The Mother of Us All

May 1, 2007 By Dennis Daniel

I tried to forget all about Mother's Day for a few years there," says Nita Pippins. Those would be the years following the death of her only son, Nick, my partner from 1983 to 1990.

In 1987, at the age of 60, Nita did something few mothers are called on to do. After retiring from her job of 30 years as a psychiatric nurse in Florida, and while her friends were relaxing into new chapters in their lives, Nita made the daunting move to New York City to care for her son as he fought AIDS.

During the next three years, through our many battles against the system, Nita bonded with Nick in ways most mothers are never allowed. He was as stubborn as she was and put her nursing skills to the test. And then, on the night of July 27, 1990, Nick, at the age of 35, departed this existence surrounded by a dozen friends, as she and I held him between us.

Nita's family expected her to move back South. But the city had become her home; she was now a New Yorker. What's more, a new family had formed around her. It had begun with me, our friends and their partners, but had grown to include their friends, their sisters and brothers. And friends she had made on her own as she cared for Nick.

For a year or two she mostly just grieved. It was a year before she could sleep in the bedroom of the apartment the three of us had shared. But she turned her talent and experience to a new project, and once again in her life, Nita made a new start.

She founded Miracle House, based upon the Ronald McDonald Houses for families of ill children. Now families finding themselves in New York City dealing with their sons' or daughters' AIDS diagnoses—and often learning for the first time about their children's sexual orientation too—could meet Nita. Miracle House offered them a safe and nurturing place to stay, and Nita offered them break-fast at the nearby diner and a shoulder to cry on.

This past Groundhog Day, Nita turned 80. And on a very cold February afternoon, 40 people gathered at the Theatre Row, her favorite diner on 42nd Street, to surprise her with a birthday celebration. For two hours she wandered around beaming at everyone and gasping, "You did all this for me?"

For Nita, having lost her only son, has gained a huge extended family. Some of these new children have even had children of their own, making her a mother and grandmother many times over. So I

know mine is not the only card she gets on Mother’s Day. I asked her recently if she still dreaded the day. “No,” she said. “It’s back.”

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