

August 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 notebook.

MOUNTAINS

Hazy, pointed purple mountains, verdant rounded tree-covered mounds and even stony snow peaked ranges caught my attention every day for several weeks. One Sunday I caught myself staring at an ad. A thoughtful-looking girl with long straight black hair stood in front of a stretch of desert scrub. Behind her, a range of mountains rose blue-gray in the distance.

Mountains! I shook my head, Why am continually seeing mountains?

Later at church the priest told an allegory. A son climbed a mountain to get life-giving water for his ailing father. Later that afternoon, my husband tuned in a *History Channel* documentary on bush pilots and I saw bits of Alaska's snow covered ranges.

Since I believe in "signs" I thought, *These peaks have a message for me... what?*

Determined to find a clue to my mystery, I padded to my home office computer. Opening a glowing new white page, I began to type, hoping to find meaning through word association. "Mountains, peaks, peak experiences, high places... "

Lyrics from a childhood record of "Sunshine Mountain" danced through my mind. They sang, "Climb, climb up Sunshine Mountain, Heavenly breezes flow, Climb, climb up Sunshine Mountain, Faces all aglow..."

The song ended and I returned to word connections. "...High places, climbing, climbers, Moses climbed Mt. Sinai to hear God's word, mountain climber, dangerous journey..."

Suddenly my associations released a memory. I was thirteen and sitting in the back of our sleek silver '57 Chevy with another pony-tailed teen. My Hoosier parents decided on a last family trip to California before I was in high school. To make three weeks away from peers acceptable, they allowed me to invite my best friend, Sue.

We were on our return route. That afternoon Daddy was driving and Mother sat shotgun while Sue and I lounged in the back seat. Sue settled behind Daddy and I perched beside her. The Impala climbed steadily, roads snaking one way, then back. Mother slid the long metal lever on the air conditioner to "Off" and cool air stopped. Sue and I looked up at the sudden silence. Leaning her left arm on the back of the front seat, Mother half-turned to us. She explained, "The air-conditioner pulls too much on the engine."

I looked at the Cold —Hot dial on the dashboard and saw the needle pointing about half-way between the extremes. Sue looked at me and I shrugged. We turned to our respective windows and cranked them down. Sue began fanning herself with a tourist folder with bold yellow letters inviting, "See Bryce Canyon."

(Continued on the next page.)

She leaned over her *Calling All Girls*, its glossy pages open across her lap. I shuffled my Great Salt Lake souvenir cards and began another game of "Train" solitaire.

A string of cars poked along ahead of us. Daddy drove slowly along the curvy two-lane blacktop. Over the front seat I could see the red speedometer needle hovering around 10. Brake lights in front of us flashed, dulled and then flashed again.

The parade up the mountain continued. On my right, a sheer wall of dirty rock seemed close enough to reach through my window and touch. On the other side I looked out Sue's rolled down window and past the opposite empty lane. A deep violet shadowed canyon met the road's edge and strange stone shapes loomed farther out. Quickly I shifted my eyes to the floor mats. I didn't want Sue to see I was scared.

Daddy turned the car's steering wheel to the left and pulled out a little.

"Careful, Frank!" Mother's voice was breathy. "There's no guard rail!"

As Daddy let the car sink back in line, the July afternoon sun glinted off the chrome of the hood ornament. Matching suits in my game, I added one new card after another. Focusing, I didn't notice anything strange about a tickling on my leg and brushed away the annoyance. Four hearts came up together. I smiled and dropped them in a pile beside me. Sue turned a page on her magazine.

Suddenly she shrieked, "A wasp!"

A small brown insect with laid back wings crawled up the seat between us.

"Kill it!" I yelled at Sue.

"No, you!" she cried, shrinking against her locked door.

"What's the matter back there?" Mother demanded.

I met Daddy's inquiring eyes in the rearview mirror.

"It's a waaaaaaaaaasp!"

Mother directed, "Just kill it."

My eyes widened. "Me?"

She glanced at Sue leaning against the door. "Yes, you!" Her eyes were blazing. "Use Sue's magazine."

