

January 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.

Dear Friends,

Prayers stopped running through my mind so I opened my eyes and slid back on the wooden pew. In the silent sanctuary, I thought back on recent weeks of emotional "darkness".

All month I fought the familiar frightening cycle with praying, walking and sitting every day with my spiritual group. Still, my eyelids drooped early at night and I needed frequent daytime naps. I frowned over thoughts, "This move isn't working... My efforts are futile... My life will never be any better..."

I couldn't seem to stop a murky stream that slogged around me and pulled me down. Worse, depression runs in my family. Three years ago my despondent cousin shot himself while being treated with a new depression medication. Two other members of my generation need similar medical treatment.

Sitting in the long row of worshipers, I sighed. Then, an image formed in mind. I saw myself being pulled back from a deep raw dirt hole. Someone grasped me at the shoulder and p-u-l-l-e-d me up and out.

That mental picture reminded me of a real -life moment when a woman did just that. Grasping the shoulder of my garment and she pull me up. That day I was in labor, about to deliver my first child.

I was not prepared. I had studied large posters of the birth process that hung in my unsmiling doctor's white-walled examination rooms. I also read, Becoming a Mother. But, I held my breath hearing real women's stories. And, I narrowed my eyes and wrinkled my brow when little smiles and nods passed between experienced mothers. Some wordless truth moved among them like a secret they would not share.

Eventually, labor began and I found myself in a one-bed hospital room, where a strange green- cloaked man pressed my protruding middle. Then, while two other green-coats looked on, he reached up under my hospital gown and poked me. Before long, a white-capped, woman carried in a small black tray holding a plastic glass of water and a paper cup containing two white tablets. "Take these -- for pain," she said producing a crescent moon smile.

I took the glass and tablets. She turned and crooked her finger to my husband. He followed her out. (Later he said the nurse had calmly explained that first babies came slowly. Ours would likely appear in about nine hours.) Meanwhile, I closed my eyes in mute prayer for quick pain relief and gulped the pills.

My husband returned and raised his eyebrows to me, "Are you OK?"

I forced a smile then closed my eyes. He sat down and fell silent. I watched a school-room size clock on the wall between wrenching spasms. Twenty long minutes later, I summoned energy, opened my eyes and said, "Get the nurse."

My husband did not move, but patted me, "Breathe, Honey, breathe. You'll be OK."

But, I wasn't. In the next hour, I asked for the nurse again and again. Finally, I begged, "Please, p-l-e-a-s-e ..." Shaking his head a little, my spouse rose and walked out.

He returned with green-coat who lifted my gown, frowned and prodded. Suddenly, a squad of workers clad in green and white scurried in and shifted me onto a wheeled bed, then rolled me into a cold room. They lifted me onto a smooth metal surface, strapped me down and disappeared.

My teeth chattered. I shivered so hard I rattled down the slick metal surface. That's when a wordless, brown-eyed nurse appeared at my head. She grasped the shoulders of my gown and dragged me back up to the top of the table. Soon, the doctor appeared and my son cried.

I pondered my memory and the mental image. "Ah-ha!" I nodded. My painful darkness and frightening thoughts were like labor. I smiled. Perhaps I am about to bring forth something unknown, but new and good. If so, I also know who pulled me up this time.

Thank you, God.

Frances Fritzie

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

Frances,

You are right, between my full-time job and my "helping out" one, my hours are mostly spoken for.

However, a goal I'm working on is to create time for creativity. Rather than choosing to see my time as always busy, I'm working on planning and structuring my time for things that I need to do and would like to do. Part of this will be creating time for writing.

Thanks and blessings,
Peter

Peter (June '06) adds, "I am still thinking about penning a few words for the topic, Spirit of My Work. I am in the process of creating time to reflect and enjoy life in a different way. Writing will actually be helpful to me as a reflection and a reminder of what it is I am changing and why I do what I do."

(Continued on the next page.)

Dear Frances,

Your Nov.-Dec. '06 letter clearly expresses how torn you feel over Helen's stroke and death. But, it ends with the ray of hope in terms of the gift you feel you have received. It is a beginning, My Friend. You are actively dealing with your emotions.

