

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,

Sitting alone in a coffee shop, I sipped dark steaming brew while retro songs filled the air. Strains of Fats Domino and "Tooty Fruity All Rooty" brought back The Fifties. Unlike the songs that played one- at- a- time, several memories appeared at once: our gym's wood- floor sock hops, wearing white bobby sox, and growing my slicked back DA into a ponytail. I followed the images until from nowhere a yellow, red-lettered package of chewing gum came to mind: **JUICY FRUIT**.

I never much liked that gum. When I bought chewing gum, it was Wrigley's white pack, Spearmint. When Daddy asked for gum, he wanted the green pack, Doublemint. **JUCIY FRUIT** was Mother's favorite.

It was too sweet for me. But, sometimes I just wanted a piece of gum but didn't have any. First, I'd ask Daddy for Doublemint, but if he wasn't home, I'd look for Mother's purse. Since she never seemed to run out, I'd help myself to a stick from her pack and pop it into my mouth. Then I squeezed my eyes shut and swallowed a lot until the intense sweetness faded.

As I swallowed my cooling coffee, sugary gum thoughts reminded me that two weeks earlier I had attended a "Happy 50" birthday party. The hostess had handed out favors: baggies of Fifties candy and gum. Later, I ate the Pez, Root Beer Barrel and Laffy Taffy. Then I pulled the waxy red, white and blue wrapper off the Bazooka Bubble Gum. As always, inside I found the little folded "Bazooka Joe" comic. I read it, and the joke under the bottom panel: "What did Bazooka Joe say to his panting pup on a hot day?" ANSWER: "Hot dog!" I shook my head.

Only the **JUICY FRUIT** remained in my baggie. Finally, I was in the mood to chomp that sweet stuff. Eying the yellow pack, I located and pulled the slim red plastic opener. I lifted off the pack's yellow cap and pulled out a stick. It was covered in a polished white paper.

In The Fifties, each stick had a fancier double-sided wrapper. Inside, next to the gum, was thin white paper, but the outside was like tinfoil. Little jagged silver teeth met at the stick's belly and its ends folded up.

I turned over the new gum and pushed off its paper. What used to be tanish-gray chicle was now striped yellow and white. I popped the happy- looking slice into my mouth. Ooo! Soft ... with the same sharp sweetness.

I chomped awhile. When the flavor eased off, I turned it absently on my back teeth. Before long, I even blew a bubble.

As a kid, making gum bubbles was hard. When all my friends blew and popped bubbles, I could not. I tried different brands. **Shelby's Super Blo** sort of worked -- maybe because it was softer. Even then, I produced only small air-filled pockets like a baby's slobber. (*Continued, top of next page.*)

I tried flattening the pink stuff against the roof of my mouth before making an air sac and filling it. The blob always felt thick. One friend suggested I flatten the wad between my front teeth and my lips. That didn't work either. Mostly my smoothing stage produced dough too heavy to push out or so thin my tongue made a hole in it.

Finally as a teen, somehow I learned the art. Ever after, I blew bubbles whenever I chewed pink gum. Back then, my favorite Spearmint and other regular chicle didn't work. Thus, I was surprised the day I chewed the new striped gum and produced delicate yellowish bubbles -- not big like the pink stuff allowed -- but blowing them was still fun!

So it is that nowadays, I usually carry a pack of Mother's favorite **JUICY FRUIT** in *my* purse. And, whenever I chew, I think of Mother and smile at how much I've grown like her.

Frances Fritzie

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

Dear Frances,

I read your Jan.'07 story about depression and your e-mail comments to me about that time also being like a desert. I thought, "I am glad to hear that someone else goes through dry times."

In my line of work, I am sort of expected to be cheerful. It is hard to always be "up" and I think it works on me.

When I get those less- than- bright times, I do some physical task or go outside and pray as I walk. Then, I feel better.

Much love, Frances.
Patience.

Patience (Feb. '07) adds, "Soon, I will leave for my long-term mission discernment time in Texas. I am ready."

Dear Frances,

Thanks for sending the Jan.'07 e-issue of *Ninepatch*. I can relate to the story of being grasped by the shoulders and pulled into another reality -- the birth of a new life. (It's a great analogy.) I can also relate to all stories about depression and birth. These are -- I hesitate to say it -- "women's motifs", events that shape and change our lives.

I also liked your Feb. '07 letter about having to learn the facts about sex. Since you told me your mother worried about getting pregnant, I can readily see why she was so keen on your sex education. (*See top of the next page.*)

When I was about the same age, my parents were threatening to “send me away” because I was so unmanageable!