Without moving from her crouch, Sue extended the magazine to me. I folded the thin pages over to make a harder surface. As the offender crawled along the seat between us, I swatted it.

Alas! The spongy seats softened my blow. When I lifted the magazine, the pest angrily took off -- but not out either window.

Ducking and swatting, Sue and I chorused, "Yiii!"

Above the commotion Mother turned to us again and shouted, "Stop- that- you-girls!" Eyes narrowed she spat, "Fritzie! Get- a- hold- of- yourself! When it lands, kill it."

When the creature dropped to the seat again, I whopped it a second time. But this time I didn't lift the magazine completely to check my work. When I peeked and the creature wriggled, I slammed the pages back and pushed on them. After a while I got tired of pressing and even Sue took a turn.

We still held the beast against the seat when Daddy reached some kind of lookout at the side of the road. He turned onto it and switched the engine off. Immediately Sue and I unlocked our doors, pushed them open and leaped out. Then I leaned in, carefully lifted the magazine, and jumped back. The little brown troublemaker crawled a bit, then spread its pointy wings and flew out of the car. *(Continued on the next page.)*

With that my memory ended. But, as I lay in bed that night the message I sought came together. I realized all the words and the memory were part of one grand design: the mountain represents my life journey. Like Moses, I am a climber in search of a Sunshine

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Mountain, a spiritually high place. The road's curves are treacherous and the grade is steep. I have scary experiences. The people I love cannot always help directly.

I smile at my "mountain" solution and remember I also had the grace of being again with my parents and teen friend, Sue.

Frances Fritzie

<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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Hi Frances,

Greetings from Uncle Jerry and me.

I love your e-magazine. Very interesting stories, some are very heart-warming and others -- wow-- they all seem to have survived their ordeal.

I found *Ninepatch* when I was searching on the Internet for interesting magazines. There I came to the intriguing title, "*Ninepatch*". I am pleased to have found you and the magazine.

Thanks again.

Lotte

Lotte A. deRoy (See more about her adventures with Uncle Jerry in *FABRICS*.)

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Hi Fritzie,

Your ballet story from June'07 was magnificent... wonderful. I went to ballet for eighteen years and I feel very lucky I did not have to ever wait there for my mom. (She was good at that.) However, I do remember an experience when she left me in a blueberry patch.

I was furious. I hate blueberries to this day... despise them. I know feeling abandoned is the reason, too.

I was just a kid of nine. Back when it happened, I remember being very frustrated. I was left out in this woods picking blueberries for my mom so she could make a pie. (Even then I did not care for blueberries but my father loved them. I guess Mom's intent was to please him.)

After lunch one day Mom drove me and several neighborhood kids out to a local wooded area known for blueberry bushes. She left us there after giving each of us empty two- pound coffee cans to fill. I worked hard and picked more berries than any of the other kids. (I wanted to show mom that I was a good kid.) It would have helped to have her there with us that afternoon. (Continued on the next page.)

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The kids started asking me when she was coming. (I didn't know!) I was tired and hungry same as they were. It was getting dark by the time she showed up again. She probably does not remember how long we waited for her to pick us up. But I do.

Anyway, the ballet story was great. Once again, a great *Ninepatch* story.
Jodi

Jodi (Mar. '07) says, "Children should not have to wait for their parents and be put in those situations. But it does happen -- sometimes innocently and sometimes for other reasons. I understand a bit of Frances' emotional story."

Fritzie,

Your "At the Movies" from July '07 really grabs me by the heartstrings and I'm proud to be a small part of it.#

To this day, I fervently avoid reading animal stories or watching animal movies. (You may have pinpointed some of my early conditioning) *(Continued, next page.)* I learned at a young age that even when an animal story has a happy ending, it first drags someone like me (and you) through agonizing melodrama. The emotional imprint has permanent impact on some of us, while some others are apparently immune.

Life has also taught me that if a person can intentionally maim or kill an animal for any reason other than food or euthanasia, then that same trait is eventually turned (though often masked) against fellow humans.

