

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 page from my spiritual notebook.*

KINDERGARTNER

“Is that you?” My girlfriend pointed to a framed black and white, eight-by-twelve photograph of me, age five. I am wearing pigtailed tied with plaid bows to match the plaid of my dress. One corner is signed, “*Olan Mills.*” As memories swirl around the tarnished, gilt-framed photo, I remember the child I was the day of that photo.

Kindergarten was over for the year and days were I-don't-need-my-jacket warm. Mother wanted to dress me up. Unrolling a bundle from the plastic “dampening bag,” she had smoothed it over the ironing board. She plugged in the iron and a minute later, spit on her first finger and touched its smooth stainless steel surface. It sizzled, so she began smoothing my Sunday dress. When she finished, the little ruffles around the puffy sleeves stood out like fuzzy leaves on Grandma's African Violet.

Once I put on the red and blue plaid pinafore, Mother cocked her head to one side and looked at me. “Time to braid your hair!”

She marched me to the bathroom and pulled rubber bands off my braids, unfurling the twists with her fingers. Picking up the blue brush with the black bristles, she straightened my only-blond-in-the-summer, brownish hair. But, when Mother turned on the sink's faucet and wet her hands, I clenched my teeth. *Wet-handed braiding hurts.*

“Ow!”

“Stop squirming!” she said. Finishing, she tied new plaid ribbons on my pigtails. Now I was ready, she picked up her pocketbook and car keys, then drove us downtown. She angle parked next to the old hotel on Main Street and pointed to a side door as I slid off the seat.

Mother pushed the door for me and I stepped inside. We passed a doorway where I saw tall chrome-legged stools beside and a polished wood bar. Beyond, the room was dark, but behind the bar, light shone on fancy sparkling bottles holding brown, red, yellow and clear liquids standing in front of a shiny mirror.

As I stared, Mother pulled my hand, “Come on! We'll be late.”

Silently, we tread down mulberry-colored carpeted steps, and turned into a long dim hallway lined on one side with straight wood chairs. At the end was a small bright room where I heard a man's voice and sometimes saw a lightning flash.

As we perched on the hard seats, a little boy wearing a blue suit with short pants, knee socks and polished oxfords skipped by followed by his mother calling, “Don't run, Johnny!”

A man, woman, and a little boy and girl sat closest to the room where a lady on the first chair held a clip board. Looking up from the paper, she called, “Hoover?”

The four people stood. Following the father, brother and sister, the mother leaned and pulled down the back of the little girl's red velvet dress. They disappeared into the little room and Mother pointed to the empty spaces and whispered, “Move over!”

When the family left, the lady with the list said, “Ridenoure?” and it was our turn. I stood in front of a large gray-blue window shade and blinked in the bright lights. Mother pulled my strand of pearls out so they spilled over my neckline. She licked her right first finger and pasted down strays at my hairline. Then she stood back, her arms folded.

“Say cheese!” the man directed. When I did, a light flashed.

“Sit here,” the man said, and pushed over a white carpet-covered box with his foot.

“Sit up straight!” Mother directed before the man moved a small table covered with a white cloth in front of me.

“Lean on this and fold your arms.”

He stepped to the side and said, “Look here.” He held up his left hand.

He peeked under a cloth covering the back of his black camera standing between us on three spindly legs.

“No...” he touched my chin and moved it a little to my right.

(Continued on the next page.)

“OK... now smile!”

Flash!

Maybe I moved because he took several more shots before he turned to Mother. “OK. It’ll be about six weeks before you can pick up the proofs. You’ll get a postcard.”

Now, more than half a century later, I gaze on the photo I had pulled from a scrapbook in Mother’s estate during the ‘90s. Newly divorced and retired after thirty years of teaching, I was adrift among a sea of older singles and needed an anchor. I had read that looking at one’s childhood photo helped to reconnect with the little girl (or boy) a person once was.

It worked! The old portrait has followed me through five moves. The little girl I was encourages me.

When I look at that smiling five-year old, I see a girl so excited to go to kindergarten she had given up sucking her thumb, but had already started chewing her fingernails. Her smile shows a dark front tooth -- dead from the afternoon she and her cousin had been jumping on Grandma’s double bed. She’d hit her tooth on the top of his head as he bounced up and she came down. *Tears, blood and a scolding that day!*

But tough experiences didn’t get my five-year old self down. Each day was an exciting gift.

On my best days, I am still that little girl.

