

April 2007

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 tipped up the insulated jug of *Half and Half*. Opaque white-ness streamed into my fresh coffee. Clouds of tan roiled from dark depths, spread then stopped just before they reached the liquid's smooth top. A white bit of cream floated on the dark calm surface.

For several months I'd been slowly adding coffee cream to my java, and studying the remaining small white etching. The image appeared for a second then grew into more shapes. I "read" them like tea leaves in a Gypsy's cup.

I have no particular gift for fortune telling, but a friend does. Occasionally she brings over her mint and green blended tea. We sip and talk, then she interprets my leaves. One day, after pointing out creatures and objects she saw in my dregs, she urged me to read her cup's residue. I squinted then stared at the soggy brown bits, but said nothing.

She urged, "Just tell what the shapes might be."

I told her of a Scotty dog, ears perked but lying down and a sheer cliff like Mt. Rushmore, but faceless. Not much, but my friend smiled. Nowadays, in the same it-might-mean-something spirit, I study my floating coffee cream.

Often I see a fire-eating Chinese dragon or a vanilla swirl in a new quart of chocolate ice cream. Today, I beheld a breezy angel rising toward a single bright star. I hoped it was a positive sign. I could use one.

Two days ago I answered the wall phone by my kitchen desk. I hear the voice of my real estate agent half a state away. My hubby walked in while I was talking to her.

She presented a low offer on my empty house. I heard her out, then shook my head at the phone, "He doesn't sound like a serious buyer!"

She agreed the man's offer was too low. Insulted by the piteous offer, I didn't even counter. I rejected it.

This afternoon my husband said, "Take that last offer on your house."

To JK it was simple: tell my agent I had changed my mind. But I didn't want to. I still fumed that some guy thought I was so desperate I'd sell my beautiful little house cheap.

I said nothing to my husband, but thought, "Mind your own business!" and "What do you know!" I slammed my house sale papers back into their file and stomped around our house. My gut churned like the stormy cream after it entered the depths of my coffee.

Suddenly, a lump gathered in my throat and sobs threatened. Instead of crying, I clenched my teeth and tried to identify my trouble. It wasn't all JK. He meant well. I was actually only irritated at his meddling.

The biggest chunk was probably a year of yo-yo of selling/ not selling my lovely little house. It had "sold", then the deal fell through a week before closing. After that, the market fell and I tried without success to sell it myself. When the snowbirds came back, I

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hired another agent. She found me a sale, but that one also fell apart only three days before it was to close.

I also missed sitting with my far-away girlfriends. And, surely living full-time with another person after many years alone was also taking a toll.

I needed a *time out!* I piled into my car and motored to one of my favorite places to recoup -- *Krispy Kreme*. I sat in a booth apart from others. While I sipped hot coffee -- laced with cream, I nibbled glazed donut holes.

Sweets soothed me and the coffee perked up my thoughts. "This too shall pass," and, "God has a plan for my life" ran through my mind. I even reviewed the good in my life: safety, enough money, health ...

As I tipped up my coffee cup, I remembered the cream angel. She was climbing for a single bright star. I smiled. It was a good sign after all.

Blessings***

Frances Fritzie

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

Fritzie,

About your depression. There is no sense in going with-out appropriate antidepressants. I would urge you to get to a good psychiatrist and try something.

There is no point in snoozing your life away and being depressed. It is a chemical imbalance that can be addressed with appropriate meds. You wouldn't hesitate to take insulin if you had diabetes. In the same way, you should not hesitate to take antidepressants for depression.

It is a chemical imbalance, not a "head game".

Good luck!

GinnyLee

GinnyLee (May'04) adds, "I have a Seasonal Affective Disorder light that I haven't used for years. I want to try it again."