As always, thanks for being there. I hope JK is doing well and that you're fully back in the mode of being home.

Your friend,
Fred

Fred (Apr. '07) adds, "This summer my wife and I are planning to adopt a golden retriever from 'Gold Ribbon Rescue'. We will never be able to replace my beloved Dory (who left us in October just before turning fifteen), but it'll be nice to have a dog around the house again." #Editor's note: When I asked, Fred did not mind being identified as Jon's friend in, "At the Movies".

Dear Frances,

Your July '07 "At the Movies" is a story that most of us can relate to. As children we were frightened at the movies. I recall an occasion at our Saturday matinee when my sister and I were about six and seven years old. In the cartoon, when my sister's favorite character was being chased by a big scary man, she stood in the middle of the theater and yelled, "Run, you fool! Run!"

Your reaction to injury to animals doesn't seem to have changed much since you were ten years old.

My response to violence has become a choice not to view it. For example, snakes give me the creeps. When I see such a program on *Discovery* or *Animal Planet*, I change the channel.

I have learned to honor my boundaries.

Bless'ed Be,

June Poucher *(June comments further on the next page.)*

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June Poucher (July '07) adds, "I use those same boundaries with most types of violence."

Dear Frances,

June '07 was a great issue -- thanks so much! I loved Linda's horse story and especially, "Tredway's Fen" from June'07. It was wonderful to read the list of "apex" moments in your life. (Personally, I enjoyed the heck out of your stories.)

I'm sensitive to cruelty to animals, too. Last night in my writers' group a guy read the story of shooting an elephant. I was upset by his recount of the kill. Instead of commenting on his piece, I wrote on my copy I felt unable to make comments since I found the story so distressing.

Namaste'

Liz

Liz (July'07) adds a personal update, "I've been feeling a bit down – overwhelmed with a new job in the fall I think. I'm also a little lonely in this new city and I feel the increasing distance between me and my teenage son, too. Luckily, I know, This too shall pass."

Frances,

Got your e-mail! I'm always so glad to hear from you.

I'm depressed – not happy here again in the North for the summer. This time I'm realizing how isolated I am.

My son and daughter have rented a big, casual cottage up in New Hampshire for a week... anybody who's interested is invited to visit. I've decided to go and just veg out. I won't be "Grandma" or "Mama"... just another visitor. I can rest and enjoy the company of people who I love and who love me.

I'm glad to hear you sounding happy.

Love you,

Nancy

Nancy (Mar. '07) adds, "Summers away from my support group can be challenging."

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Dear Frances,

Life goes on and on. I went to counseling -- I will see if I am able to continue. Seems my employer covered only two sessions. The therapist copied my insurance card and said she would make some calls and get back to me. Now I wait like I seem to do for a lot of things.

Like you said, it is hardest to take care of myself. It seems easier to take care of others. I am at least doing the things I enjoy. I listen to music-- especially when I have a day off and the house to myself. *(Continued on the next page.)*

I also write letters and read. I found a new Amish series. There are four books in the “The Brides of Lancaster County” series. The stories are by Wanda Brunstetter. I am reading the second one, Looking for a Miracle.

I guess they were a sort of gift. When I had my first counseling appointment, my husband took the day off and drove me. He also took me out to lunch. After that we went for a nice ride in the nearby countryside. Last we went shopping.

We were looking around a store when he pointed and said, “Hey, look! Amish books. You like those don’t you? I think you should get them. I think you would enjoy them.”

Since our anniversary was coming, he picked them up like a gift for me. But when we got to the check out line, he turned to me and said, “You do have the checkbook, don’t you?”

He hurt my feelings. I felt like I was paying for my own present. I was quiet all the way home. He didn’t seem to notice.

Thanks for listening. I hope all is well with you. Take care of yourself. God bless you and keep you safe.

Love and prayers,
LindaSue

LindaSue (July 2007) says, “When I feel hurt, I don’t do very well. I need to get away and be quiet – until time passes, I suppose.”