I remember when I was working on forgiving my mother after she died. I had a ritual. Every time I passed her picture in the family array hanging in my hallway, I touched her face and said, "I forgive you." In doing that, I was feeling better quite rapidly. When I told you about my ritual and how much relief I felt, you were skeptical. You predicted that things would come back to bite me long after I thought I had dealt with it. You were so right.

Your session with your Advisor was productive in several ways it seems. It adds to your writing reservoir in addition to giving you some measure of peace about the matters that trouble you. I'm glad you have that resource.

Bless'ed be,
June Poucher

June Poucher (Nov-Dec. '06) adds, "I still deal with the loss of my loved ones, but much of the hurt is gone."

***Desire and reality
may not
be related.***

James (Nov.-Dec. '06) adds, "However it's a wonderful feeling when reality and desire are cousins."

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Dear Francesca:

I am so sorry about the recent death of your friend. How hard that must be. I am grateful for your spirituality, it must be of great comfort. Thank you for sharing your feelings with your readers.

I appreciate your telling me about your "dark days". I kept mine to myself for so long that the burden was too much to carry. My saga hasn't changed much since I wrote last -- wish I could tell you otherwise.

I've told my sons about it, hoping for some support. I've received very little; I think they just don't know how to talk to me about the problem. My therapist said that children want their parents to be well and talking about mental health issues contradicts what they want to believe.

I'm pushing ahead by sending them short e-mails about my status, but I don't get much in the way of response. However, I'm determined to persevere with them. When I'm ready, I'll tell them how I hurt when they don't reach out to me.

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(Continued next page.)

With this last go around with the disease, I also told other family. First, I told my mother who didn't seem to know what to say. Then, I talked to my sister who showed little involvement or curiosity. Finally, I confided in two local friends who were both very kind and supportive.

I guess my point is that "dark folk" need support, but we might not get it where we want it. We need to go after whatever help is available.

That's all for now. Be well.

Elaine

Elaine (Sept. '06) adds, "My spirituality has taken a downward slide. I need to find it again. I like that idea of lighting a candle with intention. Thanks for mentioning it."

Dear Frances,

Thank you for your letter *and* the two books of yours you sent! (I enjoy Beverly Lewis and am already on the third chapter of, The Shunning.) You are right, reading can be relaxing. I am enjoying it very much!

Glad to hear about your house progress. During the summer we did nothing indoors. All we did was work in the yard. It was a little discouraging, but we can't do it all at once -- not enough time, money or energy!

You said you mostly enjoyed reading and writing. Reading books and writing letters is what I do, too. I have to wonder, if that's what we like to do, why do we let other things take our time?

Right away I know the answer: *We are women*. We always put others first. Men seem to know that, too. They are good at taking our time.

Thanks for everything. Put yourself and things you enjoy first!

Love and prayers,

LindaSue

LindaSue (Nov. '06) adds, "Since you sent the first and third books in a Lewis series, I have a 'good reason' to go to the library. Perhaps it is the motivation I need to find time to get over there!"

Hi Frances,

I am creating my life again as a single woman. Looking ahead to next summer, I applied (and was accepted) for a summer position as a lighthouse keeper on Lake Michigan. I will work two weeks with several others. We "man" the gift shop, give tours of the tower, greet the public, restock the restrooms, stock shelves, clean the beach area and do general housekeeping. About every third or fourth day you make dinner for everyone. Each couple or single (as I am) has their own bedroom, we share the kitchen and a sitting room and the bathroom. There are six or seven of us "manning" the lighthouse at once.

Meanwhile, I enjoy being active in my church. I work at our literature outreach at least once a week. I also continue to discuss weekly Bible lessons by e-mail with a friend in another state. *(Continued on the next page.)*

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I eat out several times a week. Once in awhile, I go for dinner with the folks in my apartment building where I live now. And, I meet my youngest daughter for coffee and catching up. I also take my son out for lunch or breakfast a couple times a month so we can visit.

Family is more important than ever. My daughter and son who live here went with me to Virginia in November. There, we joined my two daughters who live there to celebrate my birthday. What a joy!!!

I'm glad to hear all is well with you, I love hearing how you work stuff out with your husband; it brings a smile to my face. You do well.

Love,
Diana

Diana (Aug. '06) adds, "It was a surprise when my daughter from Texas flew up to join us in VA. It was the first time in a long time that all six of us have been together in one place. We laughed a lot. What blessings they all are!"

Hello Frances!

