

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 journal.*

Dear Friends,

I paced and muttered to myself before going to the medical facility. Nevertheless, I visited my friend Helen three times after her stroke. I *made* myself go. Then, one day, I decided it was just too hard and stopped dropping by. However, a little voice still said, "Go see Helen."

Though she had been a mentor after my mother died, I didn't listen to the voice. I shut my heart and blocked fond memories. Time passed. The voice nagged, "Go see Helen."

I thought of her lying helpless in those white sheets, unable to move, speak, hear or see much. I had a similar experience with my Mother. Then, I smiled and chattered brightly. I read newspaper stories and greeting cards to the poor woman who could neither respond nor get better. I couldn't go through it again.

The little voice didn't care about my past. When I did not heed its directions, it began to say, "The truth is you simply won't do what you should."

Tears trickled down my face when I confessed these failings to my Spiritual Advisor. She leaned toward me and in a low voice asked, "What would Helen say to you now?"

I hesitated, but then Helen's words formed in my mind, "It's alright, Frances, it's alright."

My Advisor urged me to forgive myself. I sniffled and nodded. However, at the end of our session, I stiffened when the little lady mentioned she was offering an open session on forgiveness the following month. I just nodded, and said, "I'll think about it."

I sighed over adding another commitment to my busy schedule, but decided to attend, anyway. A few weeks later, I sat in a semi-circle with five women and a man. My Spiritual Advisor invited us to tell why we had come. Then, she called our attention to newspaper clippings laid out for us to see. Each was an example of unusual forgiveness. We also heard thoughtful quotes, quieted for reflection and then shared our musings. The morning closed with scripture readings, prayer and song.

That morning I assembled several ideas. First, though the world tends to view matters as good and bad, right and wrong, forgiveness is not an event. It is a process. Only the first move is a clear one: decide to forgive.

Next comes the gray part: the process of letting go of resentment, anger or hurt. One thing I must do is avoid the drama of vivid story retelling. Another is I want to turn away from wallowing in sadness or anger. For example, it does no good for me to dwell on ways I failed Helen. When that little voice starts pointing out my weakness, it's time to change the channel. (*Continued on the next page.*)

Third, I must be my own advisor. For instance, my self-counseling sounds like something Helen might say, *"It's alright Frances. You did the best you could. If you could have done better, you would have done better."*

Fourth, I want to look at the good I did. In Helen's case, I did visit a few times. I also lit a candle and thought of Helen as well as prayed for her.

That morning I also had a flash of understanding. It was nothing anyone said. I was not even thinking about anything when it occurred. Suddenly, I just knew that I had a *gift* in even partial forgiveness. It rose from my weakness.

One gift I received from Helen's infirmity, death and my struggle to grieve has been my stories about the situation. I like to think they may shed light on someone else's forgiving process.

Meanwhile, I smile when I recall another blessing from Helen. She listened when I was troubled. She nodded and gave no advice. Thus, she allowed me to find my own way. *May God grant my friend love and peace.*

Frances Fritzie

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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 like your Oct.'06 letter about our friend, Helen's passing. It is a tender caring tribute to a deep friendship. You said you had not been able to cry; I think dry grief is more difficult to bear.

Every time I visited Helen after her stroke, I felt like crying. (Sometimes I did, after I left.) In that way, I mourned her for over a year but I cried briefly after I got the call notifying me of her death.

I think my tears were partly of gratitude and relief. Like you, I had been praying every day. I wanted an early merciful death for her.

As you know, Helen was my mentor and we shared a lot. She and her husband were there when my husband died. Four years later, I was there with her when her husband died. The four of us bonded in countless ways.

Helen had a good sense of humor. I remember in the mountains, where we were summer neighbors, she often came down to use my washing machine. One day she was hanging clothes on the line to dry while two of my grandchildren were visiting. As Helen started to leave she turned to the children and said, "I'll be back later to take my clothes off."

The children howled with laughter and Helen, a good sport, joined in. The children loved Helen and always enjoyed the story that never lost its humor in the re-telling.

(Continued next page.)

June Poucher (Oct. '06) adds, "Now, I like to think of Helen as reunited with her only child (who died two years before her), her husband, my husband, and many others."

Note: See her favorite weather comment later in this issue.

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Hi Frances, my dear friend,

I loved your article in the October '06 *Ninepatch* regarding Helen's passing and your aunt's grieving. It was very touching.

I often think of our friend, Helen, and thank God for my precious moments with her. I do not understand how someone so special had to go through all she did. Only God knows. I have to just accept that.