Frances Fritzie

- -A-R-O-U-N-D - - T-H-E - - F-R-A-M-E- - -

(Letters to the Editor)

Frances,

I started my morning out by reading April ‘10 *e-Ninepatch*. I truly enjoyed all the sharing and writers getting to the heart of our lives. The stories were fabulous and sad -- both. Sometimes I ask myself, “What kind of world are we living in?”

Like your contributors, where would I be without books! Only in writing do thoughts get expressed at a level commensurate with one’s intellect. The rest is electronic clichés and fake niceties that are -- to a great extent -- insults to one’s intelligence. Still, we live in the world and have to learn how to navigate all the flotsam and keep our ships on a smooth course. There is the challenge.

I’m still working and that is the plan while I await Life's direction and discover what is *really* going to happen. John Lennon said it well, “Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.”

Love,
Shari

Shari introduces herself, “I am single and I have two grown children. At this point in my life, I am a phoenix, rising from the ashes of having lived through the responsibilities and rewards of my own chosen actions. Now, seasoned considerably as to the terrain and ambience of life, I am carefully and selectively choosing how to enjoy, share, and embrace what remains. My current reading interests hover around Marshall McLuhan and his students. McLuhan wrote Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man where he made the now famous statement: The medium is the message.”

Hi Fritzie

e-Ninepatch May 2010

Received and read April '10 *Ninepatch*. Thank you. In your note, you asked about books I've read. I haven't read any cozy mysteries for a while. I switched to non-fiction.

Have read Karl Rove's, Courage and Consequence. Really a good one. I didn't want it to end. Also I read Sarah Palin's Going Rogue: An American Life, and Leslie Caron's, Thank Heaven: A Memoir. Caron was and is one of my movie favorites. I think I have seen all her early movies.

My son, Keith, has moved in with his son. So far so good. How long that will last, I don't know. I just hope he will get some help.

Hope all is well with you.

Going to close now my friend. Regards to JK.

Patricia

Patricia (Apr. '10) comments on her summer interest, "My favorite baseball team, The (Cincinnati) Reds, lost their home opener. Darn it."

Hi Frances!

Good to hear from you. My husband and I are still sailing his boat, a Sovereign 7. It's a twenty-four foot sailboat, made in England during the 1970s. It is a very sturdy boat and does not turn over in the water -- a very important requirement for me since I'm its first mate (or *last mate* as my husband refers to me)! We'll start home the end of April.

We've had a wonderful time so far but I have also had some depression. (Not sure what that is about.) Of course the chilly weather has been a disappointment, but that's not it.

My laptop computer is sick, so I haven't read *Ninepatch* yet. I am using my cell phone to type this!

Will write more after I get my computer fixed back home.

Jane

Jane (Apr. 10) says, "I forgot to add that I read, The Necklace: The Experiment that Transformed Their Lives by Cheryl Jarvis. Very interesting to see the changes in the individual women who bought into the idea and also in the group as it turned to outreach. Thanks for suggesting it."

Dear Frances,

You said I sounded "down" in my last letter. Yes. It's light longer these days, but I still work and take breaks in windowless rooms. On good days, we sit outdoors at a picnic table. But sometimes there's rain or it's chilly.

You suggested vitamins and said you recently read about eating a daily banana. I do take vitamins. I have heard of "an apple a day..." but never "bananas for the blues." I'll buy some anyway.

There's been chaos at home. My oldest granddaughter (who lives here) ran away with her boyfriend. She is back now though she still tries to sneak out. I am sad and upset but pray for her.

I am working on staying more "upbeat." At home I stay busy. I still go to work. I just do what has to be done. I don't feel like I belong there, either. My best times are still with my dad. But reading is also a big help. I continue to get new faith-encouraging books from the library. Thanks for sending me new titles. When I asked for the three "Plain" books by Beth Wiseman, the librarian took my name and said she would call me. Now I have several to look forward to. Thank you.

I still pray a lot. I go to church on Sundays and have my faith in God. Now I have three things to support me: faith, Dad and my books. I'm happy.

Thank you for listening.

Love and Prayers,
LindaSue

LindaSue (Apr. '10) adds, "The new thing with my husband is he got a dog! He's built his life around it. He takes her everywhere and even sleeps with her!"

Dear Frances,

When I returned from my winter travels, I picked up the January *Ninepatch* again. I was going to file it, but got to rereading and noticed Georgene's story about her family.

I, like Georgene, used to dream of the days when all the family (my children and their spouses) would be together and everything would be storybook perfect. Since my family was also three boys and a girl, the boys all went out on their travels and found their mates in new places: New York, Los Angeles, and Denver. Of course this is where the girls' parents and siblings live, so much of their lives revolve around that family. I still had this fantasy of our being together.

