

June 2006

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 page from my spiritual notebook.

Dear Friends,

It was evening. My husband, JK, and I sat in our home office -- he at his computer, and I at mine. We were ready to reconcile our expenses for the first time after moving in together.

Before this, we also split *shared* expenses. However, I was a bit tense this time. The move and starting work on necessary house projects, caused unusual amounts on my credit card.

I had just spent a tedious hour checking sales' receipts against the card statement. Next, I would tell the date and amount and JK would enter it in a computer spread sheet.

I voiced the *first* receipt. It was for our new refrigerator. I recalled moving day when we found the old one dead. Previous owners had left food and the odor was *r-i-p-e!* We went out the next day and bought a new one. I recall how we "discussed" which model to get. It was a first experience with our different ideas. We settled on one fancier than he wanted and plainer than I wanted.

I laid the yellow register tape aside. But, before I could go on to the next one, JK questioned me about it, "It couldn't be *that* much. Where's the sales ticket?"

The *sales ticket?*" I thought then asked, "What's wrong with this receipt?"

"I want to see the *sales ticket*," he repeated.

His questioning struck a spark that lit a short mental fuse that began to sizzle. His question implied that 1) the receipt I had wasn't good enough, 2) my hard work was not important, 3) he didn't believe me!

BOOM! I exploded.

I jumped up and angrily started to look for it. I looked in a file drawer. No luck. Then, I stormed into the kitchen and slammed through a loose stack of miscellaneous papers, waiting to be filed. Nothing there. I strode back to the office where JK sat -- calmly waiting.

"I can't find it," I said angrily and plopped down thinking sadly that nothing was going smoothly, and all my efforts were useless. Then, thoughts swirling, I switched from sadness to rage. I fumed to myself, "OK then, if he won't pay, it will be MY refrigerator, *and* MY new toilet, MY new bathroom, MY..."

I grabbed the yellow register receipt I'd laid down. I began tearing it up, saying, "Tell you what ... I already paid for it... I'll just eat this one ... let's go on and reconcile the rest of the bills!"

With that, I stuck several yellow scraps in my mouth and started chewing.

Alarmed, JK raised his voice, "Frances! What are you doing?"

Luckily, somewhere in all this, I glimpsed my insanity, and just wanted *out of it all*. Abruptly, I announced, "I think I'll go out for a while!"

I stomped into another room to get my car keys.

Continued, next page.

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“Frances, Frances...” JK called, trailing me into the entry way, “Wait...”

For some reason, I heeded his word and stopped at the front door. JK caught up and put his arms around me.

I stiffened and spat, “Hugs won’t work! ... Leave me alone!”

But actually, his hug did sort of “work.” I began to calm down.

I asked myself, “Where would I go, anyway?” Then, “Am I even OK to drive?”

Just then, I recalled another night forty years earlier.

It was after midnight on a February Michigan night in 1968 and I was six months pregnant with our first child. My first husband and I were arguing about something ...I don’t know what, but I do remember he was not treating me right ... and I was not going to put up with it.

That night I got my keys, stormed out and drove off. I recall having nowhere to go at that hour. I ended up drinking coffee and eating pie at an all- night Howard Johnson’s.

There, a guy on the next stool worried me. After we exchanged what seemed “pleasantries” of eating elbow -to-elbow, he continued to be friendly -- too friendly. I tried to discourage him by mentioning I was pregnant. When this did not tone down his apparent come-on, I decided to leave. I returned to my c-o-l-d car and locked the doors.

I started the engine and, as the heater’s air slowly warmed, wondered where else I could go. When I couldn’t think of anywhere, I slowly drove home.

What a discouraging memory! No matter how hard I have worked to improve myself, I am *still* basically the same girl I was in my twenties.

Still, I *have* progressed a little over the years. These days I don’t justify and hold a grudge. . On the other hand, I like to think I can do something about my *temper!*” But, can I? I don’t know. Will I ever mend my ways? Maybe.

God, help me! Bless me with grace.

Frances Fritzie

Frances Fritzie, Editor adds, “It may be true that JK wasn’t treating me ‘right’. However, if I want to be a better person, I need to deal with my part of trouble. For example, why did I push, trying to deal with difficult money matters when I was worn out?”