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

CAMPING WITH RITA

Last week my girlfriend, Rita, invited me to go camping so I joined her for an overnight. The lake, beaches and woods at a Lake Michigan state park were lush and beautiful. The weather was sunny but not too hot.

I met Rita at the campground after she had driven to a nearby car-ferry to pick up another gal she invited. A gentle breeze was blowing as the three of us walked a boardwalk built to protect the woodsy dunes near Lake Michigan.

Rita and her friend brought their own bikes so I rented one at the camp store. Then the three of us pedaled down a sandy road along the lake shore to a nearby lighthouse. We parked the bikes and climbed stairs inside to the top.

Wind whipped strongly as I stepped onto the little balcony about a hundred feet above the beach. Standing there was a little scary.

We walked back down the stairs and rode our bikes back to a shore closer to the campground. I sat behind a sand dune and chatted with Rita's friend while Rita swam in the chilly lake. *(Continued on the next page.)*

At dusk we went for a walk along the woodsy shoreline of a large lagoon. Fireflies dotted the dark and deer stood and watched us. The three of us slept together in one tent

and listened to rain that drip-dropped on the tent while we stayed nice and dry. Luckily, the showers stopped before dawn.

Rita had brought two kayaks, so after breakfast she and I took them out onto the lagoon we had walked around the night before. We paddled through beautiful flowering water lilies. Four swans flew overhead and we watched a great blue heron until it flapped its wings and left. The water was very clear and shallow near the banks, lots of small fish swam under us.

After Rita and I returned, the three of us drove to a nearby town. We enjoyed a nice lunch in a restaurant. I took happy memories with me when I left them and drove home.

Carol (July '07) adds, "The first night we walked around the lagoon Rita's friend got scared. We saw a stump in the path that looked like an animal and both of us screamed. Then we saw it was broken tree remains and laughed."

UNCLE JERRY RECOVERS -- BUT NOT STRINGFELLOW

Uncle Jerry had been in the hospital for an infection in his leg. After that he was in rehab. Every day of the three months he was away from home, he called and "talked" to his dear cat, Stringfellow. The little animal had also been ill, diagnosed with diabetes.

Finally Uncle Jerry came home. Then he and Stringfellow were inseparable. Wherever Uncle Jerry went, Stringfellow followed. When Uncle took a shower, the cat lay in the front of the bathtub. When Uncle stepped out, the pet jumped up and ran to the nearby bench -- to inspect cleanliness. Satisfied, Stringfellow ran over to where Uncle sat. He lay flat on his stomach and looked back as if to say everything was in order. Then Uncle Jerry gave his pet a treat.

Unfortunately, this happiness was not to continue. Seven months after their reunion, Uncle Jerry and I had to euthanize Stringfellow because his diabetes had reached a terminal condition. The day we drove Stringfellow to the animal hospital, the cat seemed to know he was dying and didn't cry when he saw the doctor. It was surreal: the cat appeared to have a smile on his handsome face.

Afterwards Uncle and I drove to a deserted wooded area and sat together, first sniffing and then laughing. When we sobered and Uncle Jerry said, "Stringfellow is out of his pain and is now at peace."

It seemed appropriate to memorialize the loving and devoted feline. To honor the treasured pet's death, we sent out notices of his passing to family and friends. I wrote a poem for our darling Stringfellow which Uncle included:

(Lotte's poem for Stringfellow is on the next page.)

Yesterday I was lying in the sun
and it seems as if the world was fighting paw and tooth

against the sun which was disappearing into the west.

I understand the panic, the tumult
then I realize that there will be
no more tomorrow.

After a difficult fight, I am at peace
and will sleep forever.

Lotte A. deRoy (July '07) continues, "Stringfellow sometimes visits Uncle Jerry. For no apparent reason Uncle's radio goes on at 7:00 PM. The first time it happened, Uncle nearly jumped out of his skin. Now we figured out that is the time when Stringfellow was fed. So at 7:00, Uncle Jerry calmly talks to the spirit and tells him that he is fine. My uncle seems to draw strength from these visits. He does not feel so lonesome."

