

May 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,

I don't like snakes. But I don't kill those I see, either. I just avoid them.

I had a first close encounter with snakes when I was eight or nine. Our family took a vacation to Florida and one day we went to a "gator farm." We watched a man wrestle one of these ugly and fearsome creatures. At the same place, they offered a Snake Show.

*After telling about snakes, an instructor invited members of the audience to come up and hold his large black snake. My dad urged and cajoled me, finally saying he wanted to take a movie of me holding the snake.*

*I can still remember that old movie of me -- arms stiffly extended in front of me, palms up, holding the black creature. It was longer than a yard stick and bigger around than my fist. It flowed smoothly off both hands. Though the snake teacher is standing by, I look worried. Daddy -- the movie maker-- must have said, "SMILE" because I look at him and put that expression on my mouth -- even though my eyes tell a different story.*

I am still wary of snakes, so when I was standing at our mailbox and first saw our yard snake, I stiffened. Then, I stepped back. It was not a rattler or coral but seemed like some kind of Florida garter snake. It was pretty, I decided, a sort of aqua with black stripes and a zig-zag design running down its body. It was wary of me, too, and I watched as it slithered away into the ground cover. I was not concerned about it living near the mailbox, though I did mention it to my husband, JK.

I also remember a snake encounter as a young adult. When I taught third grade, I covered a science unit about animals: mammals, birds, fish and reptiles. Mammals were easy since many students had or knew a dog or cat. Birds were easy to see and often, a student could bring in a pet parakeet to visit. Commonly, I also kept a couple hardy gold fish, too, so *fish* were covered. But, due to a salmonella concern with handling/keeping turtles, reptiles were more difficult. So, one year, I arranged a snake visit. The pet store owner had only a python at that time...

*I remember the day the snake-and- man arrived. Children clustered around him and the aquarium-like glass cage in which he carried the python. They listened to him and closely watched the snake. As the owner and I had discussed, after a while, it was my turn to hold the snake. (I had practiced with the owner at his store, and now I had to be "Daddy's brave girl" in front of my class.) I wanted to show students -- especially the girls -- these creatures were nothing to be scared of when handled properly.*

*The owner gave me the thick tan and gray rope-like creature that held his S-like curves when transferred to my hands. I turned to my students and smiled (I like to think I did better than that old home movie!) Then I said, "Snakes are not 'slimy', but cool and smooth ... Who would like to touch the snake?" One boy stepped up, then another and finally, a girl. Finished with my performance, I handed the creature back to the owner.*

Over the years, I made a sort of intellectual peace with snakes. So, when I recently stepped from my car onto the driveway and saw my mailbox snake caught under a rear tire, I was upset. The poor thing was writhing, pulling at its trapped tail. I don't know why, but I ran into the house and shouted to JK, "I killed a snake, I killed a snake!" *(Continued, next page.)*

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Since it was not actually dead, as JK came out, I got in the car and backed up a little, freeing the little fellow's tail. Even then, the reptile's head and "shoulders" pulled hard, but barely dragged its paralyzed tail. "I don't know that he'll live," JK observed.

We watched as the little fellow tried to pull his wounded body away. I figured he was trying to get *home* -- the mailbox's ground cover.

After a while JK and I returned to the house. When we came out later to run an errand, the aqua and black guy was lying *behind* the car, but not moving. I backed out carefully -- not wanting to hurt the creature again. When we returned, the aqua rope was lying where we last saw it.

"I think it's dead." JK said, then added, "I'll get a shovel."

He returned and scooped the limp form. I followed as he walked to the rear of our property. There, he dropped the body and dug a little grave. He put the lifeless form in, then covered it. As he did, I recited a little prayer I use whenever I see a dead creature on the highway:

Animal dead on the road I see,  
Bless its soul,  
And, *God bless me.*

Frances Fritzie

*Frances Fritzie, Editor adds, "When I went to the mailbox the next day, I was a little sad, knowing I would not again see the shy aqua-striped, fellow who once lived nearby."*

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

Dear Frances,

I really enjoyed, "Childhood on a Michigan Farm," by Le in Mar.'06 *Ninepatch*. I am writing a biography about my mom, who also grew up on a farm in The Upper Peninsula of Michigan that Le talked about. Although my mother's family did not market their produce as Le's family did, they grew their own vegetables, had cows for milk and butter, chickens for eggs and a special dinner here and there.