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<p>-</p> <p>- - - - A-R-O-U-N-D - - T-H-E - - F-R-A-M-E - -</p> <p>-</p> <p>- (Letters to the Editor)</p>
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Dear Frances,

June 2006

I liked your story about your mailbox snake in May '06. It gave me cold chills when your father convinced you to hold the black snake. Perhaps your fear was overcome by

(See next page.)

your absolute trust in him. However, that would be considered child abuse nowadays, I suppose. It seemed cruel to me, but it made a good story.

Bless'd be

June

June Poucher (May '06) adds, "I salute Frances' courage; I'm sure I could not have done what she did."

Dear Francesca,

When you sent me the proposal for my May '06 letter, you asked me to add a word or two to describe my mother. The sentence I wrote was, "... *I wonder: am I still hoping that Daddy will rescue me from my mother?...*" That was some exercise!

For a moment I just froze. I came up with some *beauties* and then felt sad about those angry words. The negative syllables make me feel like one angry b-i-t-c-h. In place of the more emotional words I first experienced, I gave you, "critical" and "judgmental" to define my mother. What power words have!

About your letter -- where I saw how much your mother loved you, you said it was, "...hard to feel love." I understand that and continue to struggle with the same thing. I know my grandchildren love me and I know the unconditional love of animals. You, a few girlfriends and my sister tell me that I'm loved.

Much of the time I just think "I love you" is the appropriate thing to say. "Love" wasn't a vocabulary word in my early home life. I can't remember my mother *ever* saying that she loved me. Still, I'd like to think she does love me on some level.

<Sigh.> Just once I'd like to write something upbeat for *Ninepatch*. I sound so dark. I even wonder if I could even do it. Perhaps I'll try.

Love you,

Elaine

Elaine (May '06) adds, "Fixing up an older home would be therapy for me, but the expenses would probably freak me out. I'm fairly handy and creative to a point. I sure hope the 'new' house doesn't over- stress you, Francesca."

Hi Frances,

I was sorry to hear about Sandra's death (May '06). I hadn't heard her name in many moons. I think I may still have a letter that she sent to me from years ago, packed away somewhere. I'll have to look for it. I lost contact with her fairly quickly after she left Michigan for Tennessee.

I hope that with her Twelve Step Program work, she was able to maintain her serenity and dignity through her illness and other challenges. I suspect that she did, despite the fear of what we all must face one day *and* the pain of separation from her husband.

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I can't recall if it was she or someone else that I knew in The Program who used to say that they welcomed pain, as it gave them an opportunity to feel and to grow. (Next) I remember the candles around our women's group table and the affirmations that we gave to each other.

I remember Sandra was a strong yet fragile person. I enjoyed reading Michael's letter about her (May '06), it was so frank and human. It described her so well, I could see her face again.

That's some deep stuff -- her story -- especially concerning her relationship with her husband, which, I felt by some intuition, was challenging.

God bless. God bless.

Linda

Linda (Oct. '00) adds, "I have taken some peeks at the webpage – very nice! I will spend some more time on it now that I know it is there."

Dear Frances,

Thanks for your letter, the proposal for my next writing in *Ninepatch* and the newsletter. I got them all in one week -- and a nice note from Georgene was attached, too.

You said all you and JK seemed to get done was *talk* about projects. I am glad you talk, *talk* and t-a-l-k some more. Communication is important in a relationship. Since my dad has been living with us, my husband and I don't talk much. He is very moody. I don't know if it is from his concussion, pressures of his job or the crowded living arrangements. I miss talking things over with him.

You asked if my dad was with us "for good." Yes, he is. He was living with my brother. It is a long story, but here's the short of it. My dad was living with my brother who was taking Dad's money, but not looking after him. I feared my brother was actually abusing him. Family and police were involved before Dad was taken to the hospital. When he came out, Dad arrived to stay with us -- permanently.

This happened the same week I had eye surgery. Then, my husband took care of *two* convalescents instead of just me. It was a stressful week and he had a "relapse." The doctors had told me that he would have "bad days" after his serious concussion last year.

My life goes on -- one day at a time! I use lots of prayer!