Life! it's all a journey.

Love'n'peace,

Moscar

Moascar is a divorced single mother of two sons, aged 14 and 21. Recently she moved to Northern Florida after many years of living in The Keys. In her spare time she says, I like to read, write, hike, swim and just be outside in the glories of nature -- unless its cold, in which case she likes to be inside on the glorious couch.”

*

Dear Frances,

I've told you at least twice that I had a letter for you. Now, I'M TAKING TIME TO WRITE!

I was surprised when I went to find the *Ninepatch* letter I wanted to respond to and found it was the October '06 issue. That letter was the first time you wrote about the stroke and later death of our friend, Helen.

I felt for your sadness even before you were able to write about it. Let me begin by referring to your letter. I, too, thought Helen's death was a blessing.

I think of how I met Helen. It was at Tuesday Noon group where I also met you. That day I knew I had found *home* and a *family*. I was grieving a lost and difficult marriage, after years of pain and struggle. In my “new family” I received the gift of being accepted for who I was. I felt safe in a way I had never felt before. In the group, I thought Helen was the most OK with herself, so I asked her to be my sponsor, my special friend.

Looking back, I see how God guided the timing of it all. I was visiting in the North when she had her stroke. When I returned a month or so later, I asked one of the Tuesday Noon gals to take me to see Helen in the nursing home.

My heart cried to see my Helen. With my background in nursing, I came to believe Helen's essence was still alive and well inside her. It was saying, “How the H--- did this happen to me?” It was her essence I saw and that's who I talked to. I was more comfortable with her situation. Frances, you were not able to be there physically and emotionally for all your own reasons. The Higher Power brought me along then.

Before her stroke, you took marvelous care of Helen. You watched her diet, health care, and encouraged her independence. In God's time I was brought along to take my turn. God knew what we all needed *and* when we needed it.

You did not abandon Helen. She will always be within you. Helen understands it all -- I'm sure she is smiling down on you.

Go ahead and cry. (I still do.) Helen is in my prayers every morning. I pray, “Be at peace. I miss you.” Sometimes I smile, and sometimes tears come.

Mourning is appropriate and healthy. Don't, keep it inside.

All my love to you,

Nancyann

Nancyann (Nov.-Dec. '06) adds, "I am glad I changed my schedule and took time to finally write this letter. In a way, it's part of my own grieving."

Dear Frances,

Every time I receive a letter from you I find another thing we have in common. You wrote about getting ready to fly North to visit your sons. You were rushing around, packing and *cleaning the house*. I also hate to leave my house "dirty". I clean the house from top to bottom. And, everything also had to be in order before we left on a trip. I think it may be "old child stuff" about feeling important and even concern over abandonment. Order and cleanliness give me a sense of control.

News! I got myself my own savings account! (My friends thought it was important.) It did feel like a loss of power putting my money in a place where my husband could (and did) spend it whenever he wanted.

I used to feel he had all the control and all I did was work, eat and sleep. It seemed all I did was for my husband and my dad. (Work in a nursing home and live in a nursing home!) Now, I feel a sense of power.

I am glad I have my job. It's nice to have the money and also good to get out of the house. It's a chance for different surroundings and other people to talk to.

Thanks again for your letters and the moral support!

God bless.

Love and Prayers,

LindaSue

LindaSue (Feb. '07) adds, "I am still enjoying Beverly Lewis books. I have finished eight of them and am looking for more."

*

Hello Frances,

I just wanted to take a moment to tell you that even though I haven't responded to any of your monthly emails for the last several months, I am very appreciative of your persistence.

I had been working hard and putting in long hours. And, in saying that, it's also important that I take the time to reach out to others and let them know that I'm thinking of them and that they do matter.

So, Frances, thank you. Know that I still hold you in a place of fondness and respect.

Michael

Michael (May '06) adds, "Out of necessity my business keeps my focus very tight."

Success seldom arrives easily.

James (Feb '07) continues the thought, "The street named Success is often paved with mistakes."

Dear Francesa,

I've had another revelation. I have a neighbor who has a good sense of humor but, hiding behind humor, he is constantly taking jibes at my husband and me. Like a good girl, I let his arrows penetrate my being and I fret about them until I've forgotten them.

I've decided the very next time he throws one of his jibes, I'm going to tell him (pleasantly or not so pleasantly) to go mind his own business. I've allowed myself to feel like a victim and put up with his you-know-what for three years now.

Talk about "duh."

Elaine.