My grandfather also cut hardwood railroad ties from their homesteaded property. I guess they used the hardwood ties for curves where the rails took more stress.

In reading old letters and journals, I also discovered that my uncles worked on some of those depression "make work" programs Le mentioned: building dams, and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

It's sure fun to find a fellow Yooper! (A Yooper is someone who lives or has grown up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.)

Love,  
Palma

*Palma (Apr.'06) adds, "I hope you are in your new home now and life is settling down for you."*

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(Continued, next page.)

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Hi Frances,

I enjoyed Apr. '06 *Ninepatch* and your little note. I think the issue was especially good this month. Maybe, it just spoke to me more than usual, too. One letter I related to was by Christa who mentioned she liked paper letters since you can take your time to respond and think about what you're going to say. I agree!

I'd like to read the book June mentioned after her letter, No Death, No Fear by Thich Nhat Hanh. Also, TROR reviewed a book, Ordinary Miracles by Jasmine Smith and it sounds interesting.

I loved your writings about your mother and her concern for you to have cash with you. I also enjoyed reading about the contents of your mother's coin purse. How neat that story was to read. I felt your love for her and how you miss her.

Wishing you and JK well, Hope your household rehab chores are not too stressful.

Blessings to you both.

Dottie

*Dottie (Mar. '06) says, "Frances recently sent me a flier about transitions. She mentioned several she was experiencing. I could identify. I'm going through one with my boyfriend right now."*

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Hi Fritzie,

I thought of you when I met my new neighbors. Their names are named Frank and Francesca. Francesca goes by *Frances* -- and you do too! I imagined that you changed your name to *Francesca*. I think it suits you.

Your story about going through your mother's purse brought me to tears. I'm not certain, but you might have missed the most important part. Your mother loved you! Mothers who stick cash in their daughter's bra for emergencies and safety are demonstrating love. Her focus was on you.

Also, I've observed that you are well organized and meticulous with details. Now, for the first time, it is apparent to me where that trait came from!

I've been a wreck of late. I spent the entire weekend in bed, crying and sleeping. I'm completely off anti-depressants after taking them since the 1970s. I'm always wanting my husband to 'fix' me, even though I know that's an unreasonable expectation. I wonder: am I still hoping that Daddy will rescue me from my critical, judgmental mother? I recall frequently thinking that as a young (and not so young) child.

Thanks for your ear, Francesca.

Love you,

Elaine

*Elaine (Feb. 06) adds, "During my child-bearing years, I feared that I might have daughters. I worried that I would re-peat the only mother-daughter relationship that I knew. Luckily, I had only sons."*

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Dear Frances,

Thanks for your letter. I am sorry to hear the sale of your house fell through. Important things take time. I agree with what you said in your letter, God does have a plan for your life. God's timing is always best -- better than our own. We are to learn from things that go "wrong". (I tell myself the same thing all the time.)

You asked if I was reading anything. Now -- no time! My dad had to be taken to the hospital a couple of months ago, is still with us and I care for him. And, on top of that, my husband (*See next page.*) still has bad days after his concussion nearly a year ago. Add all this "nursing" to my job, the usual special events with our kids and grandkids. Then you can see why I have no time to turn book pages.

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I pray a lot. *Life goes on.* I remind myself to take things one day at a time.  
Take care of yourself. God bless.  
Love and prayers,  
LindaSue

*LindaSue (Apr. '06) says "I am waiting for warmer weather here in Michigan. Then, I can get outside more, have more space -- more time for myself."*

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Dear Frances,

Just found the April '06 *Ninepatch* in my mail - - thanks! I'm sorry if I'm slow getting to it. I'm afraid I've been pushing so hard of late in so many areas (work especially) that I've started to unravel so to speak.

It's exhaustion, I suppose. But, am taking a few days off this week and plan to give my-self permission to rest, maybe even... gasp... nap (?) and putter on *9patch*'s web site\* and some of the 'have-to's' I've been letting slide.