Thanks for listening! Thanks for your *blessings*, too.

God bless *you* and keep you safe!

Love and prayers,

LindaSue

LindaSue (May '06) adds, "When I read about Frances' moving problems, I remember my own. We have been in this house only eleven months. Our 'new' house was built in 1950 and required some work. We had workmen, mess and extra payments -- same as she tells me about. Just recently, we've had men here putting in new vinyl flooring in entry, bathrooms and dining room! I wanted this done right away, but we had to wait for our tax refund money!"

Continued on the next page.)

June 2006

Dear Frances,

Recently, I have really been working on my attitude. I think I'm finally sick and tired of being *sick and tired*. I've been training myself to be thankful. To me that means being intentional about finding the *good* in what is going on and naming it. I have also been intentional about asking God to provide what I need --regardless of my *wants*. A third thing I do is look for the lesson in any stress or upset I feel.

My husband has noticed the difference and so have I. I continue to feel like I am getting my head above the fog of the world more often than not. Patience, I tell myself, *Patience!*

Love,
Georgene

Georgene (May '06) adds, "If I had Frances' recent travel schedule I'd feel like just staying home, too. I got tired of traveling regularly for work and most of that was just three-day trips! I don't tolerate repeated trips that require a travel bag like I used to ... and your long-drive trips would be torture for me. I've come to the place where I like being at home."

Frances,

Thank you for the May'06 e-*Ninepatch*. Something you said in your e-mail made me think over the last year. I have never had one quite like it.

After the death of my mom last July '05, my sister and I rallied around my dad to keep him from getting lonely. Then, in April '06, my dad died of a heart attack. His death was less than nine months after my mom.

The experience of these losses so close together has touched my emotions to their very depths. My sister and I miss our parents very much and we've both given more thought to the meaning of our lives. We joke that, "We are next in line to go". But, I *hope* that time is far off. No one knows. We just try to live meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Peace,
Peter

Peter (Aug.-Sept. '05) adds, "At the end of July I am going to Alaska for two weeks. I was there once before and hope to enjoy it even more this time. I love the mountains and the Alaskan wilderness is amazing!"

***It's the loser
who creates
the winner.***

James (May '06) adds, "Too often the loser is ignored during the adulation of the winner."

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

SOME TRAITS DON'T SEEM TO CHANGE

Recently, I have been writing a biography of my mother. To get details, I have been going over her old journals.

In reading her pages of the years when my sister and I were born and were small children, I noticed my mom gave descriptions of me, "Palma is full of the dickens"... "She sings *la- la- la* all day"... "She cries just for fun"... "(She) Wants to be where the family is"... (She is) Always busy and happy on the floor"... "She has a definite stubborn streak and we have to handle her with care lest we bring it on"... "She sings in tune every song she hears"... "She enjoys playing with sister" ... "(She) Climbs in bed with Daddy and kisses him to wake him up"...

The funny thing is that I still like lots of freedom and physical activity -- like crawling on the floor. I still sing and/or play piano almost every day, too. I love people. I also crawl in bed with my significant other some mornings and wake him up!!

I'm still full of the dickens!! Guess I'm still the same as Mother observed.

Palma (May '06) adds, "Not only the crocuses are up but the daffodils and tulips!!"

*

MR. GRAY'S SITUATION
IS UNCHANGED

For the last little while, nothing much has changed with Mr. Gray, our neighbor's cat. We still seem to be his "Godparents." We take care of him when his present caretakers don't.

He still prefers to be outside a lot. However, after he has toured the neighborhood for a while he will come back in and rest. Then, he will want out again and stay out until after dark. Then, he finally comes in for the night. He almost gets frantic about that.

Mr. Gray doesn't come to our door wanting in overnight until the neighbors have turned out their porch light. I give them every opportunity to take him in for the night since they *say* they always do.

When their porch light goes out, if the little cat is still outside, he comes to *our* door and "asks" to come in. We are always happy to have him! He's a nice little cat.

Patricia (May '06) adds, "We also leave our garage door cracked all day. I prepared him a place to sleep out there. I also leave out food and fresh water."

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Though he is small, Mr. Gray seems to be quite hungry. When I check the food supply after he's left, it is always completely gone.