PROBLEMS ARISE
AT TREDWAY'S FEN

When I purchased a slice of land on Lake Superior that I call 'Tredway's Fen', I was told that I could only use this site as a recreational property, meaning that I could put an RV on it but no house. Rebel that I am, I had to push the parameters so, during the time that I was preparing the property to be an RV pad, I did all the applications for a building permit.

A building permit means approval for a well, and a septic system. Even though I knew there was not enough space for a septic field, I figured a composting toilet would be a good substitute. However, I never succeeded in convincing the powers that be that this was a good idea.

In the meantime, I discovered that, as long as I wasn't putting water into the ground, I didn't need a permit. With the advice of others, I decided I could still have my composting toilet, in a shed rather than in a house.

A composting toilet is designed so that heat, air, and oxygen along with peat and composting bacteria, decompose human waste very quickly and efficiently. It is a closed system, doesn't stink, and so doesn't cause any problem with the environment.

At about this same time, I was introduced to 'the yurt'. A yurt is a round Mongolian style tent which is not considered a permanent structure. (In other words, not a house.) The yurt is very sturdy and sits on a wood deck, which again is not harmful to the environment.

Now I've ordered my yurt. I'm excited to have a 16 foot diameter space -- much more room than my 8x8 storage shed. Also it is close to the lake so I will hear the water lapping on the rocky shore. I'll have a 'rest room' nearby (my composting toilet shed) and still have a place where one can park an RV.

I hope to have this all in place yet this summer. I am really excited to be finishing this project, which I started in the fall of 2002. (*Palma concludes on the next page.*)

Palma (June '07) adds, "I may complete my project, but I'll never be really finished."

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Reality needs no explanation.

James (July '07) adds, "It's good to appreciate the sunrise and sunset for the day that it is."

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OUR SPECIAL TOPIC
(A Defining Moment)

A DEFINING MOMENT

When I saw that the new special topic in *Ninepatch* is "a defining moment in my life" I immediately recalled one such moment.

For a number of years I have been a member of a Twelve Step Program which teaches us that we cannot change the behavior of anyone except ourselves. Despite knowing that, I tried for years to influence the life of a family member I will call Dan.

He had been into drugs for several years but when he came to me and asked for a small loan, I yielded one more time. He explained that he had a good job opportunity that would require him to have a card certifying that he had had safety training. He promised to repay me from his first paycheck.

When I next saw him, about two weeks later, I asked about the loan. He said that his first paycheck had not been enough to cover all his expenses. Then he proudly showed me his new cell phone.

There was a noticeable "click" in my head. I recognized it even then, as a defining moment. (I emphasize the word 'moment'.) That was when I let go of my expectations for Dan.

June Poucher (See her letter in AROUND THE FRAME) says, "This is what is called 'tough love' in the Twelve Step program. I love him enough to let him experience the results of his choices."

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BROTHER

I don't like writing about my brother, since I avoid thinking about him. I've been overwhelmed with too much of the drama John created in my life. After his long years of suffering, the fact that he finally died in a nursing home rather than the mental hospital he was confined in for over twenty years was anti-climactic.

Long ago, I made most of my peace with what he stood for in my life. Thus, when Frances suggested writing about him, I kept avoiding the subject. *(Continued next page.)*

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(I'm not even sure why I took up the pen this afternoon, other than it is quiet, the skies are a lovely blue, and I don't feel as trapped in my own numbness about my family as I used to be.)

The first night that my brother returned home to reveal the onset of his schizophrenia: paranoid, anxious and manic he pushed aside large wooden china cabinet so he could hide behind it. It was a defining moment for me.

I was a young girl, maybe six or seven years old. My brother was deaf, so that all of the anguished noise he made that night was guttural, pain without pronunciation.

Terrified, I crouched on the stairs leading to the second floor of our house, where my bedroom was located. In the haze of that long ago, all that I remember is heart-pounding torment, my mother yelling at me, "Get back upstairs!" then yelling in vain at my brother, "What is wrong?"