We had together time Christmas of 2000. I realized then that when all of us were together, I didn't have much time for one-on-one type interrelationship. It was all too confusing and fraught with too many personalities.

Now I find it much more satisfying to relate to each part of the family on an individual basis. Granted, it's fun to have us all together once in a while. That seems to happen at weddings, which are happy occasions. But I've learned to appreciate my children and my sister, whenever or however we happen to come together.

Palma (Apr. '10) adds, "This last summer, my sister was visiting me when her husband was busy with some of his family affairs. It turned out that my sister and I had some real quality 'hanging out' time and it was wonderful, just the two of us."

Dear Francesca,

Thank you for telling me about times you thought your mother would not survive the night, but next morning there she was, ready for another day. I think that is where I am, anticipating the worst and being afraid and sad.

During a phone conversation today with one of our boys, my husband honestly sounded as if he was saying a final goodbye -- in case upcoming medical options don't help.

The boys believe he is at peace and I agree. My husband has absolutely no regrets -- that's just the kind of person he is.

While his demise is on his mind he won't talk about it. That's also true to his character.

He's had a tough ride of late and it isn't over.

Thanks for listening.

Elaine

Elaine (Apr. '10) adds, "I'm concerned about not being prepared for what seems inevitable. I've been doing some sleuthing about final plans, feeling sneaky and disloyal along the way."

Dear Frances:

Thank you for the letter. I was thinking about the not-seeing of people on a regular basis and, well, I thought of history -- and families and friends who didn't see each other for years, if ever again. The

American Colonists are a good example. They maintained bonds of affection despite distances. Perhaps they perfected the art of letter writing.

Seeing each other in person is good, but you and I still man-age a “colonial” e-mail friend-ship quite nicely, too, don’t we?

It sounds like you had your hands full of family business when you were recently in Michigan. And trouble with your condo furnace, too! Gosh, homes are very needy. So much like the individual soul, I suppose. Something breaks down in one spot and other things follow. It all needs fixing and then the cycle begins anew.

That theme of complicated home maintenance reminds me of Linda Sue’s comments in the March’10 *Ninepatch* about joining the Amish. The Plain People seem to lead very simple lives. There is attractiveness about that for many people. Yet, their culture is not one that I would want for myself. We have many Amish families in my area. I interact with Amish women every week as I purchase groceries from one of their discount stores. I also read a few books about their lives to better understand them.

They are romanticized by non-Amish who are attracted by parts of their culture that appeal. To me, their practice of shunning seems particularly very mean and there are plenty of other shaming aspects of who they are. Those wouldn’t work for me, that is who they are and it works for them as a people. God bless...

It’s warming here. Though rainy and gloomy this morning, the hope of spring comes again.

“Talk” with you again soon,

Linda

Linda Rosenthal (Mar. ’10) adds, “Family business was the path that you needed to work on, and you did! I look forward to seeing you when you are back in Michigan this summer.”

***The answer lies not in the act –
but in the response.***

James (Apr. ’10) says, “Self talk may be therapeutic.”

(FABRICS begins on the next page.)

- - - -F-A-B-R-I-C-S- - - -

(Our Experiences)

MY JOURNEY INTO THE PAST
(Conclusion)

The movie, "The Law-Abiding Citizen" echoed my own grief and judicial journey of seven years ago. I, too, was a law abiding citizen who trusted that my daughter's murderers would pay for their crime. Grief struck, I sat in court rooms and followed back room negotiations as deals were struck with the district attorney's office and the murderer's lawyers.

Suddenly it seemed police testimony was dumb. The judge had all their reports including the man's blood tests. The presider knew my daughter's murderers were high on alcohol and three other drugs. But charges against the two men were dismissed! The judge even announced to the courtroom, "My hands are tied."

My daughter's killers never saw the first day inside a prison. One of them did probation for holding a controlled substance -- but that was it!

When I exited the theatre, I realized I had again spiraled into earlier post traumatic stress. First I cried. Then I felt only numbness and emptiness. Even my body reacted. My feet felt like concrete and my body moved without conscious thought of its direction.

I guess I learned the hurt and pain I thought were healed or buried deep were still an open wound. Seeing my tragedy all play out on 'the big screen' did me in.

Will I protect myself from this sort of damage in the future? I really don't know. After the chaos of injustice struck a second blow (the first blow being my daughter's death) I realized I have two choices with this world: live (how short life is) ... or not. Due to my faith in my Lord I keep choosing the first.

It's a crazy ride, but life over death is the best choice.