MY ULTIMATE FEAR

I often observe how consistently, how relentlessly, fear drives our society. Fear is a tool that is used by media, business, political and religious groups to intimidate and manipulate the population. They use it because it works!

I refuse to surrender to "groupthink." In political matters, I no longer follow opinion polls; or listen to the 911 color alerts which I believe are often activated to keep our fears alive. If not fear, what inspired the term, "politically correct"?

I wonder -- do cell phones bring out another form of fear? Do I really need (or want) to be available 24/7? Do I really want a nagging beast interrupting my solitude? Am I afraid of being alone with my own thoughts?

And organized religion can be the biggest fear engine of all. Some attempt to push my guilt buttons. They also warn me that, "God will *get* you for that!"

Fears define me, if I allow them. Fear can keep me from being who I am; or worse -- it can keep me from KNOWING who I am. Is that my ultimate fear?

As I ponder these questions, and observe what goes on around me, I have become a skeptic in many ways. It is my responsibility to examine my reasons to do, believe or practice whatever is proposed. This helps take my focus off, *What will people think?* or *What will people say?*

It's very liberating.

June Poucher (May '06) adds: "As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, We "have nothing to fear but fear itself".

*

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

MERCY

This is the second book I've read by Jodi Picoult. Last month, I commented on, My Sister's Keeper. Like that one, I could not put Mercy down.

The book has two plots, both centered on love in a small Massachusetts town. One plot develops around how to defend a man who lovingly euthanizes his dying wife at her request. The other centers on how to reconcile the marriage of the police chief who cheats on his wife.

Picoult introduces the reader to many townfolk as she brings the two stories to life. Both plots are mercifully resolved, thus giving the novel its very fitting title.

Carol (May '06) says, "This novel touches on the subject of euthanasia which has fascinated me for years. The ending of the story was very affirming to me."

(Continued on the next page.)

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

OUR NEXT SPECIAL TOPIC

Our special topic to reflect on is for the remainder of 2006 is *The Spirit of My Work*. My Webster’s *New World Dictionary* lists *twelve* meanings for the word, “work”. Following are the first five: 1) effort or labor 2) employment or occupation 3) something I am making or doing 4) the thing itself made or done: as in *good works* or collected writings or engineering structures 5) a place where work is done...

There is MUCH to ponder in just these five meanings!

Frances, Editor

GET TO KNOW ME

Editor’s note: Here is the second of the responses to our monthly questions—our new effort to get to know our readers better.

This month’s question:

When I take a weekend trip I love to....

Responses:

Editor’s note: *Frances, Editor* wrote the following to all readers who receive the Ninepatch e-mail issue: *Travel? Me? I’m done with traveling for a while! I am just hoping to NOT pack my suitcase for several months! However, even though I have done more than my share of travel in the past few years, I have never been much interested in jumping in the car to go somewhere.*

When I was a young adult, working and raising kids, my idea of a great trip was to go to a motel alone, SLEEP as late as I wanted and eat breakfast/ brunch at a restaurant. If I did anything that day, it was probably browse a bookstore or library then sip coffee.

Now that I write this, I’m not sure that isn’t still my preference since that’s what JK and I did to celebrate our anniversary! Of course, that day WAS his move to our “new” house. (Due to late paperwork we could not yet stay there overnight.) After lifting and toting boxes all day, I l-o-v-e-d that motel’s hot tub, its comforting bed and breakfast bar the next morning! Ah!

*

Georgene (Apr. '06) says, *Frances' weekend trip description sounds great. I've been wondering if my husband and I should just spend the night at a place on the beach near where we live just for the experience of being "away." It seems like a (See next page.) waste of money, though. I'm obsessing more about money as I get older. Of course, we are taking a big trip soon and that triggers worries. We took most of my bonus for it so it's paid for, but I spend too much time second guessing if it's good to spend chunks of money on traveling when there is so much need in the world. (My husband and I always have to negotiate the amount of money given to good causes. Some women buy clothes. I seem to instead fall for every "mission" out there.)*

We're starting to be concerned that we need to get our last b-i-g travels in over the next few years. We know retirement will require living close to home. For a contemplative soul I just can't seem to find that center of peace with our travels as often as I need to."

