

February 2007

Ninepatch

Stitch - by - Stitch

W - e - C - r - e - a - t - e - O - u - r - L - i - v - e - s -

Note: Following is a recent page from my spiritual notebook.

Dear Friends,

The echoing Gregorian Chant faded. Six of us sat in a meditation circle, eyes closed. Quiet settled in. I had trouble getting settled deeply. I sank into depths, then bobbed up again. During a shallow moment, I heard a Sister in the convent upstairs. She did not speak, but silverware clinked on china. The sound whisked me back into girlhood.

I was ten. My best friend lived fifteen minutes away — by bike. Once Mother said, OK, I was allowed to pedal down the curbless road. First, I packed up my Muffy dolls. I lifted their little suitcase into my wire front basket and pushed off. I rolled up to Judy's big white house and set down the kick stand on the walk in front.

Judy met my knock and we climbed the stairs to her room. She locked the door against her troublesome little brother and we got out our dolls. As we dressed our little families, Judy told stories about her mom, dad and the big girl who lived next door. Judy's neighbor went to high school, had fashion magazines in her bedroom and wore rolled down bobby sox with saddle shoes. "She told me," Judy began then stopped and checked her closed door. She bent her head toward me and whispered a story from her neighbor girl.

That evening Mom, Dad and I sat in our seats for dinner. As Mother cut and chewed a minute steak, she asked what Judy and I did that afternoon. She smiled when I reported, "We played with our Muffy dolls..." Between bites I lowered my voice and told the secret Judy had shared, "Judy's neighbor told her a boy at school f--ked his girlfriend three times and got her pregnant." I took a drink of milk and swallowed.

My parent's forks hit their plates. Silence piled up. I set down my milk glass and glanced curiously at Mother. She and Daddy were looking at each other.

I sucked in a breath. "Oh-Oh! I should not have told that secret." I worried some when Mother changed the subject, "Frank, shall we wash the storm windows tomorrow?"

After dinner, Mother gave me a direct look, "Come. Help me do the dishes."

"I'll get it now," I thought.

Mother filled the sink with bubbling water, mopped a plate then held it under the hot water. Handing me the dripping white circle with a rose on it, she spoke evenly, "F--k is a bad word." She swished a second soapy dish. Holding it mid-air, she looked me in the eye. Underlining every word with pauses she said, "You - must - *never* - use - that - word - again."

Wide-eyed, I nodded stiffly. We finished the dishes in silence. As I hung my damp towel, I frowned, "Why didn't Mother unleash her usual storm?" Her lecture did not balance the electricity I felt when the forks dropped.

For the next few days, I was careful. Before being reminded, I set the table and jumped up from the table to help with dishes. I also straightened my room and shook its rugs.

The punishment I feared came anyway. One night, a week or so later, I went downstairs to say goodnight after I got on my pj's. That's when Mother said, "I'm coming up to tuck you in."

I was really too big for being tucked in. Nonetheless, Mother followed me upstairs. I climbed under the sheet and instead of saying goodnight, she perched on the edge of my bed.

"You remember what you told us about your friend Judy's neighbor?"

"Oh-Oh!" I thought, holding my breath. *(Continued next page.)*

Mother pulled a little blue book from behind her back and said, "It's time you learned the real way a girl gets pregnant."

With that she opened the volume, turned the first two pages and began reading. I covered my ears, "I won't say that word again, I promise!"

Mother glanced sharply at me, "Put your hands down!" She continued reading. Book in hand, she followed me to bed for many nights. I hated that book and escaped it in my own way. When she pointed to drawings of the naked man, I looked only at the page number. When she held up diagrams of women, I blinked hard and didn't see. When she read from the book, I gritted my teeth and focused on the book's cover.

Its bluish paper jacket had one photo, a boy and a girl sitting together on the back of a mule. The little book's black lettered title and author are burned into my memory, Being Born by Francis Bruce Strain.

Eventually Mother finished reading me that ugly book. By then I didn't want to go to play dolls with Judy any more.

