeling freer. I'm praying to get past my hurt, anger, blaming that caused the rift.

It seems to me that a woman's *couple-life* adds more -- but separate-- chapters to her ongoing life story.

God bless,
Gail

Gail (Mar. '05) reports on her reading, "Did I tell you I loved the Janet Evanovich Stephanie Plum comedy-mystery series. (One for the Money, Two for the Dough...) What a funny writer. I also read Anne Lamott's new book, Plan B. It was good, but I liked the earlier, Traveling Mercies better. Now, I'm into Isabel Allende's Daughter of Fortune. It's a wonderful historical novel -- something you don't find too much of anymore."

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

RECEIVING PEACE

On the bittersweet path to holiness, the suffering grows us up, the surrendering brings us Home. With all the chaos happening in the world today (which seems to not be of peace) I find myself thinking ever more about what brings peace to my body, mind, soul and spirit.

Peace is a graced moment of yielding to a clarity greater than my own; a wisdom far wiser than mine. Clarity and wisdom can be accessed from within my own heart and mind as I yield my own agenda and seek to listen to this deeper *knowing* in the face of what is. (*See top, next.*)

Peace is not something I can make happen with the power of intellectual comprehension or outer striving. I can only receive it as I release any desire to achieve it.

Peace requires great courage and trust that there is a larger Reality holding me, and all, in a vast network of relationships meant to serve a higher good than what my individual ego could ever comprehend without humility.

Humility breaks open the ground of my human limitation. It enables the light of truth to penetrate the dark soil of fear within me and to plant new seeds of hope for a peace that passes all understanding.

Peace is an unconditional gift, received as my attachment to my ego's fear of loss, and consequent effort to hold on is relinquished.

Peace requires the humility to trust the One who made me to guide my way, step-by-step, as I wait in stillness for the dawn, listening for the inner call to *(See top, next.)* Love's actions.

Through these actions of love, a peaceful home, community, nation and world can be built. Without humility, the door to Love's peace-giving Presence does not open. "Ask and you shall receive, knock and it will be opened to you."

May you know the peace that passes all understanding, enabling our broken world to find its way Home.

Julie D. Keefer (Nov,-Dec. '02) directs Morningstar Adventures, a retreat center in Central Michigan. This appears in their newsletter: Vol. 21, Spring 2005.

GARDNERS GLEANINGS

On the night of the celebration of my seventieth birthday, friends gathered with me around a sacred altar covered with a deep purple cloth printed with labyrinths and holding a seven-branched candelabra, each candle representing a decade of my life. On the tiers of the candelabra were carefully- chosen pictures and symbols from each decade. Then golden and dark purple cords were woven around and through the layers, symbolizing God's presence throughout my journey as well as the times that it felt as though God was absent. Also resting on the altar, was a scroll with the names of all whose lives had touched mine. This was tied with a golden cord.

Having found much joy in using Phillip Newels, Celtic Benediction, Morning and Night Prayer, which is based on the seven days of creation, it felt right to use this theme for my ritual. The Celtic tradition sees each of these days as theophanies or showings of God. I spent nearly a month looking back over my life to see how God had manifested these various aspects in each of my decades, and how (at times) I had blocked them. Newell lists these showings as: the divine light that is the heart and origin of all life, the wildness of creativity, the earth's fecundity, the harmony of masculine and feminine, the goodness of the senses, the awesome mystery of being made in God's image and the stillness that is essential to life's renewal.

As I looked back over seventy years of my life, I could see the utter faithfulness of God, woven lovingly throughout my life even when I could not feel it -- or, for that matter, knew how to name -- this presence that kept calling me forward. Yet now I can look back with God and pronounce it good. (This said with some qualms, knowing that I have often acted fearfully, and made what seemed to be bad choices, but I realize that I do not have the whole picture, and never will.) My thinking is still too much in a

box and probably always will be, but I am definitely trying to break through those imaginary barriers to live in the wildness of creativity, to trust in the earth's and my own fecundity, to savor all that my senses tell me (certainly one reason I love to garden, cook and create altar out of table!) and to rejoice in the awesome mystery of being made in God's image.

