

January 2008

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 first of several stories about my 9-07 trip North.

FINDING A SOLUTION

What have I done? I look at the nonrefundable bus ticket in my hand, and think of the twenty-eight hour bus ride to attend my class reunion. In less than a week I'd start at 3:30 PM in Gainesville, Florida and arrive about eight PM the next day in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I shake my head and sigh, "This ride will take stamina, but my energy is already low."

I frown. Feeling tired scares me. I've danced the dark steps of depression too many times since I was a teen. Over the years I have read about the ailment and studied my symptoms. I have learned most of my causes: childbirth, monthly hormonal fluctuations, seasonal light changes, negative thinking, assault of overwhelming emotions or events and bodily chemical changes. There's a good side to these: they can be diagnosed -- a few predicted or diagnosed and treated. However, the type that scares me most is not in that group. Like an undertow surprises a swimmer, I think I am coping when it strikes and pulls me down.

Years ago I was struck by such a fit. After an argument with my then-husband, I had stood in the doorway to our house and watched him stomp into the attached garage. He backed out his car and drove away. I stared after the gray VW until it disappeared around a corner. Hopeless and numb, I had lowered the garage door, started my Pontiac, then stretched out across the front seat and closed my eyes to sleep forever.

I was drifting off when dimly I heard a house door slam and my five-year calling, "Mom? Mom? Mommy?"

Suddenly he pounded on the driver's door, "Mommy! Are you in there?"

Being exhausted reminds me of the hopelessness I felt that day. Now I dread my long bus ride to Michigan, worrying it will drain me.

Unfortunately, my travel-weariness is not new. I remember the March I was in Third Grade and we drove to Florida for a vacation.

In February Mother and Daddy returned night after night to our dining room table after dishes were done. It was serious when they met at the table -- like when they opened the checkbook and paid bills -- I was not to interrupt. Wearing his glasses, Daddy pulled a chair to his place at the table's end. He ruffled pages of the big Rand McNally Road Atlas. Now and then he'd pick up his Parker fountain pen and jot a note on a white pad at his right. While he poured over the light blue pages, Mother sat to his left dog-earing travel guides and unfolding glossy, bright-colored brochures.

In an adjoining room I watched "Roy Rogers," but I noticed Mother's voice, "Cypress Gardens is on our way back..." and Daddy's baritone, "I hear they are building a big highway through the worst of the Tennessee mountains."

A 1953 black- and- white photo shows it all. At St. Augustine's old Spanish fort, Mother, Daddy, and my friend Peggy are posed in a cannon opening in the ancient coquina block parapet.

(See next.) They are clustered at the right of the stone "U" smiling brightly at the camera. On the hole's left I lean listlessly against the gray wall, resting my head on a block, exhausted.

Being worn by travel has followed me through my life. However, I want to see family several states away and far-off friends so I keep trying to go but stay vigorous. Each trip I start out armed with a new list of ideas to keep me energized. This year's is: always sleep eight hours, walk every day, keep up my prayer routine, don't see more than one friend or set of relatives a day. Nodding at the items, I tell myself, "This time I will manage my energy better."

However, after I book my trip, friends tell me sad bus tales of long delays, missed connections and break downs. *Oh no!*

I shake off doubts, but they return like waves of an incoming tide. So I get busy, feverishly working down my travel check list: prepare to close our Florida home. "Sweep and dust" is on that list as well as, "put out clean towels and change the sheets." (Both these will keep me from feeling overwhelmed with immediate chores on my return.) Last on the list is, "buy a good frozen pizza". After lots of eating out, a quick home meal makes me smile.

Lying in bed the night before I leave, I review my still incomplete list and sigh. Just preparing has me tired. *Where will I find energy for the long ride ahead?* Whimpering to God, "I'm already beat ...", I suddenly huff, "Hang the cost! I should have flown!" Then I sigh, *Too late now.*

After prayers, I remember how just being silent for a day had once revived me.

Mentally, I nod. Then I think, "I also need to change my attitude." The next day I'd begin calling my long silent ride a *spiritual adventure*.