*

Hi Fritzie,

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I've been carrying printed versions of the last three issues of *Ninepatch* in my briefcase and have just now perused them, savoring the fresh and soul-warming sincerity as the gift that it is. *(Continued on the next page.)*

Your January '07 story about writing absence excuse notes for "Billy" brought back vivid memories from elementary school where I also first met him. I counted Billy as a friend. He used to receive what was by comparison an ample allowance, and he frequently bought me and a few other friends chocolate malts at the soda shop not far from school.

He touched my life all through my school days. To this day, I still see him at my parents' cottage at the lake. His bright eyes are aglow and he's wearing a big toothy smile.

He is leaning assertively into the wind, enjoying a rush that came with piloting a small boat. He is manhandling the roaring outboard motor with his left hand on the handle -- steering-- and the throttle wide open.

In junior high, I remember one of Billy's parties in his parents' rec. room. Lights out, I was introduced to "Spin the Bottle" and I kissed a young blond vamp. (She sure knew what she was doing, and I've never forgotten how fast I learned a kiss could be more than a peck on the cheek. I think it took me a year to get a good night's sleep!)

In high school, I earned gas money for my little boat by collecting scrap paper on evenings and Saturdays. I'd haul it to a salvage yard owned by Billy's dad.

Then in our last year of high school, Billy's dad trusted me to use one of his bigger trucks for our "Senior Class Paper Drive". I felt like just another kid, but he must have seen someone different. Billy's dad bought our paper and once again added coins to my coffer -- this time it was earmarked for the Senior Class Trip.

I sure liked Billy. He and his family were good people.

Love and peace,

Fred

Fred (Feb. '05) adds, "I can see your mom's face when you quoted the "f- word" your little girlfriend had used to share her teenaged neighbor's story about getting pregnant. (Feb2007) If you were ten when your mom read you 'the book', then I guess we were both in the fourth grade. If only we had known at the time how innocent we were. "

Dear Frances,

TROR'S letter in the March issue of *Ninepatch* spoke to me. She talked about her ex-not listening to her. In the early years of our marriage my late husband would often, unthinking, walk away while I was talking to him. As we both matured I could see it was a product of his upbringing; he believed my thoughts and feelings were unimportant. I agonized over this because he was my lover and I wanted him to also be my best friend.

In a quote from her book The Friendship of Women : The Hidden Tradition of the Bible, Joan Chittister says, "A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words." I have been blessed with a few such friends. My husband never quite reached the level of understanding that I would have liked. However, our relationship improved tremendously over the years. Primarily that was due to our active participation in twelve step programs.

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Through my program, where I am listened to and validated, I came to understand that a person cannot give what they do not have. Sometimes the greatest gift we can give to others is to simply listen to them. *(Continued next page.)*

June (Mar. '07) adds, "I believe the most vital part of a relationship is to respect what is important to the other person."

Hello Frances,

Thanks for your letter.

Life goes on here. My one daughter, Anita, lost her job. Her case-worker is helping her with interviews. She doesn't want me to know what is going on. She tells me she is an adult. Maybe she thinks what I don't know won't hurt me, but she still comes running when she is scared or needs money.

Recently, my husband had a complete physical – routine. Now he is a diabetic! He has to check his blood sugar level every day. (This makes him more crabby than ever.) He says his blood sugar can affect his moods. This is why he's been acting so strange. Maybe?

He was sweet today. He shut off the alarm and let me sleep. He made breakfast and brought me coffee in bed. But, last month when I had knee surgery, he didn't do anything nice. He just complained about all he had to do.

Oh, my dad! He had been sober for years. Then one day last week he came home drunk. I hope that doesn't become a problem.

I can't do anything about any of it! I just work, try to keep up with my husband and dad. I still read, too. That's about it until my recent knee surgery completely heals. Then I can start walking again.

I hope all is well with you. Try to slow down and enjoy yourself. Take care. God bless.

Love and prayers,
LindaSue

LindaSue (Mar. '07) adds, "I found three more Beverly Lewis books. (Now I have read nine of hers.) I am reading, The Covenant. Next in the series are The Betrayal, The Sacrifice, The Prodigal, and The Revelation. When I finish these I will look for her series, "Annie's People."