I read over your blog, "Honk If You Need Help" posted on Sept.13, 2006. You wrote about your alarm at bats flying in your bedroom.

I thought of those bats the other day. After work I was enjoying my daily three- mile hike, following a converted railroad bed. On my way home, it started to get dark.

Suddenly, right above me, I saw bats flying -- looking for bugs. At times, they flapped close to my head. I thought, "What if one of those things runs into me? I'm bound to fly into a panic similar to the one I read about."

Maybe not, too. The bat-thought also reminded me I had heard woodcocks flying over-head just minutes after I had started off on the second segment of the trail. (Woodcocks are small robin-sized birds with VERY long beaks and wings that produce a characteristic twitter when they are in flight.) Then, I remembered one evening I stood in a field with my dad watching birds. Woodcocks were displaying.

We heard their twittering in person. I smiled at that memory.

God bless your soul,
Bookworm

Bookworm (Aug. '06) adds, "I wish that I could have helped get rid of bats in Frances' bedroom."

(Continued on the next page.)

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

THE GIFT OF SILVER

During a fund- raising drive, a well-known nonprofit organization was running persuasive commercials on television. They touchingly portrayed hungry children living in unhealthy conditions. My daughter was in first grade and had learned to read and to print legibly.

One day I received a phone call from our rural mailman who was also a friend. He told me he found an envelope without a return address that he thought probably had been picked up from our mailbox. It was correctly addressed to the charitable organization, but contained two silver dollars.

We both knew it was not a good idea to send coins or real money through the mail. He said he'd hold the letter for me to pick up. Later, I held the letter in my hand and asked my daughter about it. She acknowledged she had sent it. She said, "It's from my piggy bank. I wanted to buy some food for the kids."

I explained why it was not safe to send the silver dollars in the mail and suggested we send a check. She listened and nodded thoughtfully then watched as I wrote the check. She addressed a new envelope and licked the stamp. I accepted her two silver dollars and watched with tears of pride as she walked out to the mailbox. She deposited the envelope and raised the signal flag for the postman.

June Poucher (Nov.-Dec.'06) adds "I didn't realize at the time that it was also another kind of signal. It was a character flag of the kind of adult she would become."

MR. GRAY DISAPPEARS

I don't think there will be any more Mr. Gray stories. Three days ago, the morning started the usual way, I got up and fed our cats. Since the weather was beautiful, (and Mr. Gray was begging at the door) I thought I would let him out just a little while. It was 9:30. I thought I would watch him to see where he went. So I kept an eye on him until he wandered out of sight. I have not seen him since.

Later, I walked over the entire neighborhood, searching. I even looked under cars. I checked the busy highway nearby where he was once seen. No sign of him. I also observed the sky for buzzards and none are circling the way they do when something is dead.

Earlier, I noticed the neighbors' daughters were visiting. (One of the girls is Mr. Gray's owner.) I know that girl loves the cat. The vet said he was in really good shape when I first took him in. Anyway, I have decided she must have taken Mr. Gray with her. (Continued on the next page.)

Since I am not on speaking terms with the people next door, I don't know what actually happened. But, I said a prayer about the little animal and now I am assured that he is OK.

Patricia (Nov-Dec. 06) says, "I miss Mr. Gray, but am relieved a bit. My husband and I really don't need any more cats."

MISSION IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
A Last Letter from the Summer's Adventure

Editor's Note: *The following letter was received from **Patience**, via the Mission Diocese courier, dated June 23, 2006. It is the last 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:

We have been quite busy teaching in the village of Los Guayuyos which is located in a mountainous area.

The two women who have been here working with me are leaving today.

However, I will continue with this wonderful community of people a while longer.

The adults, teens and children I work with are learning! They are proud of their progress in learning to read and write in Spanish. It is a tool for all of them to continue to find out about the world.

Last night my youngest students and I lost power in a storm that came up suddenly. The dense clouds and rain made it nearly dark. I ended up with twenty-five kids in a dim classroom. We made-do for an hour and a half. Luckily, in the half-light the children could see enough to play some games and color.

In the next couple of weeks I will be working more intensely with a few adults who can read and write at about the Second Grade level. These folk are the "teachers" here.

Much love to you all and many blessings to you for your support.

Patience

Patience (Nov-Dec. '06) adds, "I have gotten to know the families and have grown to love them dearly."