I started my change of pace today. For example, I woke to a call from my sister who'd dropped by town for a surprise visit. Other than doing dishes and getting a few groceries, I took it easy with her all day. It was nice! Tonight, I am going to bed at a decent hour, too! <Sigh.>

So how have you been doing with settling in? Luck with the house and all,  
TROR

*TROR (Apr. '06) adds, "Glad to hear you're well, my dear, and that you and JK are keeping busy with 'useful' work. Yah, it can be a pain, but can also be satisfying to see the results in the end." \*Editor's note: TROR is our *Ninepatch* web master. She puts up a new issue and improves the site every month. See it at, "www.ninepatch9.org"*

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Dear Frances,

After reading, Angela's Ashes and 'Tis, I've finally finished Frank McCourt's latest book, Teacher Man. McCourt is such an Irish charmer. I enjoy his sense of humor. After that one, I thought I'd finish James Frey's, A Million Little Pieces, the memoir that got all the flak for having untruths about his drug addiction, the one Oprah endorsed and then retracted -- but, I still have a hundred pages to go. I ran into too much of the same kinds of events, but I'll finish it, anyway. It's kinda' like a book-long exhale.

I've been practicing acrylic painting -- both small and large. I even started a mural on an obscure wall in my condo! It's my new creative thing, I guess.

Also, I have a new phase of my job at work. It is to select thirteen movies for the LazyBoy Theater at the retirement home. Each week I publish the schedule. Of course, I have to watch as many as I can at home! It's a dominating factor, but fun.

A subplot in my life is the gathering of information to publish a book on my genealogy. An extended family member has volunteered to do it. I'm so blessed. It has taken him less than two weeks to gather more than I have put together in thirty-five years!

Yet another project I'm getting to is the final edit on my book of poetry. I will publish only thirty or forty books, not the hundred I first thought.

Busy days here!

May God bless your days, too, Dear Friend.

Gail

( See more from Gail next page.)

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*Gail (Mar. '06) adds, "The mural is like the 'unfinished symphony.' It is only partially done -- background paint sky and grass. Meanwhile, I'm practicing on smaller watercolor paper. Even that is going slowly. It takes focus and a block of time. I'm usually short on both. I need to adjust myself mentally."*

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Dear Friends,

Recently, I've been reading about Patricia's cat, Mr. Gray. It takes me back along a path that I seldom travel much anymore but cherish taking, nevertheless.

I was about six or seven years old when our family moved, and we brought along the family tomcat, Tiger. Unbelievably, his "homing" instincts were so incredibly strong that every time we let him out of the new house, he'd find his way back to the old house that was a couple of miles away.

Eventually, Tiger adjusted to the new house and stopped this repetitive behavior, but not before we had to go back to the old house and collect him quite a few times. So, when I hear the stories of Mr. Gray's "homing" instincts, my brain can't help but conjure up this memory of Tiger along with a few other fond (and not-so-fond) memories.

Sometimes, for example, Tiger would leave half-eaten rodents on the front porch of the house. Apparently, the dried cat food we fed him just didn't quite hit the spot. His God-given instinct to hunt was also a driving force behind this little behavior.

Tiger was a little wild. The few times that we let him in the house, he was not really one to cuddle up with people. In fact, more often than not he'd zip off to his little hiding spot in the basement storage room the minute we let him in.

Remarkably, his elusive nature is one of the reasons that I have such great memories of him. In fact, when Tiger passed away at the ripe old age of fifteen, he left a great gap in my life. For a long time, every time I visited one of his old haunts, I had this strange feeling that Tiger was still with us.

*Bookworm (Apr. '06) adds, "After I was living on my own, my mother eventually owned two very different cats named Sweetie and Sister. However, neither one ever gave me the kind of memories that good old Tiger did."*

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Good Morning Frances,

It's nice to hear from you, again! You mentioned you had not heard from our friend, Sandra. I also had not heard from her for a long, long time. (Didn't know she'd gone back to preferring "Sandy", either.)

What I mean is, I had not gotten any sort of *personal* message from her. Sandra forwarded me all sorts of "junk" e-mail. After a while I started deleting it without reading.

I used to go down and visit her and her husband at least once a year and stay at their glorious home in Tennessee. It was a sanctuary for me. However, my old truck got too old for me to feel confident in making that journey from Michigan, so I hadn't seen the two of them in about five years.

Also, when I told Sandra, via e-mail, about the ending of my eleven-year relationship -- a HUGE and painful event in my life -- she seemed *brisk*. I felt hurt and didn't feel much like writing her much after that. That exchange was the last I had with her.