*

Frances,

I have arrived at the Texas retreat center where I'll have my discernment -- a preparation for long term mission.

I'm taking this time away from my usual work because of my desire (and request) to work in the mission field. It is dramatic change from all I have previously done. I did spend two months each of my last two summers in the Dominican Republic, but those experiences are not quite the same as they will be once I am totally into mission work.

All is going well here. There are seven of us in the program here -- the small number makes the experience very intimate and personal.

(Continued on the next page.)

Every day we also have presentations, time for reflection, counseling interviews, group sessions and prayer time. I am able to get much out of it!

It is so very good.
Much love and prayers,
Patience

Patience (Mar. '07) adds, "Our time is not all taken with our discernment processes, We also take turns with regular living chores like cooking and laundry.

Hello!

When most of the U.S. was wearing green for St. Patrick's Day, I was wearing a silly sombrero at my bridal shower.

At the Mexican place where it was held, my mom asked the servers if they had a paper plate that could be fashioned into a ribbon hat. They said, "No, but they had a sombrero." (Oy!)

It was an interesting and pleasantly small gathering. My sixteen-year-old sister (who is also my Maid of Honor) did a good job with the planning.

We are having a honeymoon, but not right after the wedding. At the end of the summer, perhaps, we'll go and stay in my mom's vacation house in Costa Rica.

Christa (Feb. '07) adds, I figure by summer's end I'll have recovered from the wedding. Perhaps I'll also have gotten a book deal and finished writing the book!"

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A good consequence is the child of a thoughtful parent.

James (Mar. '07) continues, "It is nice to reap the rewards of careful planning."

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(FORUM begins on the next page.)

- - F- O- R- U- M- -
(Readers Write to Readers)

Carol shares the email she sent to Georgene, in response to her Mar.'07 article, "The Spirit of My Work".

Dear Georgene,

I "hear" you. When I was working full time, I took pride in believing I could support myself for the rest of my life. However, my career got derailed when I gave birth to my only child at age thirty- six.

I've always greatly admired people, women especially, who could support themselves financially through rewarding, honest, hard work. I don't know a lot about the jobs you've held, but I've witnessed your dedication, focus, problem-solving skills, devotion and team spirit.

My faith is strong that you will find a wonderful job that will pay you a decent salary. Your forward steps into the unknown inspire me.

Carol (See her dinner guests, page13) says, "I am at a very good place in my life journey, at the moment, and am happily sharing my bounty through service and moral support to my friends."

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Palma has comments for several March '07 contributors.

I want to respond to several women who contributed to the last *Ninepatch*.

First I'll comment to Elaine who wanted to know when one reads. I live alone so of course it would be different if I lived with someone. I read with breakfast and tea for about a half an hour. If I'm home at lunch I read then for about a half an hour. Ditto at dinner. Then I also read for about fifteen minutes when I get in bed. If I have a thriller going, I look forward to the next reading time rather than gobbling it all up at once. If I'm with someone I read only at breakfast and before bed.

Next, I have a thought for Georgene who said something like, "How long a minute is, depends which side of the bathroom door you're on." Another time a minute is really long is when I'm waiting for someone and they are late!

Last, I want to tell Frances that I have been dealing with a cousin who committed suicide a couple of weeks ago. I've thought of you and your strong reaction to your cousin's suicide (Mar.'04). My cousin's death seems such a waste and so brutal. It's hard to believe that she would do that to herself.

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She had been through a lot, but she seemed on top of it all. She had a closed head injury in August and since had been going through divorce.

(Continued on the next page.)

She'd also had a lot of pain from some pancreatic cyst. Our family wonders if she had been diagnosed terminal since she did have breast cancer several years ago.

So sad. She left no note. And no will.

All for now.