Frances Fritzie , Editor

<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>

Dear Frances,

Thank you for your letter. As always, I found myself in *Ninepatch*. Like Gail who wrote about her daughter, I am also trying to distance myself from reality and attempting to stay out of the situation emotionally.

Though I never heard of "The Sick Man's Prayer" Gail mentioned, I think I should see my difficult daughter, Anita, as "sick". My questions are, "How can I be helpful to her, but not too helpful," and "How can I not be angry with her or my husband?" *God save me from being angry! His will be done!*

I also saw myself in Palma's story, "Using My Gratitude List." Writing a letter was an idea. Dottie had a good thought, too. She listens to a calming tape and journals to ease her anxiety. *(Continued on the next page.)*

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Like Frances, I was surprised at what I learned about myself with the game she included in the Nov.-Dec.'07 issue. (I was to write my name in the center of a square, then others on the paper. Next, circle one above and one beneath my name.) The name I had circled above the line is a girl I work with and respect. The authors of the game suggested (and I agree) that at times I see her as "above me." She is younger than I and quicker with some things.

Below the line, I had circled my husband's name. The authors said this name would be someone I "look down on." Right now I do look down on him. (Love and respect do not always go hand in hand.) These days he puts me down a lot. And, of course, we do not agree on his lack of feeling for our daughter, Anita. (On the other hand, he never did have much feeling for her and he does say he loves me!)

My faith keeps me going, I keep praying and know the Lord will bring us through it all.

Take care of yourself. God bless you and keep you safe.

Love and prayers,

Linda Sue

LindaSue (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "I found another Beverly Lewis Amish book. This one, The Preacher's Daughter, is the first of a series.

*

Hi Frances,

I've been an awful correspondent, but I have an excuse ... my book is due in twenty days! I'm worried that I won't finish it up to the publisher's standards, so I write and rewrite. Everyone I know is telling me not to worry but I keep answering, "Easy for you to say!"

If you haven't guessed, it's busy here. Even without the book pressure, there's plenty to do with the new house! Some things (like cleaning) get put off while I do other things (like repairs). Other projects are waiting, too. For example, pictures that still haven't gotten hung up are all over the couch in the living room and the yard supplies we bought are still in the car. I wanted to get mulch and seed the lawn before spring. However, we had flurries so that project will have to wait till the end of the season.

Luckily, I'm feeling good -- just stressed!

Christa

Christa Weber Terry (Oct. '07) adds, "I just played the game that was in the Nov.-Dec. '07 issue. The person in the top circle turned out to be my husband, though I'm not sure I truly see him as being "above me". The person in the bottom circle was a friend of mine who I indeed "look down on" some of the time because I don't agree with many of his lifestyle choices. Interesting!"

Dear Frances,

Recently you wrote me saying you needed more alone time, but were not sure how you were going to get it. Could it be that you are stressed by not having the solitude that

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you had become accustomed to before you moved to Gainesville and began living full time with JK? *(Continued on the next page.)*

Your move and needing solitude could also have a bearing on your Nov.-Dec.'07 story, "Dream Walker". What I see is that she is trying to pick up the pieces of her life (pages that she gathers from the stream of sheets flowing past her feet.) and put them together in some kind of order.

She is also alone and in partial darkness -- perhaps the "darkness of not knowing".

These are just my thoughts after reading your e-mails over the last year and your Nov.-Dec. story.

Bless'd Be.

June

June Poucher (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "I believe that our dreams are insightful and are often parallels of what is going on in our conscious life."

*

Frances!

Family (with a capital F) has ruled my life of late. My daughter is out of a six-day jail stint in a nearby county. She was in for biting her partner while totally intoxicated. On top of that she was belligerent with the police when he called them.

Now she says she's ready for help with her alcohol problem. I hate to get my hopes up, again-- but hope since she is losing her kids, she will succeed in quitting her drinking. We are hoping she can get enough AA meetings under her belt to get her head on. She has court dates coming up!

Her partner has a drug problem, but he is functional enough and making good dough. I'm sick about it all -- in disbelief to some extent.