Frances Fritzie, Editor

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

Hi Fritzie,

I am sure glad to be back online and getting caught up with my Dear Friends.

I liked what you said in the e-mail with the attached Jan.'07 *Ninepatch*. I relate to depression more than well. I have struggled with it most of my life.

When I am down, I try to find the peace my mind needs. It is a tough job. But I have made it this far and I know -- somehow-- I am a stronger person for those experiences.

I was living part-time with my fiancé but ended up majorly depressed, so I moved back home to pull myself together. Maybe I have found the peace I need. I think so.

It seems my depression always leads to peace. How this happens, is hard to explain. First there are a series of events. Then I feel the grayness sneaking in. It grabs me and holds on strongly. Sometimes I retreat to my bed and sleep through a tough time. I must rest a lot because the feeling is so overwhelming.

Then, after a lot of praying, an event comes along that seems to pull me out of the depression. That's when I see how lucky I really am. I feel a strength like I never had before.

Have a great day. Keep in touch.

Love,
Jodi

Jodi (Sept. '00) adds, "I am sure that feeling strength is a result of answered prayer."

Hey Frances!

I'm sorry to hear of your depression. First my husband John died, then not two years later, my daughter was hit and killed by a drunk driver. I certainly have been there! (But then ... really, who hasn't, if we are being honest!)

When I am down, napping makes me worse, so I try to use the bed for sleep. I get out and never look back during the day -- unless I'm sick.

In the e-mail you sent with the *Ninepatch* e- issue, you said you planned to talk seriously with your doctors so you would not get into such a dark place again next year. You said, "...I don't expect to have that happen, but planning is comparatively cheap." I liked your comment, "Planning is comparatively cheap." That's a good one!

Well, whatever works for you. I hope you find your best plan soon, that it works well and is lasting!

Keep in touch dear e-mail friend!

Luv,

CaT

CaT (Nov.-Dec. '07) says, "My fibromyalgia doesn't exactly like being in bed either. Well actually, it likes being in bed until I try to get out. ☺"

Frances,

January '07 was another good *Ninepatch*. I enjoyed your story about the birth of your child. How scary though.

It's been so different with my two grandchildren's births. The daddy was with the mother, supporting them all the way. I sure didn't have that with my two. For the first, I was left in a dark room -- alone. remember feeling terrible pain before anyone came in.

Unfortunately, for my second I was alone, too. My husband and I got a legal separation the day before that birth. My dad actually took me to the hospital. Later, he found my estranged husband in a bar and told him he had a son as well as a daughter.

Dottie

Dottie (Jan. '07) adds, "It's awful when one is not heard. Sad that Frances had to endure that."

Dear Frances,

I did get a chance to read the Jan.'07 *Ninepatch*. (It is a very fine issue!) I am so sorry that you are struggling with the dark season. I don't like the lack of light either. I've often thought I might be one of those folks who has mild Seasonal Affective Disorder.

This year I have felt lucky. I don't know if it is my stubborn-ness or what, but I knew the darkness was coming and I committed myself to fight it by focusing on a beading project, which I recently completed. It seemed to have helped, as I have not experienced the mourning that I have felt in past years. Perhaps it is also the acknowledgement that I suffer from that malady. I do not know, but I have much sympathy for you and your struggle.

In December, I celebrated the winter solstice and the return of the light to the earth. Perhaps the mourning is a human thing and some of us are better at expressing the loss that we feel when the days grow short.

(Continued, next page.)

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I'm not always successful, but I try to remember to distract myself from dark moods through movement or play or art, to make sure that I express my feelings to my partner, and make Twelve Step meetings when possible.

I hold you in my prayers and mediations.
Linda

Linda (Oct. '06) adds, "We have been blessed with a mild Michigan winter thus far and it is a sunny day here today. I take joy in the silvery full moon at night and the bright sun during this day."