Love,

Palma

Palma (Mar. '07) adds, "Last night someone crashed into me while I was driving down the alley where I live. I'm okay, but my car isn't. A friend will loan me her car for my piano appointments next week. (Very nice.) Other than that -- and lucky for me -- I can walk or ride my bike any place I need to go."

**

Georgene has comments for TROR and Elaine, contributors from the March '07 issue.

Dear TROR,

I read your Mar. '07 article, "Subtle Abuse" with tears in my eyes. You said, "I wonder if given the chance to share those same feelings and reactions with a husband who gave me my voice would have helped me. I have to think a caring listener might have allowed me get over my troubles faster." You are right, dear TROR. Ideally, if one is married, a spouse's acceptance and willingness to "give me my voice" is a wonderful gift. But, when that is not the case, *Ninepatch* can stand in the stead of caring listener and champion of voices. That is what *Ninepatch* was for me for a very long time. There was much healing that came from having a voice in its pages.

Now I am blessed with a husband who listens and cares, but I don't always turn to him as sounding board and mentor. *Ninepatch* still helps me move through painful moments ... and gives me the chance to do the same for another.

Peace,

Georgene

**

Dear Elaine,

You asked, "When do you read?"

My primary time to read is half an hour before I go to sleep, and for a bit of time before I get up on a Saturday. I still work so I've had to train myself to accept reading in small bites. Some-times I wish I could read into the night but the morning tiredness just isn't worth it.

Good luck carving some reading time from your schedule.

Peace,

Georgene

Georgene (Mar. '07) adds, "Finding time to read is just like finding time for anything else. The desire has to be strong enough to displace something else in our finite

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*number of waking hours. I'm sure some think that grabbing half an hour a day to read doesn't do the story-teller justice -- and perhaps it doesn't -- but it works for me. I find it better to relax and read a little here and there than to never relax and read at all." **

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

DANCING IN HARMONY

My older brother and I are two years apart. Those twenty four months made us close enough in age to play together as young children, snub each other for the larger part of our teen years, and then grow together once more as we neared adulthood.

When I flip through the old black and white photos buried in shoeboxes, I find him wearing my diapers (cloth) as a four-year- old Superman. More photos show us plastered with smiles in all manner of play, riding in wagons, sitting on the porch steps, tottering on the backyard swing set.

Like another picture -- this one in my mind's eye -- I see us on a summer day. I was five and he was seven. We were in front of an old mirror propped up in our garage, dancing the "swim". Where we learned this I don't know, but there we were holding our noses with one hand and making swimming motions with the other, dancing up and down, full of giggles.

Years later, oddly enough, it was dancing that was part of our reconnection. We were attending small colleges just a few hours apart in South Georgia. I went for a weekend visit to watch him perform in a play, a totally new endeavor for him. The next night we went out to the local hangout. For the first time in years I was his peer, not just his little sister. And, to a disco beat, we danced again that night.

Thirty years later, on my brother's forty-ninth birthday, he was in the hospital undergoing triple-bypass surgery. As I stood beside his bed afterwards, the photos and memories seemed so long ago.

Now as I look at him, fully recovered, I think perhaps it is time to dance once more.

Angie is married. She is the mother of four plus: two grown sons, a grown daughter, one finishing high school and a daughter-in-law. Angie loves to read (especially during the summer), write, and listen to a variety of music. She can't pass up a used bookstore and buys more books than she has time to read. That's an act of trust that, "one day" there will be time.

*

LOOKING UP

On the wall above my computer is a photograph I took in California. It is a place I consider to be one of the most enchanting places I have visited: the Self- Realization

Fellowship Lake Shrine in Pacific Palisades. It was established by Indian yogi Paramahansa Yogananda and his followers in 1950. *(Continued on the next page.)*

The image in the photograph is almost divided in two. There's the "real world" and also its reflection in a spring fed lake that is astonishingly green. Mineral colors in the slow moving water meander like liquid malachite.