Being made of clay, physically and spiritually, I feel God's hands constantly at work on me, shaping me more and more into a lover. They are always tender, but they are also strong and firm and they are always stretching me in my comprehension of what being a lover really means the inclusively and responsibility that it calls me to.

And so, on this magical evening, as I shared with my friends the many threads of my life, they also wove into this wonder-filled fabric songs, poetry (*See top, next page.*) and reading of their own making. It was indeed a joy-filled evening and we did not stop dancing until two in the morning!

Elise (Apr. '03) lives at Morningstar Retreat Center and, together with Julie D. Keefer and a Sistry Circle, helps guide their offerings. This piece appeared in the center's newsletter, Vol. 21, Spring 2005.

Quiet and solitude inspire clear thinking.

James (Apr. '05) explains, "Thoughts get lost in crowded rooms."

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

LIKE A TROUBLESOME RELATIVE

Hearing that Hurricane Charley was headed my way with very little notice was like getting an unexpected telegram from a troublesome relative, announcing that he is on his way for a brief visit. The finality of his arrival was in the message. There was no way to weasel out.

First, I felt annoyance at my changed plans and extra work this would cause. Then came my concern: *How much of a com-motion would he cause? How much cleaning up would I have to do after he left? and, Yikes! How long would he stay?*

(I was beginning to understand why hurricanes have the names of people. There are a lot of similarities.) Little did I know Charley's real intentions for his visit.

After shifting my prayers for the people on Florida’s West Coast to all of us in Central Florida, (and probably intensifying them a notch) like everyone else, I hurriedly got ready.

Offered safe-haven by a niece, I considered the daily mayhem in that house and opted to face Charley alone instead. I’d be comforted by my critters who would likewise need comforting.

Hurricane Charley’s arrival date -- Friday the 13th -- fit the occasion perfectly, providing (Next.) overtones of the unknown and the dreaded.

Late that evening, like an enormous helicopter landing in my yard, Charley whooshed across the lake and hit my house with a wail and force that sent a limb banging across my roof. Dog and cats crept underfoot, their tails dragging. I began to realize that this was far from a mere “visit,” it was more like the delivery of a long-held grudge. Winds pounded the house, trees crashed, the lights went out and all I could hear was an eerie high wail over the heavy chatter of rain on the windows. I spent the night in the dark, dozing through the mayhem, surrounded by warm, furry dog and cat bodies.

By morning, Charley was gone, but what a mess he had left! Every inch of my yard and driveway was filled with huge tree limbs and shattered tree- tops giving it the appearance of a tropical jungle. As the heat of the day increased, I realized there would be no electricity (and air-conditioning) for a long time. Luckily, I had running water and owned a Coleman lamp and stove.

Finally able to get out on the main road, I had a look around and realized how fortunate I was. Elsewhere, Charley snatched roofs, scattered all manner of signs, streetlights and sheds, crushed dwellings, hurt and even killed people.

Charley’s visit had scared me a little and made a B-I-G mess. It would be a long restoration, but I was alive and well to do it.

Joan H. (Jan. '05) adds, “Charley's sisters, Frances and Jeanne were not as devastating as he was, but it was still a very long, hot summer!”

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HURRICANE REFLECTIONS

At the recent *Ninepatch* book sharing, many of us talked about our lives as well as the books we’d been reading. I recall Frances saying how the dark winter days depressed her when she lived in the north.

Her remarks brought to mind how grateful I was when one night recently I saw that the city crews had finally repaired the lights on my street. For the eight long months after Hurricane Charley, my street was in darkness.

I am also making progress with my home repairs. For several weeks I have been replacing my den ceiling which the hurricanes destroyed. In the process, I took down its large fluorescent light fixture. (I really missed that light -- going in there at night was a hazard since I still had stepladders and tools about the room.) Because of the fixture’s weight, my son helped me re-install it a few days ago. (What a blessing!) *See next.*

That incident brought me to ponder how often I hear the term ‘light’ to express one’s self, such as, “I finally saw the light”; “... the light of my life”; “shed light on”; “brought to light”; the “light in his eyes”; “in light of”; “it dawned on me”; and so on.