Francesca --

I'm making some headway in understanding my sons. Recently, I've been dealing with issues related to my son who lives nearby. I believe I've finally figured something out on my own without someone else having to point it out. *(Continued, next page.)*

This boy was just the most wonderful child to raise. He was sweet, smart, athletic and often singled out for his sportsmanship or good conduct. He just never caused me any trouble -- only joy. Now he's a young adult (over thirty), I'm finding that he has changed, as is natural. However, I don't necessarily like all of the changes.

What I think is happening to me is that I am grieving for the child I raised (or for the child I thought I raised). Not knowing anything about the grieving process, I found a website that talks about grieving that is not related to death or other major life events.

I'm wondering if you might be going through things that you need to acknowledge, too. It might be helpful consciously to go through a special grieving process for these things. (It just makes so much sense.) Here's one of the websites in case you are interested: <http://www.archrespice.org/archfs21.htm>

I want you to know that I am genuinely concerned about you. You have soooo much going for you. I'd like to see you able to enjoy this phase of your life.

Love you,
Elaine

Elaine (Jan. '07) observes, "When I'm sad or teary, nearly everything affects me deeply."

Dear Frances,

Thank you again for the Beverly Lewis books. I am reading the third and last in the Shunning series. (I wish there were more!) Reading is something I *like to do*.

Recently, my husband finally got some energy and he went to the race track where he used to enjoy working in the pits. I used to go once in a while, but I never really enjoyed it. However, years ago, I was always happy when he took the kids to the track with him.

Those days I would window shop and browse. Then, I'd walk to a nearby restaurant and treat myself. After that, I'd go home to a quiet house, listen to music and go to bed early.

This time was different. Being home alone was not good. I felt left out and angry. When I feel like that, even activities I normally enjoy are no fun!

It was an effort to calm myself. But, I wrote a letter to a friend and poured out my feelings. That helped. Finally, I settled down and had a nice quiet evening with my dad.

Thanks for everything! You give me lots of ideas.
Love and prayers,
LindaSue

(Continued on the next page.)

LindaSue (Jan. '07) adds, "I need to learn new ways to have fun. I already like to read, write letters, walk and shop around. I even like to clean house -- probably because I like order. May-be I also like housework because my mother used to praise me for doing it when I was little. (I think childhood affects us for a long time.) Still, there must be more to having fun!"

Frances,

In an e-mail, you asked if I reread any of the letters I wrote while I was away last summer. I did not. I had no access to e-mail during the time I was in the Dominican Republic.

I sent my letters back through missionaries. Then my secretary in the US typed them and sent them to people I designated. (By the way, you are quite good at this little newsletter now!)

Once I returned to The States last August, I asked to go back to the Dominican Republic as my full-time work. In response to my request, I have been assigned a discretionary cycle. I am *in-process*. This means I need to wait.

I will be going to San Antonio, Texas for a "discernment". I'll be there nearly a month, early in 2007. After that I should have a better idea of my future in the mission field. I do want to go back.

Love,
Patience

Patience (Jan. '07) adds, *While I wait, I have been asked to write on several topics -- and of course, to pray.*"

Hi Frances,

Well, you know me, *busy* is my middle name.

A lot has happened in the past month. First, the company I worked for asked me to take on a new project but once I had worked furiously on it, they put that project on hold. Also, I was immersed in wedding-planning activities. Luckily, that wound down as well because I reached the point where I've done almost all I can this far in advance. Last, I started working on my book proposal again and it's almost done, finally.

Our wedding is in May of this year. It's not that far away and will no doubt be here before I know it. My dress arrived months ago, if you can believe it. It's sort of stuffed into a cloth heirloom garment bag and is hanging in the closet with a note on it that says, *No peeking!*

Busy isn't always fun but it's often rewarding in terms of getting lots of things done!

Best,
Christa

Christa D. Weber (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "Sometimes I feel like I'm busier than ever. Isn't that just always the way? Near the end of a project, I always look forward to the "downtime" that will follow... However, it seems there is always some chore to fill the space left behind."

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A learning day is a successful day.