Well, I'm sorry, Frances, to be the bearer of bad news, but I received a call on Sunday, 10 July 2005, from Sandra's daughter. Sandra went into the hospital with an infection in her large intestine. It became septic and she died the next morning. It was all very quick. Her death was a year and a half from the last time I heard from her. (*Continued on next page.*)

During that time she had uterine cancer and she also got a divorce from her husband. I feel so bad that so much was going on in her life and I hadn't even a clue.

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Sandra could be so disarmingly real and heartfelt in the types of things she would share. And, she could also play her hand very close to her chest. Near the last time I heard from her, she stated that I was her best friend left in Michigan. Well, this friend never knew she was ill until she was gone. I was devastated.

Life is such a fragile vessel ... and friends are worth their weight in gold.

Warm Regards,  
Mike

*Michael is single gay man and is into an adventuresome chapter of his life. Several years ago, he left his job of many years and started his own antique business. Working for himself in a field that he loves allows Michael to exercise his creativity, while continuously challenging him to keep it viable. He says, "I have never been happier -- or poorer."*

*Although Michael never has much free time, he manages to punctuate his life with reading, movies and walking twice a week with a friend and confidante. It is in the bosom of Nature that Michael finds renewal... and a sense of the eternal.*

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***May you enjoy the random beauty of nature.***

*James (Apr. '06) adds, "It's difficult to improve a sunset or a quiet walk in the woods."*

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

**A MOVING PLANS UPSET  
MY FAMILY**

A few months ago, my husband and I found a condo we liked and could afford. WOW! It's a quarter-mile from Lake Michigan! I just cross a park and I'm there, with my feet in the water!

We listed our present house for sale. The sign is still in the front yard and our new one must wait until we can get funds from this home.

Now, there are complaints from my family. Because we recently put my mom in a retirement facility, my sister doesn't like it that I will move so far away. Since it's only a few hours drive, I promised to come back once a week to visit her. My once a week will be the same number of visits she makes, so that should work. *(See top of next page.)*

I'm not abandoning anyone. Yet, my one daughter, who lives thirty miles from our present home complained. She said, "I'll never get to see you any more."

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I told her that when my mom and dad moved to Florida years ago, I always found a way to see them a few times a year. Besides, she and her family could come to visit *me* for the weekend, too. It's only a hundred and fifty miles.

The lake property sellers will hold "our" condo near the lake for two more months. I have put the sale of our inland home in God's hands.

*Diana (April '06) adds, "We had a good Open house recently and remain hopeful of a sale so we can buy the condo and move."*

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#### MR GRAY'S REAL OWNER RECLAIMS HIM

Recently, the *real* owner of "our" befriended neighborhood cat, Mr. Gray, came over to collect him. The little animal's owner is the daughter of our neighbors. They have been "keeping" him while she finished a college year, living where she could not have the cat.

It had been quite cold, and our neighbors continued to neglect the cat, leaving him out day and night. So, when the little creature came through the crack in our garage door for shelter, we took him inside. We had been keeping him in the house and -- to protect him -- not letting him out.

The daughter said she wanted her pet to stay with her parents and that she didn't mind that he was outside. However, I told her that at night *Mr. Gray minded!* She said he was going to be over at her parents' for only another month or so. She added that she planned to get an apartment and take the pet to live with her.

When she came into our house, Mr. Gray heard her voice and ran up to her. She took her cat and went back next door to her parents' house with him. But, the next morning they must have put the little creature out because he was back here in our garage again. So, we made a place there for him to sleep. We also put some food out there for him.

Now, we've decided that if the cat wants to come in, we will let him in -- but if he wants out, we will let him do that, also.

*Patricia (Apr. '06) adds, "After I talked to the real owner a little bit, I felt a little better about the cat's future. I hope she keeps her words and collects her pet as she said."*

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

(Reading and Listening)

#### MY SISTER'S KEEPER

This dramatic novel by Jodi Picoult is a real page-turner. Last winter it was chosen for the "One Book, One County" library reading program where I live.