Blessings always,

Gail

Gail (Nov-Dec. '07) adds, "In the meantime, I've got my own job monthly responsibilities to wrap up this week and my own life to think about."

*

Frances,

In a recent e-mail you said because you had been so exhausted by your travels, you were not going to a spiritual writers retreat or even a conference you had enjoyed the previous year. Then you wrote, "Perhaps, this is what it will take to learn to slow d own."

I know the chore of learning to slow down. I even made a sign to that effect. I just wrote in large letters: "Slow down and smell the roses." I put the sign on my entry door. I'm concerned I might trip on the wood steps as I hurry out.

Of course, my concern about slowing down is more than my physical movements, it has to do with my attitude as well. Wishing you a day filled with special moments.

Best wishes,

Dottie

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Dottie (Nov.-Dec. '07) says, "I love this time of year in South Florida when I can often have my house windows open. I love to hear the sounds of nature and smell the air. It's a freeing feeling to not need the comfort of artificial heat or coolness."

*

Dear Frances,

Today the financial aspect of my partner Bill's eye surgery is really dirtying the waters of our life. We don't know what the final invoice for his emergency operation will look like, but it won't be cheap. However, good has come out of this awful situation.

It was a phone call from Bill's father. He and his father have not spoken for about twenty years. The original row was apparently over Bill's ex-wife and the survey business. (I get bits and pieces of the story, from both men.) As you might guess about Bill and his dad, the apple did not fall far from the tree. Both have been stubborn and hardheaded. (It seems like there is as much emotional tension between fathers and sons as mothers and daughters!)

The other day I happened to answer the phone and I had a nice chat with Bill Sr. He told me to send him Bill's final invoice. It seems he heard from Bill's siblings that Bill has no health insurance. Bill's dad doesn't have endless resources, but he's well off. I think that if he can help with a substantial portion of the statement, great.

I am hoping that the rift between them will begin to heal. I would like to meet the father, too, whatever does or does not happen. But, I need to have it happen without being involved in any family stuff. That's a sticky wicket, so I'll just wait and see what happens.

Anyway, Bill cried when I told him about talking to his dad and his father's offer. This whole eye problem has become a real emotional roller coaster ride. There were plenty of tears when the eye hurt first happened -- and anger, too. Now, this whole possible father-son reconciliation has the water works going again.

Continuing prayers are a great help to us, friend. Bless you for being present, reading this letter.

In love and friendship,
Linda

Linda (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "I am finally going to get back to a Codependents Anonymous meeting this week, thank goodness. The listening eyes there will keep me from turning into a knuckle dragging ogre here at home."

*

Dear Francesca,

My Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT) is delayed a little because the schedule is off due to a holiday. Now, I am eligible to do this as an out-patient. Apparently it is done that way frequently. I need an OK from my internist, some blood tests, and I need to go off certain meds for a short time.

What I think is interesting is how common ECT is here. It appears that it's less bother than having a tooth pulled. As an out-patient, people lay on an emergency room type bed, waiting. The doctors move down the line of beds conducting the procedure.

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There is a little bit of recovery time afterward and then the patient leaves. The doctor told me about how they had done comparison studies with other hospitals that use this therapy. This one has a lower number of treatments than most hospitals. He said he thought that was because their staff has a more stringent screening system. He also told me that in his twenty years of doing ECT, there were only two people who have had complications.

Even those complications were not due to any negligence.

Enough about me. How are you doing?

Love,

Elaine

Elaine (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "My husband has been quite supportive."

*

Dear Frances,

This weekend was busy with car trouble, but I did get out to see the horses for a bit.

I had a close call... I was practicing balance, riding with no reins with my arms held out at shoulder height. Just then the horse barn's owner started his tractor and 'my' horse spooked.

He bucked and I thought, "I'm dead!" But somehow I held on and when he calmed down, I finished the lesson. My teacher / friend/ mentor later laughed. She said I hung onto that horse like a burr! Then she also complimented me for coming so far, so fast with learning to ride.

I didn't want to think about the incident and told her it was fear more than skill that kept me on that horse.

Anyway, it's late once again and I must try to sleep. Hope all's well with you and JK.