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James (Jan. '07) adds, "Learning from mistakes is allowing the past to redirect the future."

Hi Frances,

I read my *Ninepatch* over breakfast this AM. Your birthing article sure was scary.

When I read James' quote, "Desire and reality may not be related." my first thought was ... "That is for sure!" But then I remembered lots of times where desire and reality were "cousins" as James noted, and I smiled!

Your forgery story was a shocker. I can't imagine you repeatedly writing notes for Billy. You didn't say if you were "caught" as being his primary note writer or if you dodged the bullet and it's remained undiscovered. And, do you still have the bracelet?

As you know, I have loved the stories of Mr. Gray. I hope one day that Patricia can confirm that he is living the life of Riley with the neighbors' daughter. I will miss these updates.

I wish I had something special for my favorite food. I'm afraid that I am not the least bit original. I like pepperoni and mushroom pizza from an independent pizzeria in a nearby strip mall. At one time my favorite food was mac & cheese, but I never make it anymore. (Besides, the nearby grocery stores have changed their recipes in ways that I don't like.)

I do have a favorite place to eat my pizza. I like to sit on my couch and watch a movie. I usually also sip on a beer or a diet cola, depending on my mood.

I enjoyed my *Ninepatch* and coffee time. I'm sure I'll go back and re-read some of the stories. Often, I find that the stories that strike a chord the first time I read them overshadow other stories in the issue. But when I go back to read them again, I find a fresh discovery just waiting for me.

Woo-hoo!

Love,

Georgene

Georgene also offers a book review in INSTRUCTIONS.

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

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT

And you won't either -- I can hardly.

Yesterday, I started to open the door to water my porch plants and check the weather, and there was Mr. Gray -- crying really loud. He hardly gave me time to finish opening the door. He howled as he ran past me into the house. (He was so forceful about getting in that he scared my other cats.)

Still crying, he jumped up on a cart where I keep the cats' food. He sat down, looked at me and continued meowing. I patted him, talked softly to him and finally he ate. He whined a little as he chewed. He emptied the first bowl, then over the next hour and a half, returned for more four more times. Each time he appeared at the food cart, he cried and waited for me to pat him.

After that, he checked out the whole house then went to the basement where he collapsed to sleep. He seldom moved, but each time I went down to do something, he raised his head, and meowed, wanting me to pat him. (*Continued on the next page.*)

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I noticed the neighbor's daughter was visiting again the day before he came back. I think she found her pet too hard to handle and brought him back to her parents. When they left for work, the next day, they let the little animal out, knowing full well, he would come here.

I had a feeling I was going to get him back. Probably it was because I did every other time, but maybe it was an answer to my prayer.

Patricia (Jan. '07) continues, "Now, I tell myself that I will not let Mr. Gray out again. I am the boss -- not the cat!"

THE CUP RUNNETH OVER?

I received a gold-edged thank-you note for the Three-Handled Mug I recently sent a friend of mine who remarried. In the folded paper she agreed with my comment, her "...cup runneth over..." but she had a question. She figured two of the handles were for her and her new husband, but who was the third one for?

I smiled at that and went to my computer. I e-mailed her that the third handle was for God! God "handles" marriages.

Le (Jan. '07) adds, "Made-to-order hand-thrown pottery can speak volumes—and lasts forever."

USED BOOK STORE

It was a rainy, late autumn morning. I was running some errands, one of which was to visit a used book store in a cute little town north of my own.

My mission was to donate some old poetry/art books published by friends back in the '70's. (I'm at that stage of my life when it's time to get rid of the clutter.)

It was your typical used book store: kind of shabby and chilly, but it had no musty smell and offered adequate, but not brilliant, light. The owner shelved stacks and stacks of fairly-well-organized volumes, mostly paperbacks. The books were crowded on shelves made of raw lumber. A computer terminal glowed blue behind the check-out counter, and a tabby cat greeted me.