*

Patience (Oct. '05) says, *"I love Frances' idea of the hide-away place with the hot tub. I will be headed for a hide-away, this summer but there is no hot tub. I will be spending two months in the high, beautiful mountains of the Dominican Republic educating persons who otherwise have few, if any, opportunities. My hot tub is a large barrel filled with rain water and a pan that I can dump water over me. My luxurious suite will be a small hut big enough for a bed and not much more.*

I really look forward to this adventure and will have lots of stories to relate when I return.

*

Carol (See also her book review) comments, *"When I take a weekend trip I love to explore with my husband, be it hiking and camping in the wilderness or visiting art museums in a big city. Good weather, delicious food, a good night's sleep and no transportation problems are integral parts of the experience.*

*

Laurie (Mar. '05) replies, *"I think my favorite trip isn't even a week-ender - it's day-tripping. That is what I did Saturday with a friend to see my second favorite thing -- flowers. San Juan Capistrano, which is near the ocean and the Mission, was hosting a garden tour. We purchased a map and drove to six homes that were like castles. My favorite was the first one -- the gardens were breathtaking.*

The ruby red Ingrid Bergman rose must have been eight inches across. There was an area set aside under a tree for her grandchildren with a small wrought iron table and chairs, a lace table cloth, a bouquet in a vase, a plate of cookies, and a tea set. Fairy figurines adorned the garden surrounding it.

One of the others had beautiful marble statues, fountains, frescos painted on the ceilings, and a ballroom with elaborately tiled marble floors that doubled as (of all things) a garage for their Ferrari when it wasn't party time.

My friend said, "I want to be wealthy!" I replied, "You know what? That house doesn't fit me. It would be like a dress after I lost a hundred pounds." I couldn't imagine myself wandering through all those rooms. I'd probably choose one that I made cozy and that's where I'd hang out.

(Continued on the next page.)

As time goes by, my enjoyments are simple, and undemanding. I've learned to even "shop with my eyes." I select some lovely items and enjoy them in the store ...but I don't have to possess them. They are "mine" while I hold them and then I let them go.

I have all I need and have little room to add to it. I keep telling my children to keep my gifts small or consumable."

Pam (Nov.-Dec. '05) says, "On one hand, a rainy weekend with no reason to get up early or leave the house is excellent. When one occurs, my husband and I sleep in and get up only when we feel like it. (No alarm clocks!) We pull out music we haven't listened to in a while, cuddle up and read whatever we fancy, sometimes interrupting each other to read a sentence or two that we appreciated. Hunger pangs and the desire for a fresh cup of coffee are the only lures that can nudge us from our contentment. A bacon- and- egg breakfast while sipping our first cup of coffee is a weekend treat. After a quick joint clean-up we do our own things such as more reading and lounging, journaling, sewing, needlepoint, or garden planning. We come and go within the rooms of our little place with a hug, a kiss and a few moments discussion on what we are or are not going to do next. The day may include a nap, a game on the computer, an afternoon movie. We may discuss our desires and goals for the future and become creative in breaking our plans down into "bite-size" pieces. We are so busy and work so hard, it's a wonderful experience to slow down and replenish our energy and creativity and playfulness. I'll leave the rest to your imagination.

On the other hand ... are five fingers! (Little joke. Sorry!) Seriously, if the sun is shining and there's a soothing breeze blowing, chances are my husband and I are going to spend a day at the Gulf of Mexico which is about an hour and a half away. There, we play in the water -- either swimming, fishing or both. We save money by splitting the gas with friends and taking coolers of drinks, sandwiches and munchies. If we get to the beach early enough sometimes we can have "all you can eat" pancakes and sausage. The second day of such a week-end is a lazy day. After church, we nap, journal and visit neighbors -- who have a swimming pool and a grill. We take a little food with us and we're set for the rest of the day.

The only down side to any weekend for us is realizing the work-week begins again, too soon. I guess the bottom line is that if we spend a weekend with each other, regardless of what we do, we have a great time. We play well together!

*

Question for July 2006

(Responses will appear next issue.)

What makes you mad?

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