Poor Father looked on befuddled -- at a total loss about what to do. My brother fled the house and was later picked up by the police who put him into a strait jacket and took him away to the state hospital.

Over the years, only bits and pieces of what truly was wrong with my brother came to my understanding, unfolding like some archaeological dig. My mother sometimes insisted that my brother had "sleeping sickness". She said that was why he slept so many hours during the day.

Curious girl that I was and am, I devoured what little information that I could find about sleeping sickness. It made no sense to me that tsetse flies could come from South America and infect my brother with this strange malady.

Looking back, I know he was kept tranquilized and given heavy anti-psychotic drugs during the times that he came home on release from the state hospital. (I found half-empty bottles of thorazine stashed in the kitchen cupboards and somehow found out what the drug was and why it was used.)

My mother needed a scapegoat to explain his strange behavior. She blamed LSD. She said my brother's friend had slipped him a dose of it in a beer. Mother spent years hating that friend and his family for a crime that they did not commit. She spoke their names with venomous contempt.

When, in my child's frustration, I yelled, "He's crazy!" Mother wrote me into the blame list as well, accusing me of, "driving him crazy."

I cannot excuse my mother's behavior, it was emotionally damaging to the family. On the other hand, I also understand it was perhaps her only way to cope with the situation.

I remember small incidents, like taking John to a movie he insisted to my mother that he wanted to see. It was called "Poltergeist". When he had one of his weird episodes of talking to people that weren't there after the movie, Mother blamed me for taking him to see it. In her mind the bare fact that she insisted that I take him played no part.

There were many days I played scapegoat for both of them. It took me years to unlearn all of that junk AND learn not to scapegoat others.

There are also many soul scarring past experiences involving my brother. I don't like to revisit them, but perhaps this is one more beginning of filtering the pain out of those memories.

That is what recovery is about, after all.

(Continued on the next page.)

Linda (July '07) adds, "I don't hate my brother as I used to, but I shed no tears at his passing."

Ninepatch Birthdays for August:

George 3
Lori 24

**- -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: What or who makes you laugh?

Carol (July '07) writes, "A laugh is stronger than a smile. It often has an "ah-ha" element to it or an element of surprise, discovery or self recognition. I love receiving jokes and funny stories by email that make me laugh. An exploratory toddler can make me laugh. Comedy shows and movies make me laugh. My friends and husband know how to make me laugh, too.

Recently, while on vacation, I laughed ruefully at myself. I was with my husband and another couple and their dog, and we were walking along the sidewalk of an early 1800's reenactment village among crowds of tourists. Suddenly, I spied a dollar bill on the ground. As I quickly moved to pick it up, it jerked unnaturally toward the front walkway of a house where two boys in period dress sat pulling a string, giggling at me. I had become the butt of an age-old joke. My laughter gave others permission to laugh. I became an entertainer in an instant.

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Elaine (June '07) says, "Who makes me laugh? My oldest son. He sees humor in most things. Recalling the most obscure event, he presents it with a clever new twist."

Next month's "question":

The best news I heard lately is...

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

A PERILOUS PARAMOUR

This old pear tree shared
Her yellow fruit sparingly.
Tough and generously laden,
she dared me on every pass.

The business owners where she lived
motioned me to help myself.
While I prepared with great care
how casually to unburden her,

bees and coons took their fare.
So, finally I climbed her- a bit scary
(I displayed agile flare,
quite rare for 57.)

I made a pact with her and said,
“Warn me with a wary thump
when we both have had enough.” I
shook
until we had a tumbling peary rain.

and she, becoming nearly bare,
and I so worn and weary, felt a
bump.
I shinnied down, and thanked her
for a fair, but perilous exchange.

Gail (July '07) adds, “This was another true adventure near my Farmington Hills condo complex several years ago. I remember making yummy pear sauce with two grocery bags full of pears. I entered the poem in a contest and it was selected for an audio tape because of the alliteration.”

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(Continued on the next page)