The owner was a shrewd sales person. She offered to give me store credit. I knew she'd be checking the Internet looking for ways to resell my offerings as soon as I walked out the door. I didn't care. I'd rather they be her gain and somebody else's pleasure than wind up in the dump.

I wasn't interested in buying anything. Most of my reading comes from the library and Internet, but I thought, why not take the credit. She gave me \$10.05 (five cents?) credit for my stack. Then she proceeded to explain that I would need to use forty percent cash with every purchase. That's how she paid her store's rent and utilities, she said. Sixty percent of my bill could be covered with the store credit she'd just given me.

I still wasn't very interested, but I went ahead and browsed. I almost bought a couple of hard-covered books, but changed my mind and said good-bye to the owner.

As I walked out, my eyes continued to wander over the austere interior. I caught sight of a display just inside the front door. I had missed seeing the small arrangement on my way in.

Standing on a small table were three of a four-volume set of hard-covered books. I had the first volume at home, so I bought the two others she had. I paid a total of \$5.25 and used up all of my store credit.

The owner wasn't done with me, yet. She had another incentive. She gave me a punch card towards \$5 off when I've spent a total of \$50 in her store.

(Continued on the next page.)

I wasn't sorry for my purchases. I WAS carrying out less than I had brought in. But I was \$5.25 poorer. In a way I felt like such a sucker! It was fun, though.

I hope I gave that lady a treasure, that she laughs all the way to the bank, and that she lives in a beautifully restored, warm and cozy Victorian.

Carol (Jan. '07) says, "When I wrote this I was reflecting on what a good year 2006 was turning out to be. I want to wish all of my fellow Ninepatch readers a joyous winter and wonderful new year."

OUR SPECIAL TOPIC
(Did Anyone Ever Steal from You?)

MISSING A JOHN DEERE

Every day our four- year- old son cried and pleaded with me, "Why can't Daddy go get my tractor?" He had no concept of the word 'stolen'. I tried to ex-plain that Daddy didn't know where the tractor was.

The day before, we arrived home and found our son's push-pedal tractor missing from its parking place on the carport. We searched everywhere but found no trace. My husband reported the theft to the county sheriff's office. The tractor was an authentic riding model that could be bought only from an authorized John Deere tractor dealership. Thus, we were able to furnish the original invoice which included the little vehicle's serial number.

Time passed and we heard nothing from the authorities. Our son still cried every day, wanting to ride his tractor. It was an expensive toy we had given him for Christmas. We considered buying another, but we couldn't afford it. When the tractor was stolen, we lived out in the country but had regular milk delivery. Often we were not home when the milk truck arrived, so we gave Jack, the friendly young delivery man, permission to come into the kitchen and put the milk in the refrigerator.

One day he knocked on the door, and handed me an announcement of the birth of his daughter. I congratulated him; he was every bit the proud father. He had previously told me he had two little boys.

After he left, I read the announcement again. It gave a street address in a town about thirty-five miles away. Suddenly, it hit me. I KNEW where the tractor was! There was not a doubt in my mind as I reached for the phone and called my husband at work.

He came home, picked me up and we drove to the address given on the announcement. There, on the driveway, two little boys were playing with a push-pedal John Deere model tractor. We drove slowly past without stopping.

As soon as we reached home, my husband called the sheriff's office. He told them we believed we had found the missing toy tractor. They handled the matter without delay.

The following day, my husband brought the tractor home to a very excited four- year- old.

June Poucher also has a book review in INSTRUCTIONS.

(See INSTRUCTIONS on the next page.)

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

(Reading and Listening)

READING TO FEED MY SPIRIT

One of my favorite sources of spiritual food is the site for Unity Church. Both the Daily Word and the monthly meditation feed me. Readers can find this site on the Internet at <http://www.unityworldhq.org/>

I also just finished the novel rated the best of 2006 by "USA TODAY": The Memory Keeper's Daughter by Kim Edwards. It explores interpersonal relations on many levels. I would subtitle the book, "The High Cost of Keeping Secrets". I couldn't put it down.