As I walked a path that circuits the lake, I was again agonizing over my relationship with my older son. Nagged by guilt over decisions I have made and knowing how deeply these have affected my course, I was hoping to steer that son in a better direction.

As the serenity and peace of the lake shrine saturated my body and mind, I realized anew the only person I can change is myself. When I feel anxiety and unease, I must look within and take action to transform my perception. Something as simple as a breathing exercise or a repeated mantra can rapidly and significantly change my insight. Doing either is not so easy as it might seem. First I must be willing to have these fearful misconceptions changed! For some reason, instead of finding peace, I tend to cling to worry. That walk around the Shrine's beautiful lake helped me to remember that my answers lie within.

The photograph above my desk helps serve as a daily reminder of this simple truth.

Moscar (Feb. '07) adds, "I have read that looking up encourages the brain to produce the kind of waves accessed in higher states of consciousness. I can easily change my mind state just by looking up. At the lake shrine, my eyes were drawn upward by tall trees and mountainside. In a kind of parallel, while sitting at my desk, I have to tilt my head and gaze upward to contemplate the image."

THE FAMILY PILE

My favorite place in the world is in my own home, when I go to bed each night. That is when we have what my husband and I call, "The Family Pile".

This takes a little explanation. My husband is in bed, on his back. Our cat lays on his chest with her head just under his chin. I'm on my right side, lying next to Hubby's left side. My head rests on his left shoulder and we are holding hands down by his side ... his left and my right. His right hand rests on the cat's back and my left hand also rests on the cat's back.

Our cat purrs and as she gets revved up her nose starts softly whistling. We lay that way for a few minutes, lost in our own thoughts and prayers. Then the cat jumps up to go on her nightly house rounds -- checking the perimeter as all cats do.

Once she is gone, my husband and I kiss goodnight and get into our "normal" going to sleep positions. During those few minutes in "The Family Pile", I feel totally warm, safe, and at peace. There is no other place like it.

Georgene (Mar. '07) says, "Frances once told me a story about her entire family being in the bathroom while her father tried to shave. In exasperation he said, 'Where's Grandma?' My story reminds me a bit of hers!"

(THREAD begins on the next page.)

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

GREENMAN

**Greenman, why do you grin so?
Is there something I should know?
Carved into this wooden pew,
I think it's I - should laugh at you!
Since you are trapped inside this
place
While I can leave, by God's good
Grace.**

**Little man, the day will dawn
When you and your new god are
gone
Then once again, my roots will grow
And my true face will freely show
So please excuse this little smile
If I'm amused to wait a while**

LynnTROR (April '07) says, "I'm a fan of Greenmen, those part human-part plant masks one finds in castles and such. While I've never had the pleasure of visiting a church where one lives, I've read of many carved by Celtic Pagans (who converted to Christianity) in Christian churches, and thinking of them, wrote this poem."

*

IN THE MOMENT

**As I stand in front
of the mirror on the wall
in the hall,
my eyes notice over my right
shoulder
ancestors quietly observing.
My eyes shift to my left shoulder.
Another mirror reflects
unseen faces of the future
rushing to and fro on the street
through an open window.
My past and future
Lie in the moment.**

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Gail (Jan. '07) adds, "The revelation was that the moment is now and that's all there is." *****

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

THE POSTMAN

It's not often that I read a novel that tugs at my heart-strings, but David Brin's science-fiction thriller, The Postman did just that. It's a tale about never giving up on an ideology and having faith and hope in dark times.

This novel set ten years after a nuclear war that destroys the world as we know it. A drifter named Gordon Krantz finds a Jeep with the remains of a US mail carrier inside. Along with the skeleton he sees a mail sack containing old letters. He dons the uniform and takes the sack. He thinks if he pretends to be a postman people will believe that the long-dissolved United States Government is reassembling. In post-war hard times, he also hopes people will take him in and give him a meal.

