

One of our more challenging evenings

Armed with our Mapquest map, Larry and I drove across Orange County to a small restaurant on top of a hill to attend a benefit dinner. We were late, way late, and I hate being late. I pride myself on being on time, so much so, that if I am on time, in my mind, I'm late.

I usually like to go to these charity events. I like getting dressed up, eating a nice dinner, meeting new people, all in the name of helping, in this case, "the kids."

This night was different. As soon as we arrived and were seated I knew it was going to be challenging evening for me. The room seemed serious and sober. The lighting, far too dim to critique what the other women were wearing. The mood, far too solemn to have a good laugh.

As Larry goes off to get me a glass of wine, I eye the fellow do-gooders at my table to find the one that has "I don't take myself too seriously," written on her face. Hummm, not seeing anyone here ... starting to panic a little ... "Where is Larry with my drink?"

At these functions I sometimes feel only half grown up. Part of me says, "Yes, it is totally appropriate that I am here." The other half has the urge to help clear the table and follow the wait staff through the kitchen door, out to the back alley where we would sit on empty vegetable crates, have a cigarette and bitterly complain about next week's schedule.

When Larry returns, I lean over and ask him if he ever feels that way sometimes. "No," he assures me, "I pretty much feel like a grown up." Drats, it's just me. As I take a drink of wine, I peer over the rim and look, once more, at the woman seated next to me. I usually can find something to talk to

anyone about, but she was a tough nut to crack. Our brief discussion of her medical condition and then her drive to the event left me searching for the kitchen door.

Then I asked her the question that changed the course of the night, "Do you have any animals?" Without looking up from her goat cheese salad, very matter-of-factly, as if it were the most normal thing in the world, she said, "I have twelve cats." TWELVE CATS!!! An obligatory conversation gold mine!

This could fill up hours ..."What are their names?" 15 minutes – gone by. "Do they all get along?" 20 minutes – pass in a flash. "Don't you think most people don't understand cats?" Impassioned 10 minutes – spent. Before I know it, they are serving the main course. And luckily for me, her kind and caring nature was topped only by her ability to know when to stop talking, turn away, and eat her prime rib. We chatted now and then, and I really ended up liking her very much.

Turned out, Larry and I had a nice evening together. As we waited for our car, we took in the brisk winter evening. Driving down the freeway we passed Disneyland and watched as the grand finale of the fireworks show was just ending. Entering our community, we smiled and waved to the guard as he open the gate. You know, sometimes, Orange County seems like it would be a really nice place to live...