Blessings,

Lynn

Lynn/TROR (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "Working with the horses can be stressful and even dangerous at times but it's a break from the usual work-a-day stress and brings many blessings that offset the risks."

*

Hi Fritzie,

I have been meaning to write to you. I started a little story but was not able to finish it for some odd reason. It was about being up in Minnesota in September where I found peace. The leaves were blowing and whirling around. There were many sticks in the yard to pick up and pile neatly by the steps. The weather was perfect for my baggy sweatshirt and jeans. By the lake, waves were coming in. It did my body good. Somewhere between then and now ... I lost some of my serenity. It just waltzed away and I let it go. However, I am able to sit at the computer this early morning and find it again.

Peace can come in odd ways. For example, sometimes I find peace in preparing myself for my annual garage sale. Why? I guess I tell myself that this is for me. I am

going to do it and no one is going to stop me. Recently I put my foot down with my boyfriend. I may have hurt his feelings but we continue to get back to this same problem. He pushes me on some matter where I stand firm -- like my sale. When I won't give in, he gets mad and says our relationship is over. Who knows what will happen this time, but I am at peace with myself about not giving in. *(Continued on the next page.)*

Anyway, I am looking forward to the big sale and I always miss you, remembering all the sales we did together. You are a joy to have around.

Well, this letter comes to tell you that I am finding the peace and serenity I need today because of your guidance and introducing me to your special women friends who help me accomplish that.

Time to go. My coffee cup is almost empty.

Thank you for being you.

Love,

Jodi

Jodi (Aug.'07) adds, "I want to join my body with my mind. I get down on the floor and stretch and meditate. I close my eyes and see grass blowing in a field. I like to watch the wind hit the top of the blades so they sway back and forth. It is just peaceful. I need to be close to this special place so I can smile and mean it."

Infinity is a double-edged blade.

James (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "In order for time and space to have no ending, they would also have no beginning."

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

A STORY OF HOPE

About thirty years ago, when I was in Europe, I worked every weekend as a 'relief' person in a private home for children. Parents left their youngsters there to be cared for and taught. Back then, these kids were considered to be retarded. Now they have a new term for them, Autistic.

All parents get tired. They need a break sometimes and "special" children need more intense time and care. The sad part of this story is once parents took their children to the home, it was a permanent stay. Parents rarely came to visit. I don't know why. Maybe

those people were embarrassed by their odd child or maybe they had jobs that demanded most of their time and they could not care for the child.

I remember one particular little girl. Five years old, she had a beautiful angelic face, short blond curly hair, and the brightest blue eyes I've seen in some time. Her mother never came to visit but her father came once a month when he dropped off a check. *(Continued on the next page.)*

He spent a few hours that day with his youngest child. In his sad eyes and drooping shoulders I could read how he felt to see his beautiful unreachable little girl -- living in her own world.

It was my task to try to teach his child to speak. I managed. Her very first word was 'Daddy.' When her father heard her say that, he was so delighted he decided to spend more time with her. From that day on, he came daily. He talked to her, fed her and gave her a bath.

After one year of hard work, the little girl was able to speak in a more normal way. Then, her father hired the best therapists. He was determined to see his daughter grow up in a more normal way. For a while he devoted his life to this little girl.

I'd like to tell you a happy ending to this story. However, I do not know what happened to either of them. I was hired to work for NATO and had to leave that part of Europe.

I have never been able to trace them. But I do know the father left the relief home with his daughter and was a happier, more hopeful person than when he first took her there.

Lotte deRoy (Oct. '07) adds, "In the school where I work now, there are many Autistic children. I found out in the state of Florida there are training camps where dogs are being taught to assist the Autistic child. It is thought the animal's help will relieve some of a mother's work and give her more freedom."

*

THINKING OF MY FRIEND ON HER 104TH BIRTHDAY

I love Brynhilde's humor. About three years ago (She was around one hundred.) I came into her house after not seeing her in a while. After getting a big hug, I said, "How are you?" She said, "See right here," pointing to the corner of her eye. "I was looking in the mirror the other day and I found a new wrinkle here."