While traveling across the state of Oregon, Gordon makes convincing arguments that the government will soon be able to protect the people again. Thus, he appoints mail carriers in each town he visits.

Then Gordon runs into a group of people who are led by a man who has his people believing a supercomputer is running their lives and caring for them. This machine he designed is actually no longer operational but he still has a plan to rebuild what was once the Western United States.

Soon these folk start having problems with a group of survivalist thugs called the Holnists. They are intent on keeping the people of the United States in a state of anarchy. Although the town is at first hesitant to fight a group of militarily-trained warriors armed with assault weapons, Gordon Krantz inspires them. Eventually, our hero persuades the leader of a nearby village to champion the cause. Then the anarchists are defeated.

This novel is a testament to the best of human nature that lies inside each and every one of us. It also testifies to our belief in freedom and our resolve in the face of unspeakable evil.

I encourage every reader to take some of your free time and read this book

Bookworm (Jan. '07) adds: "I also recommend the movie, 'The Postman'. It's based on the book and stars Kevin Costner and Will Patton. Although some of the characters are different in the film, the directors did a wonderful job portraying the good vs. evil struggle in Brin's novel."

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(See OUR SPECIAL TOPIC on next page.)

- - -O-U-R- - S-P-E-C-I-A-L- -T-O-P-I-C- - -

(Did Anyone Ever Steal from You?)

RUSTY-- STOLEN?

Yes, I've had things stolen, and yes, I've been upset about it, but one time was a little different.

Years ago, Hubby and I bought a '77 Caprice station wagon. It was a real 'family car'-- the kind of car that's great for kids, pets, groceries and trips to the lumber yard.

As the years and miles passed, friends started teasing us about the vehicle we called, Rusty. "Just put a bullet through the radiator and be done with it!" they'd joke. But Hubby and I would have none of it. Living in a horrible neighbourhood, I often joked, "At least nobody'll ever steal it!"

Funny thing was, one day I got a call from the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) asking questions about Rusty. Confused, I carried the phone outside to be sure our heap was still there. (He was.) But, as the officer explained, the license plates were gone.

Apparently, an escaped criminal had stolen a car *identical* to ours, put our plates on it, and had been captured while fleeing the province.

The officer was just calling to clear up lose ends. He probably expected anything but the response he got from me --laughter.

It makes some twisted sense, if you want to be invisible on the road, drive a beater like Rusty. But if I were going to do time for a car, I'd want that car to be a Porsche or a Mercedes!

Lynn TROR (Mar. '07) adds, "When the guy stole my plates, I couldn't be angry, even when I had to pay to replace them. All I could think was how desperate he had to have been to have stolen that car. I prayed his life would get better."

(See *MANAGING THE HOUSE* featuring, "Get to Know ME" -- top of next page.)

**- -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 latest set of responses to our monthly questions—our new effort to get to better know our readers.

This month’s question: *If you could invite any four people to dinner (living or dead) who would they be?*

Gail (See her poem in earlier THREAD) responds, “Four people I’d love to have dinner with are Jimmy Carter, Mary Oliver (poet), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Impressionist painter) and Sue Monk Kidd (author).”

Carol (March07) writes, “I am tempted to name people like Jesus Christ, John Muir (19th century naturalist), Mother Teresa, and Annie Dillard (author and a living contemporary). I like the idea of having two men and two women. I would let them make all of the conversation and just eat leisurely, gaze in awe, and listen.

I would also enjoy having dinner with my family of origin. It consisted of my two parents, my older brother and my younger sister. This would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience in the present. I don’t want to relive the past, but I would like to know how my parents, who are both deceased, are doing in the afterlife. I would love asking them for pearls of wisdom. Also, I have been estranged from (and out of touch with) my sister for many years and would like to know how she’s doing. I am still in touch, albeit infrequently, with my brother, but the event would be incomplete without him.”

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Next month’s question: *What/who do you admire the most?*

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