It is about Anna Fitzgerald, a thirteen-year-old girl who sues her parents for medical emancipation so she won't have to donate a kidney to Kate, her sixteen-year-old sister who is dying of kidney failure after a life-long battle with acute promyelocytic leukemia, which is in remission. (*See top, next.*)

The story is told from six different points of view. First, we hear from Anna who sets the plot in motion. Then, Campbell Alexander, the lawyer Anna hires to represent her, tells his story. Next, see the tale from the eyes of Anna's mother, Sara, and then her father, Brian. After a while, Anna's only other sibling, her

eighteen -year-old brother, Jesse, tells his side of the story. Near the end, we hear from Julia Romano, the guardian ad litem, who carefully studies members of the Fitzgerald family. All of them relate how Judge DeSalvo conducts the trial. Finally, in the epilogue we get Kate's point of view.

This book also includes a small mystery: *Why does Campbell have a service dog if he is not blind or noticeably disabled?* And, it has a couple of romances, too. One is between Kate Fitzgerald and Taylor Ambrose. The other is between Campbell and Julia.

This story is a thicket of ethical and moral questions with a surprising ending. I couldn't put it down.

*Carol* (See also her comment on a Perfect Day) says, "The ending shocked me. It didn't answer the questions I have about the sanctity of a dying person's wishes, but it did make it abundantly clear that we all change our minds."

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### THE KNOWN WORLD

by Edward P. Jones

The author was a finalist for the National Book Award for his collection of stories, *Lost in the City*. *The Known World* is his first novel. The title is a reference to the limits of a slave's knowledge and experience.

The story is set in Virginia before the civil war. Most of the characters are Black, including the owner of the plantation where most of the scenes are played out. After the plantation's Black owner dies, his widow gives the position of overseer to the slave, Moses, who had help-ed her husband build the house and property. Taking advantage of his position and her grief, he makes love to her. He plans to persuade her to grant him his freedom and then to marry him.

Although many of the characters were unappealing, the exception was the parents of the plantation owner. They were profoundly disappointed that their son would own a member of his own race. When visiting, they chose to sleep in one of the slave cabins, rather than in the plantation manor house.

Jones' story is unwieldy and his frequent digressions from the storyline weight the narrative unnecessarily. He writes in the third person and often jumps ahead to predict the future.

*June Poucher* (Apr. '06) adds: "I thought a young Black owning his plantation in those times would be faced with many interesting challenges."

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

### GET TO KNOW ME

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

This month's question:

***What is your idea of a perfect day?***

Responses:

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*Le (Mar. '06) says, "A perfect day? Well, when I was young, growing up on the farm in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and it was a bright sunny day in mid- winter -- a perfect day would be skiing across the fields (some-times like skating on skis) and leaving my mark on the snowy surface -- the ONLY mark on that whiteness."*

\*

*Carol (Feb. '06) says, "A perfect day for me is not contingent on the weather. It has to do with being deeply moved in a positive way by a loved one AND stretching out of my comfort zone to accomplish something. By definition a perfect day is an exception, not just a normal good day, which most of mine are."*

\*

*Christa Weber (Apr. '06) says, "On a perfect day, I would be free of all obligations. My life tends to be busy and my schedule overfull, so I feel those days that I am not responsible for anything or to anyone are most valuable. There is still plenty to do on my perfect day, however, because a perfect day would be one where I could paint or play my violin as I liked, practice Gaelic vocabulary if I was so inclined, watch a film without feeling guilty about all of the work I am neglecting, and not worry too much about the washing up."*

*My perfect day would also be clear blue and sunny, with just a few white clouds, so I could go walking or cloud-gazing if the urge struck me. On such a perfect day, I might discover a new street or park in my neighborhood, and the geese, mallards, and swans would likely be congregating at the nearby pond. I could feed them bread and find snail shells and stretch my legs, secure in the knowledge that everything I HAVE to do will wait patiently until the next day.*

*And, of course, I'd spend my perfect day in the company of my beau!"*

\*

### **Question for May 2006**

(Responses will appear next month.)

***0When I take a weekend trip I love to....***

\*

(Continued next page.)

IN MEMORIAM

May 2006

Sandra,  
("Sandy" she last  
named herself),  
Mother. wife, sister  
And one of the original Ninepatch circle,  
Departed this world  
Suddenly,  
July 10, 2005.

*Eternal joy grant unto  
Sandy, Father Mother  
God, and let perpetual  
light shine upon her.*  
\*

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