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THE THREE -HANDLED CUP

My dear friend is getting married again. I am happy for her. She's been a widow for a number of years and she's been so smiley since she began dating this old friend of her family.

I bought the couple a unique wedding gift. It was a ceramic cup made by a potter friend of mine. It had THREE handles.

On their card I wrote something like, "Your cup runneth over, hold it firmly, and drink deeply". That may sound corny, but when they try to drink out of it, they will find it a bit difficult due to the many handles.

So it is with marriage, one must work at it. (Continued on the next page.)

Le (Nov.-Dec. '06) says, "The day after I sent the wedding gift, I found out that couple didn't want any presents! It will be fun for them, anyway."

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

ASK AND IT IS GIVEN

I'm now reading, Ask and It Is Given, by Esther and Jerry Hicks. This book is about learning to manifest your desires. It uses the teachings of Biblical Abraham.

The authors tell me I need to deliberately pay attention to my feelings. Then I must purpose-fully choose thoughts about matters that feel soothing when they come to mind. In this way thought will tell me whether I am moving closer to, or further from my desired outcome. I want to be open to the thoughts leading me to a desired place. Also, if I sense a thought I don't like or have a negative inkling I can say no to it. I am including that block in my vibration.

Authors warn me, too. If I use any influence other than guidance of this "true self", I'll get lost and so go off track. Of course this whole matter is very difficult to do. However, my awareness of my thoughts is stronger now, and I am watching my intentions, too.

Dottie (Nov.-Dec. '06) adds, "Part Two of the volume is a workbook. For example, one exercise is making a magical "creation box". Here's how it works. I take any box that is pleasing and on the lid write the words: 'Whatever is contained in this box -- is.' Then I gather magazines, brochures, and clippings of anything that exemplifies my desires. I drop these in the box along with anything I describe in words. As I do, I repeat the words on its lid, 'Whatever is contained in this box -- is!.' I enjoyed doing this exercise."

THE WILD PARROTS OF TELEGRAPH HILL,
A Docudrama

I have a movie rental recommendation. It's called, "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill." It's a documentary about a flock of parrots that lives on Telegraph Hill, San Francisco. It follows their story as well as that of Mark Bittner, the gentleman who started feeding them as a diversion and became fascinated by their personalities.

Bittner started photographing the birds, writing a diary, and studying about them. Not formally trained in any literary or film manner, Bittner walks the line between fiction and non-fiction. *(Continued on the next page.)*

He builds fantasy stories about the “why's” of various parrot’s looks and behaviors. But, he also teaches factually and reminds us it is wrong to humanize the birds -- they are wild creatures behaving as nature created them.

Both human and bird stories are heartwarming and educational.

Georgene (Oct. '07) adds, “I've recommended this movie often and always get thanks from those who see it. You will be amazed -- and probably have a longing to go and enjoy a bit of outdoor freedom!”

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

THESE ARE THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Sleeping in
no place to be
the cat guides me
to her bowl
coffee brewing
smells so good
there's time to read
the paper

The kids are working
the grandkids well
they're busy with their lives
I'm retired, but oh so blessed
to have a special job
Love what I do
I'm very glad
it's the best job I ever had

My condo's warm
and colorful
I have old friends to call
new friends too
have their ways
of making these
the good old days

Gail (May '06) comments, “Life is good!”

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(Continued on the next page.)

I AM

I am a big white cloud passing
through the blue sky.
I am a green hedge of grass blowing
in the wind.
I am a large white pine giving
purchase to the great bald eagle.
I am a crumpled leaf floating lazily
down the river.
I am a mother eagle calling out in
protection of her young.
I am a tree stump above the water
giving rise to new shoots of
growth.
I am a turtle lifting its neck out of the
rippling clear water.
I am a paddler paddling home amidst
a holy family of loons.
I am a woman embedded in
Wild Love.

As I come to know this Wild Love and that deep reflective meaning in all experience, I know who I am.

Julie Keefer (Jan. '06) explains this poem's origin, "One day last summer, I went to the Boardman River canoeing and had a delicious afternoon floating and communing with Wild Love." Editor's note: This poem appeared first in the Autumn 2006 newsletter from Morningstar Adventures, a retreat center in LeRoy, Michigan.

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

NEW TOPIC

Our topic for the next few issues will be, Thievery: "Did anyone ever steal from you?" As far as that goes, I think I want to include, its inverse: "Did you ever steal from anyone?"