CaT (Apr. '10) says, "I gave the assistant district attorney an earful afterwards. ...you just sold my lovely, innocent daughter down the tubes for a pair of guilty-as-sin-drug addicts."

THE MOST SURPRISING GIFT I EVER RECEIVED

The year might have been 1948. I know I was about twelve years old when a truck delivered a brand new blue bike for me and a red one for my sister, Ruth. Our parents called us out front to watch as the driver opened the back of the truck and brought out the bikes. We couldn't believe our eyes.

Ruth and I had been longing for bikes. The \$5 Victory bike we had been sharing was neither a thing of beauty nor dependable. However, there was no money for bikes, hardly enough for basics.

Our step-father had gotten a job in a downtown department store called, Sibleys. It was also a Sibleys' truck that brought this wonderful surprise.

I never found out how this unbelievable gift became real.

(Continued on the next page.)

Louise (Apr. '10) adds, "I've often thought how excited our parents must have been watching our surprise and joy."

LIFE AFTER EIGHTY
(Part One of Two)

After losing my husband, five years ago I moved across Florida from Jacksonville to live near my daughter in Tampa. I left all my friends behind and was devastated. However, the loneliness inspired me to write. It was therapy for my ache. I completed a book I had begun years before but never had the time to finish. Slowly, I reemerged into life.

While turning pages of the *The Lutz News* one day, I read about a local club, OWLS --Older, Wiser, Lively Seniors. It offered social activities, travel, seminars and classes. My daughter and I checked it out. It seemed reputable so I began attending. Not long after, I also joined an exercise group at my local YMCA, "Silver Sneakers."

At an exercise session, one of the ladies said to me, "There is a gentleman in our group who lost his wife a year or so ago. We should invite him to our OWLS dance class."

I said, "Great! You're good at reaching out. Go for it."

I never saw him, but later she reported she had invited him and he had promised to attend.

It had now been four years since I moved to Tampa. My book was not only complete but published and I had begun a sequel. One day I had brought one of my books to the dancing session to give to a lady friend. As I handed it to her, I dropped it. A gentleman nearby retrieved it. He handed it back to me saying, "My name is Al. Did you write this book?"

When he began talking to me, my lady friend walked away so I continued a conversation with the man.)

"Yes. Would you like to read it? You can pay me later or just give it back to me. "

Al kept that book and I brought my lady friend another one.

Glenda is a widow who has five grown children. In her spare time she enjoys fishing, knitting and sewing. During past president George W. Bush's administration, she admired his wife, Laura, and her interest in and work with younger children.

LIVING WITH STRANGERS

Some day you may be forced to render a hard decision and place a parent or loved one in a nursing home. The challenging choice will be: which facility?

You'll probably check its rating, visit and observe how the nurses care for others. Your nose and eyes will report if the building is clean. Your intuition will signal if the employees are trustworthy.

Once your parent is settled in, you will want to visit on a regular basis. It's also good to be able to communicate with the staff and charge nurses.

During the past year I had to choose nursing homes and rehabs for my Uncle Jerry. He was recovering from illness one time and surgery another. I chose to stay there with him at the facility most of the time, so I have seen more than the usual visitor.

Sadly, I've seen families leave their elders and let strangers take care them without a second thought. Frail citizens with dementia and others disabled due to an accident live out their days, disconnected. Family members have apparently stopped visiting. *(Continued on the next page.)*

Facilities do their best to entertain the sick, the demented and those who can get around without supervision. However, deep down these permanent residents know the one and only escape. Perhaps they even welcome release from such a life.

I was sad to see so many old ones become dependent on total strangers.

Lotte de Roy (Apr. '10) adds, "Some residents are being hand-fed -- they have become children again."

Ninepatch Birthdays

MAY:

Linda Rosenthal	10
LynnTROR	17
James	19
Le	19
M. Joan	21
Patience	26
Bookworm	28

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

(Reading Listening and Viewing)

A CHANGE FOR ME

Normally, I do not take time to read fiction, so the novel I'm reading is a change for me. I'm reading The Choice by Nicholas Sparks. He also wrote The Notebook and Dear John. Both were made into movies which I loved.

There are ironic parallels to my own life in this newest story. In the book, Gabby had been going with her boyfriend Kevin for years. Though their relationship had not been "going anywhere," she still thought eventually they'd be married. But when she moved, she met Travis who lived next door. He was a hunk and she was falling for him. She felt guilty about her developing attachment to the new man.

I'm enjoying Sparks' new book.

Dottie (Mar. '10) adds, "Parallels are interesting."

*

(THREAD begins on the next page.)