I've known Brynhilde ever since I can remember because she and my mom were good friends for many years. I always hear her laugh when I think of her. During my growing up years, she'd be visiting my mom and I'd be up in my bedroom. I'd hear her laugh and it would make me feel good inside. (The sound carried loudly in our house.)

One time about ten years ago, she was somewhere in her nineties and I asked her what the secret to long life was. She said, "Well, I always try to get three hugs a day." Another time when I asked her the same question, she answered, "I've always laughed a lot."

So I'm trying to apply her wisdom to my life. I get as many hugs as I can and I try to laugh a lot.

Happy 104th Birthday Brynhilde!

Palma (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "Brynhilde's daughter asked me if I could share an anecdote about her mother for the birth-day and memories came flooding back."

(Continued on the next page)

MY RETREAT BAGGAGE: PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES

When my friends Tom and Martha invited me to join them at Lakeside Retreat Center, I drew upon my past in choosing to go. Many years ago, in my quest for meaning and purpose in life, I had gone by myself on week long retreats to New Melleray Abbey in Dubuque, IA, and to St. Benedict's in Snowmass, CO. For a week at a time I was immersed in the life of a Trappist monk, living by the rule of St. Benedict ... prayer and work. Life was reduced to its fundamentals and I found a real power in this simplicity of existence. As is so often true in life, less was indeed more.

I came to Lakeside with the notion of throwing myself into hard physical labor while prayerfully contemplating my life at this juncture of my existence. Tom and Martha hadn't mentioned any particular religious affiliation and I didn't question them very closely. At the first hint of smug religiosity, I would have balked like a mule, throwing off my packs as I stampeded away.

Although I was raised a staid Catholic, I had long since stalked away from organized religion. My own spiritual path meanderings have lead me through the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (e.g. 70's "Jesus Freak"), a 12-Step Program (Adult Children of Alcoholics) and Native American Spirituality. Each tradition has added to my spiritual formation and shaped my own cosmology.

However, I was eventually disillusioned with a political dimension and individual ego self-importance that always seemed to raise its Hydra head in any human organization. I developed a marked disinterest and distaste in being part of anything organized -- nada!

This was the verve and vive of my life as I arrived at Lakeside.

Michael (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "Frances wrote she was struggling to live life on life's terms. I know what she means. My body is usually good at telling me what I need to do or not to do, IF I pay attention."

*

WRIGLEY

Adopted as a kitten from the Humane Society

August 19, 1996

Named by daughter Hannah

Died at home

November 17, 2007

For many, many months my cat Wrigley had occasional coughing bouts, but no other symptoms. Then recently his appetite dwindled, and Tuesday, five days before he died, he stopped eating altogether. He seemed weaker, and he lost his balance a couple of times when he tried to hop onto my lap. I became very concerned Thursday evening when his

eyes became dilated. If he made it through the night, I decided to take him to the vet in the morning. Later, I was encouraged when Wrigley jumped up on the bed without any urging to say good night.

At 3 a.m. Friday morning I couldn't sleep, and I went down-stairs to check on him. He was alive and resting, but didn't want to be petted. I went back to bed and cried a little. *(Continued on the next page.)*

When I called his vet Friday morning, the doctor wasn't in, so I took him to Animal Emergency Hospital at 9 a.m. I found out Wrigley's weight was down to nine pounds from eleven pounds. He got a complete blood count and x-rays, but no definitive diagnosis. I would have to take him elsewhere for more invasive tests. I decided to take him home, instead, understanding he would probably die soon.

When I brought his cat carrier into the house, set it down in front of the fireplace, and opened the door, Wrigley was too weak to come out. I left him inside with the door open and tried to tempt him out with a little food.

Early Saturday morning I found him just outside his carrier, and at first I feared he was dead. However, he let me hold him for a long time until I got weary of it, and then I laid him down gently on a towel on the rug.

All day long I tried tempting Wrigley to eat, speaking very softly and stroking him very gently, but he didn't respond. He just lay there, his breath rapid, shallow and irregular, his eyes half open and his beautiful, black fluffy tail twitching occasionally.