Dottie

Dottie (Aug. '06) also has a book review in INSTRUCTIONS.

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Dear Frances,

Thanks for your apology about getting my name wrong in the birthday listing. It's no big deal!

Just for the record; Ellen is my first name, Bruns is my middle name and Christensen is my maiden name. Bruns is my grandmother's maiden name and I use it to honor her.

She wrote three books about the family's history. Her warmth and humor make her stories come alive. I was very close to her.

Ellen Bruns Christensen is single. Her 'children' are her two dogs. She is a retired computer guru, who loves to read and play computer games.

*

Thank you so much for all your kind words on grief this month, Frances,

I'm still trying to help the husband of my friend Anita who recently died. He is coming along, but he is still dangerously close to being severely agora-phobic. (That's the one where you want to stay in your home and not go out.) He seems to have an internal clock that seems to go off after being "out" an hour and a half or so.

He went with me to look at motorcycles when I was shopping to buy. We were gone the whole day. I drove. It was fall and a lovely drive with changing colors everywhere.

After three hours the poor man was actually breaking out in a sweat and having a mild anxiety attack! I suggested we stop at my mom's to have a tea break. He seemed to level out when we got there. I watched his near panic subside while we were there. Having the house around him, even though it was not his house, soothed and comforted him.

I don't know what else to do for him except continue to support him to get out and about.

...Later, Frances!

Good hope.

CaT

(Continued on the next page.)

CaT (Oct. '06) continues, "He was saying things about being happy to help because he still remembers how My John and I helped him and Anita after their fire...(That's another story.) He used words like "grateful" and "owing"... he meant he can never forget the great feeling he had when we gave of ourselves just because we were friends. He never wants to lose that."

*

Dear Frances,

As I have said before, for many years now, I have been trying to become a better person. I have examined my patterns, my thoughts and my behavior. The journey has been an adventure, but it is not easy to put "turning my ship around" into words.

I believe my journey began the first day I walked into a new spiritual group meeting several miles from where I live in Florida. I believe the people who were there were -- each one -- a God-given gift to me. In their presence, I could at last cry. Those tears were mostly mourning the hopes and dreams that never came to be as well as the pain and struggle my life had held up until then.

Over time, I developed new eyes. During the most recent summer I have been allowed to "see" many events, ideas and people -- including another side of myself -- much more clearly. For example, this morning I found a gift in this quote from Katherine Mansfield:

"Could we change our attitude, we should not only see life differently, but life itself would come to be different."

I had heard about "attitude" all my life. Still, I had no idea how it applied to me -- until now. Finally, I am on the other side of "tude". And, since last summer, my life has been different!

Love,
Nancyann

Nancyann (Oct. '06) says, "I've been away from my Florida home for more than four months. I am looking forward to seeing my friends there soon."

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Dear Frances,

Thank you for your letter and your ideas. I do appreciate them.

In a recent letter, you suggested I might be grieving the loss of closeness I used to have with my husband. You are right. I am grieving! It comes and goes. I have problems with my father who lives with us, but with him it is age and health. With my husband, it is more emotional... And, worst of all, he just doesn't see a problem!

I repeat the Serenity Prayer over and over on bad days:

*God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.*

I had a treat on a recent Saturday. My husband was having an “up” day. We took turns doing all sorts of yard work, even moving dirt for a foundation to a storage shed he started several months ago. *(Continued top of next page.)*

Usually, when he works like that, he crashes -- he is done for the day. (And, maybe the next day, too.) But that day, he took me shopping after all our work. It was a *nice* surprise.

I am still trying to take life *one day at a time*. However, it was sure nice to have a *good* one!

God Bless.

Love and prayers,

LindaSue

LindaSue (Oct.-06) adds, “Even though I say lots of other prayers, I cross-stitched a Serenity Prayer and it hangs in our bedroom.”

Lost innocence is the cost of discovery.

James (Oct. '06) expands, “Enchantment is lost when we no longer believe in the magic of Santa Claus and Easter Bunnies.”

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---F-A-B-R-I-C-S---

(Our Experiences)

MR. GRAY ‘LIKES’ MY NANCY-CAT

My husband and I have several cats besides Mr. Gray. Another one is a calico we call Nancy.

These days, we have to put Nancy-Cat in a basement cage at night and when we go away. About two years ago, she developed “behavior” problems. (She won’t use her litter box all the time.) I have tried all manner of litter and box changes. I’ve also taken her to the vet. He has checked her for imbalances as well as illness, but she gets a clean bill of health.

Now, when we leave the house, we always put her in the basement. Anyway, I have a net -thing that I dry sweaters on and I keep it in the basement, too.