And, when one gets to thinking about the topic, there are subtly related areas, too. How about *shoplifting*... when I was a young teen, I knew some who made a game of sneaking items out of the dime store or lipstick from a display on a department store's glass cosmetic counter. (*Continued on the next page.*)

How about *forgery*? For about a year, when I was in high school, I stole the name of a pal's mother. I signed her name to notes I wrote on stationery my pal brought from his home,

Please excuse Bill's absence. He was sick from his diabetes again today.

Mrs. Kuiper

I'd known Bill since he was "Billy" in third grade. After school, he often walked with me for a block until my path home was straight up the street and he turned off.

At Christmas time that third grade winter, one day his mother waited at the end of that first block, running the engine in her white Cadillac. She waved and called me to the car, motioning us to get in. I'd seen her at school and my parents knew her smiling at the family name, "Kuiper". She pushed open the right side door for me and I slid in the warm front seat. Billy climbed in the back.

Billy's mother smiled as she handed Billy a wrapped box tied with a shiny red bow. She nodded to him, "Give it to her."

Thus, a red-faced Billy, handed me the box.

"Go on and open it, Dear," Mrs. Kuiper directed.

I felt funny, but I pulled off the paper, then lifted the lid off a white box. There, on a bed of cotton, lay a gold link bracelet. Separate gold letters spelling out my hometown, G-O-S-H-E-N dangled from the chain.

"Put it on, Dear," Billy's mother encouraged. She leaned over to help me with the clasp. My face was hot and I didn't know what to say. I stammered a thank you before getting out of the car and continuing home.

During high school Bill started skipping school. His locker was near mine and one day he asked me to write him an excuse note. I did. (Maybe writing notes for the older Billy was my gift in return.)

But, Billy skipped school a lot that spring. I wrote so many excuses, I worried about getting caught. One day when Bill sauntered up to my locker before school, I frowned. "You are playing hooky too much..." I told him I was nervous about all the excuses I was penning. I reminded Bill that my dad just got elected to the School Board. I raised my eyebrows as I continued, "There'll be TROUBLE if I get caught."

I leaned on the metal door and using a book for a desk, I wrote on his mother's creamy stationery,

Please excuse Bill's absence. He was having trouble with his insulin yesterday.

Mrs. Kuiper

(Continued on the next page.)

I blew on the ink, then folded the note and slid it into the envelope. Handing it to my pal I reminded him, “This is the last time...”

So, when he asked for a note again about a week later, I refused.

Funny thing is, the time I refused, Bill got caught handing in a fake note. It seems the, “Mrs. Kuiper” writing the attendance officer used for comparison was mine. It did not match the long hand of whoever my pal got to write that last note for him.

Thus ended my short life of forgery.

Editor, Frances

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 food?

Responses:

Carol (Nov.-Dec. ’06) says, “Here’s another tough question! When I was growing up, my parents exposed me to a wide variety of new foods and made me eat at least one bite of every food that was served. I learned to like just about everything, except for cooked spinach, Brussels sprouts and some bizarre Asian dishes.

I love variety! I don’t care how much I like a particular food, I can get tired of it long before I become allergic to it or overdose on it. In my young adult years my list of “favorites” was practically endless. I would happily adapt to the tastes of whoever I was with.

Now my child is grown and gone, my husband and I choose to eat at home most of the time. (He has to watch his cholesterol.) Almost every night we have steamed broccoli and carrots, brown rice, and fish. I will top that off with a couple of Pepperidge Farm cookies.

So, I still can't pin down my “favorite” to just one food! So, here is a partial list: dark chocolate; steak medium rare; sushi; avocado with grapefruit; fresh strawberries; fresh peaches; snow peas; a classic Thanksgiving dinner; lox, cream cheese and bagels; Chinese chicken salad; Dim Sum; my father-in-law’s chow fun with bok choy; jook; Red Geranium Diner’s gardener omelet; guacamole and tortilla chips; spareribs; Amway’s chocolate toffee torte; Cracker Barrel’s fried okra; baked yams and apples with pecans on top; yogurt chicken; key lime pie; snow peas; baked potato with sour cream and chives... Oh ... I'm hungry! Must go eat now!

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Question for February 2007

What is your favorite place in the world?

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