Elaine (Feb. '07) adds, "Recently, my sister and her husband -- who I seldom see -- took my husband and me and my son and his young family out to a fine restaurant. We stayed around the table talking for a very long time. As we said our good-byes and drove away, I become aware of what a fine family I have and how much I've lost by intentionally keeping them at a distance. I cried."

*

Dear Fritzie,

Sometimes, I feel spreading smiles is my calling. I smile to everyone I meet, even people on the street. I make sure I look in their eyes, too. It may be the only smile they get all day.

This is something I have always done and feel it is a gift The Lord has given me. It's a way I thank God. I smile at people to let them know who gives me the strength to smile and mean it, smile and care.

Smiling is so simple, can go so far and touch so many. Most of the time, it is all I have to offer.

Love,

Jodi

Jodi (Feb. '07) adds, "It may sound like I think too much of myself, but the truth is I give many more smiles than I receive."

(FABRICS — top of next page.)

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

SPIRIT OF MY WORK

When I was a teenager I looked at the work adults did in my blue-collar town and figured it would be the same for me. If I was lucky I'd marry a man who worked at the steel mill, for the railroad or local government facility. All were good jobs with fine benefits. I would not work then, but raise children.

My dad worked for the government and my mom was a domestic, once all of us kids were in school. In 1971, when I took my first job at seventeen, the spirit was: This will help fill my hope chest.

When I took my 2nd job at nineteen, I was married. The spirit was: I must do this until we have children.

I never bore children and as my abusive marriage continued the spirit became: I am capable at work. It is a good escape.

After the divorce "work" became a "career." For eleven years I stair-stepped my way to being a VP in my hometown Savings and Loan. The spirit of my work was: I can take care of myself.

In 1989 I hit my first "down -sizing". It would prove to be a turning point in business core practices. My work would not be like my parents' work. I would not work in one industry, for one employer and retire from it. I was in a tailspin. Work was my safe place and now I was terrified because good performance didn't guarantee a secure future.

I pulled myself together and started a new career. Though I was on several down-size lists and part of many reorganizations, I stayed with one employer and enjoyed stability for nine years. The spirit of my work became less self-centered because it was with a Christian publishing company and I felt the spirit become: my work has meaning beyond me, task and product.

I took a risk in 1999 and left my secure job to help build a Christian Internet community site. The spirit of my work was: I can fly!

One year later I was unemployed ... the great dot-com collapse. I grabbed a new job and the spirit of my work became: Hold on to this buoy in the storm.

One year after that I was in my dream job. My husband and I moved to California for it. The spirit of my work was: This is where I belong.

Two years later the owner of the company suddenly died and new management laid off several employees, including me. I spent seven months in a dark place.

For the last two and a half years I have worked for a small marketing company. The salary is good for the position -- but well below my work history. The owner is kind and the work itself is challenging in an uninspiring way. We've been working on an exit strategy for the company. Soon I will be unemployed again.

Lately, the spirit of my work has been -- disheartened. (*See top of the next page.*)

I'm "old" in a youth oriented culture. For ten months I have applied and applied. I compete with a plethora of MBAs and down-sized people with excellent work histories. When I get an interview I sit across from a thirty-something Human Resource Manager. I swear I see their faces fall when they see my mature face come in the door. I'm repeatedly told that my minimum salary requirement is too high -- though I continue to lower it over time. They can get new graduates for less. Yes, they have less experience and depth of business knowledge but they are fast learners and will work hard (read: long hours) for the opportunity to be employed. I wrestle with the real possibility that I will have to take another cut in pay and job level to be employed.

The journey related to the spirit of my work has been much different than I expected. It is a journey, though, and you never know which way the path will turn next. I'm determined to keep walking forward.

Georgene says, "I hope this story doesn't come across too negatively. My work is only a part of my life. I have so much good going on, too, but that is not within the subject of the spirit of my work."

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SUBTLE ABUSE

Last night, a TV show about abuse got my gears turning. It got me thinking that honoring my voice (listening to me) was yet another thing my ex-husband never understood.

From the get-go I told him I'd been through some things that still affected me. I'd try talking to him if a situation got to me or if something happened that triggered a reaction.

For the most part, all he said was, "You are with me now and things are different." He thought that talking about past troubles only made them last. He'd say, "Forget it!" Apparently he thought I could.

Not being able to talk to him was hard. 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.

One of the hardest things about being with my ex-husband was that I was so alone. We were married, but I could seldom talk to him. In the middle of the night, when the past reached out to torment me, I couldn't turn to him for comfort. When I struggled to work through issues, I couldn't ask him for understanding. He'd just say, "You do it to yourself." and "Why are blaming me for what they did to you?"