-T-H-R-E-A-D-

(Our Knowing and Our Spirituality)

CAUSE FOR LEVITY

A sprinkling of gray hair
becomes a cap of white.
When liver spots appear,
it does seem only right
that we should dye our
bloomin' crop
to match the changin' skin,
but then the wrinkles pop
and everything blends in.

It seems that gravity starts
from lids to chin.
It's really cause for levity—
where flesh at once is thin.
The chest does fall and roll
upon the tummy shelf.
It's such a losin' goal
to resemble your old self.

The teeth and hair eject;
we squint to hear and see
And knowing where we left our
specs becomes a novelty.
When bones do creak and strain,
then calcium's the fare.
As flatulence becomes a pain,
the sweets must disappear.

As shoulders sag and slump,
a fascinating stunt
evolves, as pressure moves
the rump;
it rotates to the front!
How could our loving God cause
something short of bliss;
it must be man that plots
a folly such as this.

Gail (Apr. '10) explains her lines, "I wrote this poem before the aging process really set in. I mean, now I truly see the wrinkles -- but I don't bother with dye anymore! I have had more fun since I've had white hair. Remarried at 72, and what an adventure this is! Life is good."

LISTEN INSIDE

The true you
Is way own deep,

And mostly doesn't
Let out a peep.

But when it does
You'll want to listen...

For sweet advice you
Could be missin'!

Simon Stargazer III (Apr. '10) sez, "When I don't listen I usually regret it. 'Cause, more often than not, the result is more work to be done, or sometimes hurt feelings that could have been avoided! I've been there, maybe you have, too."

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

GET TO KNOW ME

Our Monthly Question for May was, **"One thing my parents/grandparents taught me..."**

In response to the prompt, **June Poucher (Apr. '10)** finishes that thought, "(My grandparents taught me) *...the importance of integrity. They never lectured and seldom scolded. They taught by example. My grandfather was highly respected in the community. It was often said of him, "His word is his bond."*

My Grandmother often spoke of people who lied or stole as 'scoundrels'; but one of the worst sins was being untrustworthy and/or irresponsible.

I don't recall their ever using the word 'character', but I learned by osmosis what was acceptable behavior. To this day, I notice 'character flags' that indicate what sort of person I am dealing with. I am grateful to my family for demonstrating good character traits when I was growing up."

**

Next month's question is, **"My favorite time of day is..."**

MORE BUBBLES!

Last month **Nancyann (Oct. '09)** turned her car off Florida's I-75 to visit me in my Gainesville home. While we talked, I got out paper and a pen and ask-ed her to draw her bubble picture for *Ninepatch*.

As we sat at my dining room table, she told me she doesn't often "get" the games I send, but a few years ago had enjoyed drawing stars with us. As she drew, Nancyann said she had always been interested in the bubbles' paths.

Some flew up and drifted away. Others burst in the air, but she was most fascinated by the ones that floated down onto the grass. (*Continued on the next page.*)

They seemed to just sit there for a while before they eventually popped.

I'm not sure what Tadahiko Nagao and Isamu Saito, authors of Kokology might say about this story. About the bubbles in general they say, "The shimmering bubbles you blow in your imagination are symbols of your hopes and dreams. The scene you described reveals how you think about dreams you hope someday will come true."

Nancyann, thanks for sharing your bubble picture and story! **Editor, Frances**

SPECIAL TOPIC CONTINUES

Our topic until May of 2010 is, "An area of my life that is on hold at this time is..."

Frances Editor, comments, "Creating a better looking e- newsletter with the Publisher Program seems to elude me. Right now I am trying to add color to an issue with a simple line. When I was visiting Michigan

in February, a man who does the newsletter at my son's church told me how to do that... Actually applying the procedure is a quite different matter."

Remember! Our on-going topic is:
"A Part of my life that's on hold right now is..."

SEE NINEPATCH PHOTOS!

The new *Ninepatch* photo pool can be found at: <http://www.flickr.com/groups/ninepatch9/>
Anyone can view the photos added by *Ninepatch* contributors! To add your own photos to our page, go to <http://www.yahoo.com> and sign up for a free account.

Then, on the left side of the Yahoo homepage, click 'Flickr.' There, click 'Create Your Account' (again, it's free) and follow the instructions. Once you have logged in to Flickr, go to the *Ninepatch* photo pool page and click 'Join.'

Once we approve your membership, you'll be able to add photos to the pool!

Nine is our home.

Weather we cannot live.

Nobody is hers.

Julie D. Keefer (July'09) runs a retreat center in LeRoy, Michigan. She adds, "These words and drawing were published in Morningstar News, Spring 2010."

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