

Get Half

by Thea Nicholas

'GET HALF!' That was the rallying cry! Get half! If I heard it once, I heard it a hundred times. Kathy, my long-time gone high school friend, returned to my life a few months after I had moved out of my house and into the Wetherell apartments, #501, to be exact. Kathy and I had gone our separate ways; she had been a bridesmaid in our wedding and then, 'poof' she was gone. Out to California, to a whole other way of living. Christmas card exchanges with her parents and with her kept me somewhat informed of her doings, but not much.

I had sent her my Christmas card for the year 1998, a picture of all of my yellow rubber duckies swimming in my bathtub trying, as I was, to get all in a row; low and behold, she wrote me a letter giving me her email address. Via the invention of the internet, this long-time gone friend was back into my life. She soon became my strongest ally, giving me the encouragement that I needed to stand firm and to keep focused. From her roost in San Francisco she kept up her exhortation: "Get Half! Get Half!"

After 2+ years of wrangling, resisting, once even being accompanied by a private detective to enter into my own home to retrieve my ATM card, time-outs for both of our attorneys to bury their mothers, and for my attorney's wife to receive her brain cancer treatments in Omaha, the negotiations came to a close. A settlement was reached. And not a moment too soon; maybe an hour before the court was to hear my plea, all sides agreed. Enough (half?) was enough.

And so it was that ten years ago today, I became single-ized. For the first time ever, I was on my own. Free at last! Now responsible just for myself, I hardly knew what to do, much less who I was. I was half-way through seminary; I sought to return to finish my degree and move toward my life's ambition: to become a sacramental leader. The church refused to let me return; the bishop released me from my provisional status. The door, never very far open, was shut, permanently. Set adrift I wandered, finding, eventually, that it's alright to not know and do, but to be. (I'm still a work in progress, mind you.)

I loved my little one-bedroom apartment, high up among the sycamore trees where I was safe, secure and growing in assurance, bit by creative bit. I had a little solarium that jutted out to the north, overlooking Grand Avenue with windows on three sides. It was my sanctuary. I remember when checking out the apartment prior to moving in, my husband starting to move toward the little space and I yelled out: "Stop! You can't go in there!" Puzzled and a bit non-plused, he looked at me questioningly, but he did as I told.

It was in this tiny space that I crammed in every little bit of self-expression that I had...plants, Advent wreathes, bunches of books, pillows, candles, incense and music. It was in this cozy space that I sang, prayed, wept, exhorted, complained, yelled and pleaded my case before a God who patiently heard all. It was in this windowed-space that I watched as a mother sparrow built her nest, focused on doing her

best, on top of my air conditioning unit. I learned the hymn 'His Eye is On the Sparrow' and knew I was being watched over, too. I was in my Aerie, surrounded, blessed, awakening.

Each place I have lived in has been built upon that time: each place an AERIE. A launching pad for a new beginning . A place for a little one to find her wings. To fluff up and take flight, having been fed, nurtured and cozied in a nest built of the tossed off twigs, the crumpled leaves, the detritus that makes up a life.

Did I 'get half'? Not exactly. But what I did get was a whole new way of looking and being (not to mention a whole new name). A whole new chance to bring forth what needed to be heard. I learned some of life's hard lessons. Choices, even when they are made for the good, have cutting edges; when all agree this is the right thing to do, it still takes a toll. We all know it's not about the possessions, the money, the fancy china, or even the house on the lake that I dreamed would be mine someday. We learn that not all of our dreams work out.

I never dreamed that I would be alone as I grow old, but I am and I can't imagine it being otherwise. I rue the hurt and sorrow that divorce causes; the collateral damage to our loved ones. It is hard not living where I thought I should be. I continue to miss some things: not worrying about ending up a burden, vacations on beaches, someone to hug me, seeing my grandchildren a lot. But, all in all, I got what I needed: a chance to be me. And isn't that what it's all about? What we need, not what we want? A sense of clarity of the important things in life. A sense of accomplishment not purchased through another. A sense that all in all, I got the better half.