Well, now-a- days, Mr. Gray wants to sleep on it there -- near Nancy. I also notice that, when Nancy-Cat is in the basement, Mr. Gray goes down, too.

Do you suppose he has a crush on her? Mr. Gray *is* neutered, and so is Nancy-Cat... Maybe animals' boyfriend/ girlfriend relationship is not always about sex! (See next.)

Patricia (Oct. '06) adds, "It is funny because she uses the litter box in the cage when she is in there. I will sometimes find her sitting in front of the cage waiting to go in. She is hard to understand."

MISSION IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,

A Third Letter

Editor's Note: *The following letter was received from **Patience**, via the Mission Diocese courier, dated June 23, 2006. It is the third of four from her during her two months in the mission field. The Dominican Republic is the eastern half of a rather large island that lies just east of Cuba — basically between Cuba and Puerto Rico. Los Guayuyos is deeply inside a mountainous region that covers the southwestern side of the country.*

Dear Everyone:

Life in Los Guayuyos (a village in the western mountains of The Dominican Republic) continues to go well. The community has moved our living quarters into the public school room since the school closed for the summer. It is a bigger space and closer to the "bathroom".

I think we are making progress. The children are learning to read and write during our daily teaching hours. The adults and teens come to learn to read and write in the evenings after working long hours in the fields. They are so eager. It is rewarding to see them make progress.

It rains every afternoon very hard. Mud (a red clay type and slippery) is everywhere. It is almost impossible to stay clean. Last night the rain brought us a visitor -- a huge spider. It was five inches across. It was awful! We coaxed it back outside. Later, the people told me this "cacata" has a poisonous bite! I just hope we never see it again!

The best thing in my day is when little four- year- old Meraida brings me a handful of wild flowers and greets me with a big smile. This makes everything else seem nothing.

Thank you so much for your support for the people here in "los lomas", the (great) hills of this country.

Much love and many blessings to you!

Patience

Patience (Oct. '06) adds, "Our adult students work hard all day and then go to 'school' with us at night. Right now they are harvesting the beans."

DANCING WITH
THE WHITE COATS

I had a morning appointment at the heart hospital. (I was to have a rather complicated heart test done.) It seems they sent me proper instructions, but failed to inform the two docs who were to perform it that they were to be there! The staff apologized for the

mix up and rescheduled me. Then, since I just happened to be in the neighborhood, they sent me to another area have an MRI done on my noggin – (*Continued, next page.*)

to check for blood clots. While I was waiting for that test, I got to chatting with the nurses. When I told them I had recently been giving dance lessons to some grad students I knew, they wanted a demonstration.

One of them was getting married soon so, I showed her a few steps of rumba, cha-cha, and tango. I felt a little like a performer on the TV show, “Dancing with the Stars.” We gathered quite a crowd of white coated on-lookers before we were done.

Fun.

Le (July '06) adds, “This year's South Dakota color display is not nearly as good as last year -- guess we just didn't have the right temperature and light combo to make the grade. Still, it's nice to walk through a neighborhood and see the street covered with gold, red, and brown leaves, feel fall in the air, see the ‘happy’ faces of people raking, raking, raking leaves. It all reminds me of up home in the UP of Michigan where fall was a wonderland of color. I hope to go back there again in the fall and experience those vistas one more time.”

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THRESHOLDS

Thresholds have been on my mind a lot recently. Not the kind that are a hard physical reality such as the ones that separate one room from another, or from outside to inside of a building. (Though as a builder, these interest me, too.) Nor the kind I feel that our country is facing now: will we choose to remain adolescents, self-centered with few boundaries, or will we choose to cross the threshold of adulthood and become responsible, interdependent and caring for all. As much as these issues pull at my heart, the ones I have recently been reflecting on have been more personal.

For a number of years, I have been yearning to get my house in order. I would make stabs at it, but never seemed to get very far with it. I felt like I was treading water rather than swimming strongly towards my goal and it was very frustrating. Friends would roll their eyes when I talked about my desire, obviously wondering when I would get off my duff. I wondered, too, but somehow the chemistry within never got fired up with any kind of sustained energy.

However, I did learn to sit with myself in respectful attention and ask others to honor my process. At the time, I would not have labeled this a *threshold*, but now I see that it was. I was taking small steps toward greater self-care while The Universe was bringing others into my life who could be of help. One such person was a lady who did an exquisite job of interior painting for me.