I think that was part of why I am convinced that he never loved me. He was in love with an ideal. The real me was a whole person with a past, present, and future. He just never cared to take that in.

Sometimes I still feel robbed and cheated because of his attitude. In my head, I can hear him respond, "Why? Because I wouldn't let you use what happened in the past to excuse being crazy in the present?"

Listening to someone you care about, giving them the chance to voice their feelings shows one cares. It tells a woman she has value. It can help them heal. Accepting a
(See top of the next page.)

person's limitations, understanding that sometimes she needs a little help is important.

I have been stunted. Being heard can help people like me gain the strength to grow. Of course, as a person heals and grows, she changes. Maybe my ex- never wanted me to change. Guess that's why I'm not with him any more.

Lynn TROR (Aug. '06) adds, *"I'm still working, slowly, on finding my voice. Blogs, Ninepatch, friends ... they all help. Sometimes, though, I still wish I could talk to my ex- I wonder if I'll ever get over that."*

A NEW PET

In another week or so, an animal will be joining our household, a horse! Of course, she will be out in our barn, but I'm excited to be sharing living space with something that I am responsible for, after a long dry spell of no domestic animals in my life.

The opportunity came through our neighbor in the back ten acres of where we are living. She used to live in the house where we are now and kept horses here. Last summer, her oldest horse escaped from his enclosure and I saw him in our pasture. He wandered out onto the road and was slowing traffic, until a man with a tow strap lassoed him. Then a small group of us led the animal back to the neighbor's place.

Some time after that incident, I asked my partner if it might be okay for the neighbor to keep her animals in our pasture for fresh grass. Since we have no animals, that would also be a way to keep the grass down.

When the horses came to our pasture, I met the neighbor. Since I am a beginning rider, I talked with her about the possibility of trading pasture space for riding lessons. She agreed.

Last month, the phone rang and it was the neighbor. She asked if I wanted to own a horse! It seems a friend of hers had repossessed an eight-year-old mare that was nearly starving. My neighbor could not afford to feed any more horses and was willing to give the horse to a good home.

Today I am wandering towards not only a horse, but also a new set of friends and experiences. I get to shovel manure, learn about horse accoutrements, attend auctions, ride trails, get familiar with the ways of an herbivore, and have an animal companion to walk with AND ride.

Linda (Feb. '07) adds, *"It's the dream of a lot of little girls to own their own horse; I was no exception. This little girl is a bit long in the tooth to begin! However, my eyes are open, my fantasy is tempered with awareness. I feel very lucky in my experiences."*

(SPECIAL TOPIC: top of the next page.)

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

(Did Anyone Ever Steal from You?)

I THOUGHT SO!

In the early 80's, I was a single mom. I had a large house and large expenses. I needed more funds, so I rented out an extra room on the ground floor. After my first son moved out, I rented out one of the upstairs bedrooms. Since my kids were teenagers, I felt more comfortable renting to people of college age. Then if my kids were loud and obnoxious, I wouldn't have an adult to make judgments on my childrearing.

In 1983, I rented the downstairs room to an Iranian student. His name was Hamid, a common Middle Eastern name. At the time, the Iran/Iraq war was raging. In Iran, people of means sent their sons to school in America to avoid Iranian military draft. This was the case with Hamid. However, he was not motivated to be in America. At eighteen, he was lonesome for his family and culture. As a result he didn't apply himself to his studies. He had already flunked out of at least one other school before he was enrolled at the college in my town.

My daughter was fourteen at the time and thought Hamid was a doll and could do no wrong. I admit he was friendly and winning to the whole family. However, I felt resistance from him about my being the matriarch of the family and setting the rules. His was from a patriarchal society and he was not used to having a woman in charge.

He lived with us for about a year before I found out he was lying to his folks about his grades so they would still keep sending him money for school. By then he had flunked out of our town's college, too. If he wasn't in school his visa would be revoked. His dad would be angry because he didn't want Hamid to come home and have to fight in the war. So, he enrolled in another school, a community college about two hundred miles from us.

In the meantime Hamid had moved out of my house, but we sometimes heard about him from his friends. It seems he didn't have a car and was trying to move his stuff to the distant town. (He couldn't rent a car because he didn't have a credit card.)

I was tuning pianos at that time. One day I came home with a piano action (the guts of a piano) in my car. I was feeling lazy and didn't bother to bring it into the house right away. The next morning I looked outside and my car wasn't in its parking spot. After some investigation, I discovered my car keys were also missing from my purse which I kept in a corner in plain sight.