Early in the afternoon I went upstairs and took a shower. When I came downstairs at 3:10 p.m. Wrigley was in a new relaxed position, lying on his side, legs and tail extended. It took me several moments to realize he was dead. I cried. He was warm and so beautiful, lying there. I arranged him with white tissue paper in a cardboard box and left it open.

As I was wandering around in the back yard trying to decide on a spot to bury him, my husband arrived home from work. We went inside to look at Wrigley, then returned outside to choose a spot together. We completed the burial beside a baby white pine tree before sunset.

May Wrigley be forever free.

Carol (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, "He was my buddy, my only pet. He was always soft, warm and cuddly, and he purred a lot. He was my Bunny-the-Kitten. He was my Wrigley-Pigley-Pie. He would hop onto my lap first thing in the morning when I would log on to the computer. He would roll and squirm in delight later in the morning while my husband brushed him as the coffee-maker burred. He would lick his hairball remedy off my finger every Sunday morning just before I would take my weekly Fosamax. He would sit indoors at the slider in back or at the storm door in front to watch me work in the yard or get the newspaper and mail. He would greet me at the door whenever I came home and see what I had bought. He would follow me into the bathroom just so I would pet him. He would crawl under my throw and take an afternoon nap with me. He would sit on my husband's chest during his after work nap on the couch, while I cooked dinner. He would sit beside me while I watched TV. He would hop up on my bed to say good night to me, then settle down at my feet to snooze I miss him deeply."

(INSTRUCTIONS begin on the next page.)

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

WORTHWHILE FRENCH FLICK

What an eighty-two minute delight! “The Triplets of Belleville” is a small, subtitled film. It is French but has little dialogue. The story is very easy to follow and is highly engaging. The tale is a tribute to Murphy's Law, a grandmother's love, the power born of loving life, and the resourcefulness of women.

Kudos to its writer/director Sylvain Chomet .

Georgene (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, “I like foreign films. Though many plotlines are universal, it’s refreshing to see things through new lenses - something that is different from the American point of view.”

EAT, PRAY, LOVE

I’m reading, Eat, Pray Love, One Woman’s Search for Every-thing Across Italy, India and Indonesia by Elizabeth Gilbert. In one chapter she describes going to see the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. When he arrived on stage, the monk sat in silence for ten minutes -- this peace spread row by row through the hyped up New York Audience. Gilbert describes it as being “colonized” by his stillness. Silence can be a kind of meditation for me. Too much aural stimulation freaks me out! I makes me very jumpy.

Liz/Moscar (Nov.-Dec. '07) adds, “As I wrote about the book, I watched little mothy flies hovering around plants outside my window. Suddenly, just the mention of those flies brought a whole fleet of them -- like a phalanx of little UFOs. Wow! Talk about attracting vibrations, I’m just in awe of it all.!”

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Ninepatch’s

**Special topic for Feb. – May 2008:
“Good Friends Earn My Trust by...”**

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(THREAD continues on the next page.)

ONE READER

FOR MARY MEEHAN

**She boggles my mind with the
books that she reads,
from Isabel Allende
to old Pepys’ screeds,
knows that dear Tolkien
and Lewis were friends,
and follows the Chronicles’ wild
twists and bends.
Mention any book for
the old or young
and Mary does know –
it’s on the tip of her tongue.
Brought up on classics
and popular sages,
she quietly but surely has churned
through the pages.
The latest hit novels on the
best seller list
have passed by her eyes;
not one has been missed.
The spiritual threads
in the serious books
have been unraveled,
received profound looks.
There’s hardly a tome that’s escaped
her perusal.
Not a body of words
has met her refusal.**

Gail (Nov.-Dec. '07) says, “It’s true. Mary’s appetite for books is ravenous. Isabelle Allende is one of her favs.”

GET TO KNOW YOU QUESTION:

Editors’ note: No responses to “What excites you?” arrived in time for this issue.

Next Month's Question:
"Where do you volunteer?"

NINEPATCH BIRTHDAYS are on the next page.

Ninepatch Birthdays	
January 2008	
Merv	1
Dorothy	4
Nancyann	10
Fred	20

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