The next *threshold* was my seventieth birthday and the ritual with my friends. Yes, it was a marvelous decade celebration, but on hindsight, I feel it was also a *Croning*, a true crossing over to being an “elder.” How do I know? I know because my energy has been quite different. All of a sudden, I moved on having furniture reupholstered, the interior of the house painted, while bags of things wended their way to the second-hand shop or to friends, and other things like good books got stored in the hope that someday

Morningstar** will have a real library. I realized that what was going on in my outer home was truly a reflection of what was going on inside of me. I was acting on my behalf, clearing the decks, simplifying, honing in on what feels (*Continued, next page.*) truly important and letting go of peripheral “possibilities” that would often suck my energies or distract me. I have a sense of what is my next step, yet I want to remain open to the Spirit.

However, facing breast cancer again a little over a year ago took a lot of the wind out of my sails. The first time I had cancer, my body told me “something” was wrong and so I went to the doctor. But, this time the news came through a routine mammogram. I felt betrayed by my body and bewildered by our lack of communication. I thought I was a good listener, but obviously, I wasn't. Fortunately, my type of cancer is slow-growing and so after another lumpectomy and a new medication, my chances of having many more years here are quite good.

The cancer was another *threshold*, a liminal space reminding me that I truly cannot see the shore, that all that I can do is take one day at a time. However, I can do more to take care of myself physically as well as emotionally and spiritually. For me that involves a number of things, such as: cleaning up unfinished business, making sure my relationships are clean and clear, and keeping open space for listening and then acting on what feels right.

Besides gardening and being an earth- keeper, I hope to spend more time writing and doing a variety of art. Perhaps a book will emerge, but if it is nothing more than a journal of sorts, that will be alright, too. It will then be part of my legacy to my children and grandchildren. Attending to this “book” and keeping the above disciplines is an act of loving obedience to my inner truth, and each time each one of us makes that choice, the world is a better place for all. What really feels good is the eagerness welling up inside of me to take on this next step. It feels like a holy discipline, not onerous at all, but rather one full of joy and laughter; my YES to God and myself!

Elise (May'05) adds, “I am up to my ears these days running the local Farmers' Market. We encountered a number of challenges in getting it up and running, but it is now quite successful and I think will only get better as time goes by. I see it as a way of supporting our local farmers, providing good fresh food, as well as educating people and creating community. I share Market Master duties with one fellow, which is nice, as that gives each of us a break as needed. Every Saturday all summer is indeed a commitment!”

** Morningstar is a retreat center where Elise lives and helps provide services. This piece first appeared in its newsletter, Autumn 2005.

THE CHRISTMAS CACTUS

“Don't you tell your Daddy!” Mama's blue eyes drilled me as she spoke in a stern voice. She poured table salt around the roots of a small oak tree. “He planted these for shade but they make a mess when the leaves fall,” she said as she moved on to the second of the four little trees that spanned our front yard. My five-year-old eyes watched in silent alarm as the salt covered the black dirt.

I was afraid to tell Daddy. After supper I slipped into the kitchen and found the salt box. On the front porch Mama had two pots of Christmas cactus that she took great pride in. I opened the spout on the salt box and poured freely. *(Continued, next page.)*

The next morning my act of retribution was discovered. Mama took a spoon and began to remove the salt. Daddy helped her and they worked until they believed the cactus would survive. Daddy asked me why I did it. When I told him, he nodded sadly. It had rained the previous night, dissolving the salt around his trees and he knew they would die. He turned, wordless, to my mother.

I expected to be severely punished but Mama just clamped her mouth shut and glared at me, knowing that both of us had been found out.

June Poucher also has a letter in AROUND THE FRAME.

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

ANAM CARA

I've borrowed a book from my sister titled, Anam Cara, A Book Of Celtic Wisdom by John O'Donohue. It spoke to me.

Here are a few sentences from the book:

One of the reasons so many people are suffering from stress is not that they are doing stressful things but that they allow so little time for silence. Often secrets are not revealed in words, they lie concealed in the silence between the words or in the depth of what is unsayable between two people.

Another portion of the book touched me. John O'Donohue said we all have experiences, but when we are young, we miss the meaning. As we are aging we can discern the meaning of the experience. Another part felt soothing. He said that I should not blame myself for making bad mistakes that I greatly regret as I grow. When I forgive myself, through those mistakes, the inner wounds can begin to heal. This was comforting to read and feel.

The last section talks about aging. This quote represents the core of it:

Within the harvest circle, you are able to gather lost moments and experiences, bring them together, and hold them as one. In actual fact, you can come to see aging as the harvest of your soul. You begin to sift the fruits of your experience. You begin to group, select, and integrate them.