I suspected who took my car. I contacted some of Hamid's friends but they said they didn't know where he was. After reviewing all the clues, I was sure that it was he who had stolen my car. I called the police, reported the missing car and told them to check parking lots near the distant community college. (*Continued on top of the next page.*)

About three weeks later, I got a call from the distant town's police. They said my car had several weeks of parking tickets on it! It was as I suspected. The car *was* in a parking lot near that college

The police never found Hamid. But after the second week the car was gone, my insurance gave me money to replace it -- and I got an even better one.

Palma (Aug. '06) reflects, "I decided that the reason this had to happen was to test my trusting. After much soul searching about my basic beliefs, I still don't lock my house or my car. I do keep my purse way out of sight though!"

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

WATCHING HAWKS WATCH

Easing toward evening
hawks are poised
on freeway trees.
Vigilantes, these
Eye-piercing highwaymen.
Patient, war-painted
teacher of man,
watch and wait,
waste no effort.
In stillness
do they prey.
Hunters of integrity,
No road-kill feast
For this majesty.

Gail (Feb. '07) adds, "Several years ago I noticed particularly in winter the number of plump hawks on freeway trees. At the time, I was driving too fast on the freeways. Hawk observation slowed me down! I still like to notice the frequency of hawks along the freeways -- in all seasons."

Ninepatch Birthdays for MARCH:

Patricia 20
Dottie 25
Julie B. 27
Beth 29



**--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 book are you current reading?*

***Lynan** (Nov.-Dec. '05) shares her current reading, "I just finished reading The Collectors by David Baldacci. My husband said it was a good story and he was right. I also got a book that Frances (Editor) recommended, Firstlight by Sue Monk Kidd. I've read up to page forty and I find it interesting.*

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***Carol** (Feb. '07) says, "I am reading too many books! My Father's Moon by Elizabeth Jolley was recommended by a friend. Saranap, Then and Now by my aunt, Dorothy M. Ligda is a family must-read. Neither Wolf nor Dog, on Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder by Kent Nerburn will be discussed with my book group's monthly meeting. Then, there's, Mama Grace, An Oklahoma Centennial Novel by Dana Bagshaw who is a friend of my sister-in-law. Also in my book stack is, Devas in the Driveway, Connecting with the Magic in your Garden, an unpublished manuscript by my friend Minnie S. Kansman.*

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***June Poucher** (Feb. '07) says, "I usually read several books at a time. Running with the Bulls is a memoir written by Ernest Hemingway's daughter-in-law, Valerie Hemingway. It covers the last years of his life. Home with God In a Life That Never Ends by Neale Donald Walsch. It deals with the afterlife in a final Conversation with God. This I Believe, Jay Allison and Dan Gediman, Eds. This is a collection of philosophical essays written by the well known and the unknown. Dreamtoons by Jessie Reklaw. As the name implies, dreams are presented in a cartoon format. A fun book. At the top of my next reading pile: Character is Destiny by John McCain, Walking Through Shadows by Bev Marshall and Quakertown by Lee Martin*

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***Georgene** (See her letter in FABRICS) confesses, "I'm reading nothing right now. I have five books sitting there waiting: The Icon by Neil Olson -- a thriller, Red Hot Monogamy by Bill & Pam Farrel -- bought at a church dinner from the speakers, Refired not Retired by Phyllis May -- preparing for retirement, (See top of the next page.) Into a Desert Place by Graham Mackintosh -- a diary or a 3000-mile walk around the coast of Baja California, and The Trouble Shooter by Gregg Hurwitz -- a thriller.*

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Don (Feb. '06) gives his reading list: *I am reading Kurt Vonnegut's (He's now 84 years old.) A Man Without a Country. Remember his Slaughterhouse Five and Breakfast of Champions? This book is twelve stand-alone chapters that challenge every social, political and religious cliché.* **

Elaine (See also *AROUND THE FRAME*) says, "I am thinking about Ninepatch's Monthly Question and I have a question: When do people read? I like to read but I am always finding one more thing to do. And, in the evening my eyes are usually too tired to read. I could set aside a specific time each day for reading, but I just know I'd feel anxious about whatever is not getting done. And, the funny thing is that once I'm absorbed in a book I'm truly enjoying, I don't want to do anything but read. Maybe Ninepatch readers could help me out.

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Next month's question:

If you could invite any four people to dinner (living or dead) who would they be?

ABOUT Ninepatch, Inc.

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