Don

Don (Nov-Dec. '06) adds, "I just speed-read Jan. '07 issue of Ninepatch ...Bye-bye Mr. Gray."

A WEEDEND READ

I read an excellent book over the weekend. I recommend it to *Ninepatch* readers.

It's titled, The Glass Castle and is a memoir by Jeanette Walls. She kept me enthralled with her childhood remembrances -- all laced with love, chaos and pain. Her parents (a mother who suffered from depression and a father who drank) switched back and forth between being charming indulgers and selfish abusers.

Jeanette's journey had me pondering her family dynamics and finding a bit of myself in many of the funny-sad moments. This page-turner drew me in deeper and deeper. I saw her slowly enlightened to the truth of who her parents were -- and what that meant for her and as she struggled to independence and maturity.

It's a great read!

Georgene (Jan '07) says, "Now that both of my parents have passed, I find myself remembering moments and events with an intense curiosity ... wanting clarification or answers. Sometimes I remember many pieces that when added together give me an 'a-ha moment' about my parents. Sometimes, I just ask them to speak to my heart and give me peace about childish wonderings."

TRUE FIRES

This is only Susan Carol McCarthy's second novel. However, in its portrayal of life in mid-fifties Florida, True Fires rivals her award winning first novel, Lay That Trumpet in Our Hands. McCarthy is a native Floridian who has a natural feel for her subject.

In True Fires, she writes of school segregation in a central Florida county. Her story focuses on the four children of the Dare family, who recently moved from the mountains of North Carolina.

(Continued on the next page.)

Eleven- year- old Daniel retreats to the woods to seek peace. He meets Sampson whose parents were African American and Seminole Indian. Sampson is a beekeeper who shares valuable knowledge with Daniel.

There is a mystic tale within the story, and it's told like a parable. It deals with the life and ancient wisdom of the bees that Sampson keeps.

June Poucher (Jan. '07) adds: "McCarthy speaks with an authentic voice that is a pleasure to read. Her work flows easily and keeps the reader engaged."

Ninepatch Birthdays

Palma Feb. 11
Frances Feb. 20

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

PARALLEL LIVES

(First sight of robins in 2001:February 10th)

Hearty rusty
ragged-breasted robins
hop over the Fall's
frosty leaves.

They share the bounty of
dried fruit clinging
to three crabapple trees
with yellow darts of cedar waxwings.
bumpy branches
reach into sun-bright blue,
our hope of Spring.

Like rabbits hiding out
in the basement
of lofty skyscraper pines,
we only venture out for food.

Gail (Jan. '07) recalls that day, fondly.

(Continued on the 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:

What is your favorite place in the world?

Carol (Jan. '07) writes, "My favorite place in the world is to be in harmony with my Higher Power in nature. You might call it Eden. I have come close to it many times in gardens, parks, forests, prairies, deserts and mountains and near streams, lakes and oceans."

Frances (Editor) says, "My favorite place is Anna Maria Island, in the Gulf of Mexico just off the coast of Bradenton, Florida. I go there as often as time and finances allow. Walking those sandy white shores, I am happiest barefoot where I can splash in the retreating waves as I listen to the surf murmur. I hike from Café on the Beach north for about twenty minutes. I breathe the salt air and watch water ribbons of aqua, lime green and darker blue unfurl along the shore. Often, I pick up a few shells. I carry them back to the café. There, with a cup of coffee, I contemplate my treasures and hope a glimpse of my life will show itself to me — as it often does."

Month's question:

What book are you currently reading?

**Copyright 2007
Ninepatch, Inc.
PO Box 358445,
Gainesville, FL. 32635-8445**

ABOUT *Ninepatch, Inc.*

*ISSN 1094-3234

*E-mail: Ninepatch9@AOL.com

*Website: <http://www.ninepatch9.org>

*Annual newsletter donation rate: \$15-\$35

*The IRS recognizes *Ninepatch, Inc.* as a non-profit corporation, category 501c3.

*Documentation is available for a small fee on request.

February 2007