Of course these quotes are my selected sentences, ones that spoke to me. I do spend more time now in meditation -- but I still can't get to the depth I feel I need. I feel fear is part of what blocks me.

Dottie (Aug. '06) adds, "When it comes to moving back North, I feel fear is a part of the picture when it comes to not being with my boyfriend. But, I also know I have to get beyond this, to where my destiny and purpose lies."

(Continued on the next page.)

COMPLICATIONS,

A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science.

I read a blurb on this volume in a book catalog. I tore out the page and later requested the hardcover at my local library.

Author Atul Gawande is the American-born son of two Indian doctors. He studied philosophy before finally choosing medicine at Harvard. His interest in the nature of life and science is apparent in this paragraph from his introduction:

There are moments in which medicine actually happens... moments in which we can see and begin to think about the workings of things as they are... There is science in what we (doctors) do, yes, but also habit, intuition and sometimes plain old guessing. The gap between what we know and what we aim for persists. And, this gap complicates everything we do.

The fourteen tales collected were written during the time Gawande was a surgical resident. All the stories are true. However, he altered details to protect some individuals. His stories are collected under three general headings: Fallibility, Mystery and Uncertainty.

While I never found the reading gory, surgical detail is included and topics are not for the "sensitive". For example, I read about the best way to repair a hernia, chronic nausea, morbid obesity, flesh eating bacteria and doctor's surgical mistakes as well as how the profession handles (and doesn't) "bad" doctors.

I recommend this volume. It shows not only the science of medicine, but also its practice. Gawande also presents a wider perspective on relationships between doctor and patient -- one which includes both science and humanity.

Frances Fritzie, Editor

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November Birthday wishes to:

Joan H. -- Nov. 16

Diana -- Nov. 17

Don -- Nov. 26

--M-A-N-A-G-I-N-G-- T-H-E

- - H-O-U-S-E - -
(Ninepatch Business)

(Continued, next page.)
GET TO KNOW ME

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

This month's question:
What's your favorite kind of weather?

Responses:

June Poucher (Oct. '06) says, "My favorite days are flannel shirt weather. They begin during the cool refreshing mornings of fall. Living in Florida all year brings a yearning for the end of long hot days with their threat of hurricanes. Although still warm, there is a subtle change in the air. These mornings bring back fond memories of October visits with my best friend who lived in North Carolina. We would pack a picnic lunch and drive up into the mountains. We would take walks; 'catch up' with each other's news; laugh and have time for girl talk."

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Carol (Oct. '06) tells what weather she likes. She says, "All kinds! I once lived where the majority of days were balmy, and I didn't appreciate it. It was boring. Now in the Midwest I've learned to love all seasons for their various beauty. For ease of survival, I love balmy with clean, blue, blue skies and the perfume of spring blossoms in the air. For excitement, I enjoy autumn's cool temperatures, blue skies with puffy clouds, gusty winds and falling leaves. For fright, I choose thunder storms, tornados, blizzards. For just being at home (when I don't have to go anywhere and the house is warm and cozy and full of food), I like rain and snow. Then, I sit with a good book, or work on a jigsaw puzzle, or write e-mail. For magic, I delight in clear blue skies, and sun sparkling off of snow-covered trees and meadows. For exercise, I choose snow to shovel and for skiing or hot days for hanging out at the beach. For farming, I pick sunny and warm days with half an inch of rain twice a week."

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Patricia (Oct. '06) says this, "I am really enjoying early fall weather: not too cold but cool enough for sweaters, jackets and blue jeans. I just feel better when the weather is cooler like this. I like the smells this time of year: smoke from fireplaces and mulch and other stuff people put on their lawns. I am happy to see people out in their yards and, of course, the leaves in Ohio are simply beautiful."

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Christa Weber (Aug. '06) shares her thoughts, "My favorite kind of weather is the sort that one experiences on Costa Rica's Pacific coast in October. Each new day begins with copious amounts of sunshine. The sky is a vibrant blue dotted with fluffy white clouds that seem almost close enough to touch. Slowly, the air grows hotter until sweat-soaked shirts and shorts are inevitable. Birds twitter merrily and there is no escaping the loud,

pervasive hum of the country's diverse insect life. But as time passes, dark clouds roll in from the east, obscuring the tops of the lush mountains in the distance.

(Continued on the next page.)

Then, without so much as a warning crack of thunder, the sky opens, and heavy sheets of rain turn the world to water. The precipitation cools the air and makes everything smell wonder-fully of hibiscus and greenery."

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Next month's question:

What's your favorite food?

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