I’m grateful for many reminders of my blessings.

June Poucher (Apr. '05) says, "Someone said that no amount of darkness can hide a small light."

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

PULITZER PRIZE WINNER

Pulitzer Prize winner, Philip Roth is best remembered for his Goodbye Columbus and Portnoy's Complaint. New York Times has named his latest novel, The Plot Against America, one of the top ten fiction books of 2004.

The story is told by a nine-year old Jewish boy living in a Newark ghetto and related Charles Lindberg's defeat of FDR in the elections of 1940. Lindberg ran on a platform of anti-war, pro-Nazi planks that were implemented in numerous white-supremacy programs forcing the break-up of Jewish communities and the relocation of many Jews.

Roth tells a gripping though imaginative story of what might have been, complete with the angst of a Jewish household and the inner life of a nine-year old boy.

Don (April '05) adds, "Frances wrote me that she was reading Blink. I am interested in her thoughts as I recently listened to the audio book. Much of it makes law enforcement and commercial applications. I was disappointed at lack of personal applications. I hope Frances will let me know what she thinks."

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BLINK—It's All In The Eyes

I was attracted to Malcom Gladwell's BLINK through a review. According to the reviewer, it seemed to be about tracking the workings of intuition. I thought there might possibly be a way that allowed a person to use one's intuitive senses more consciously. I was eager to look into this possibility.

I picked up the book at the library just before JK and I started one of our many road trips. Since he thought the topic interesting, I began reading the book to him. During car rides, over dinner and while I washed dishes, we took turns reading aloud. Thus, we read and discussed the entire book.

I learned not only about the mechanics of my intuition, but also learned interesting research on detecting couples who will stay married and those who will not. I read of why and how policemen sometimes kill an innocent person, and even how a new singles' adventure, speed dating, can work well in finding a mate!

A reader cannot scan or skim this book for it's essence. It's not a scientific "how to" book. Blink tells its tale in-directly — the way one's un-conscious often works.

I found the book both interesting, entertaining to share with my husband and thoughtful. I recommend it to anyone interested in tracking their unconscious, or intuition.

Frances, Editor adds, "Gladwell also wrote The Tipping Point. During the time I was reading Blink aloud to my husband, I saw Tipping in a bookstore. I paged through it, reading snatches here and there. Though written in the same story-like fashion, its content was nothing I have interest in."

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

GENTLE HEARTS

Gentle hearts love with care,
Tender,
 always aware
 of the mood of the moment
When a spirit is bruised,
 and in need of touch
that says,
 I want to share your pain,
Lean on me, let me help you
 Through the day.

When a spirit is lighthearted
 and full of joy,
 the gentle heart will add
 to the celebration.

It will love without fading,
 enduring all –
 and its caring
 will never end.

Joan V. Spies (Apr. '05) adds, "Gentle hearts are what we probably (or hopefully) represent to each other."

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

FROM 1997

Editor’s Note: I found this *Ninepatch* comment recently when I was researching a theme in some of my old writings. I edited it a little.

HOW NINEPATCH WAS BORN

Looking back to 1994, I can see that *Ninepatch* emerged during a season of conflicting demands and responsibilities. I felt overwhelmed by difficult life transition. I didn’t have enough time. Hours I already spent as a single mother shepherding my handicapped teenage son were suddenly doubled by demands of also looking after for my ill and aging mother.

While single I had learned learn to rely on the support of my relationships with women friends. Suddenly, I found myself unable have chunks of time to sustain these connections. I was lost without this underlying network of women’s voices and wisdom. So, I decided to create a forum where I could hear those voices and wisdom – and manage that in spite of time constraints.

I had always been an avid letter- writer, and I suddenly realized that I could expand my correspondence to include the voices of many women at various stages of life. When I shared what I wrote and what they replied, *Ninepatch* was born.

Frances, Editor adds, “The term ‘nine patch’ refers to a beginning quilter’s design. It balances equal pieces of light and dark fabric in much the same way that a balanced life seems to combine both light and dark elements. This is the reason I chose the nine patch quilt design and quilt-making in general as a metaphor for the newsletter.”

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