

Grade 8 kids and house parties

By Francie Healy



Yes, yes, yes, I told the mothers and fathers. I'll be there. As God is my witness, I'll be there. And the lights will be on.

Their kids, aged 13 and 14, were invited to my daughter's first teenage party. I was glad the mothers and fathers asked me that question. It's comforting to know others worry as much as I do.

I didn't mean it to happen this way. My daughter talked me into it. There would just be a few of her friends, she said.

We must have gotten our wires crossed, however, because before I knew it, 18 rather than five young people from her Grade 8 class were marking Friday night at my house on their calendars. Not all

the parents asked me if I'd be there, and I thought that was a bad sign. It was going to be a nightmare. I just knew it. I could feel it in my bones.

The girls arrived immediately after school. They were taller than I thought they'd be, and more sophisticated – except for the wrestling on the living room rug and endless, eardrum-piercing screams and giggles. This would end eventually, I told myself more than once.

By the time the rest of the party arrived, the girls had managed, *en masse*, to style their hair about 147 times. They put on makeup. They squirted each other with perfume and hairspray. They sat in a row on the side of the bathtub, shaved their legs and occupied both bathrooms in the house for three hours.

They filled bowls with chips and made phone calls and whispered to each other. They laughed, shrieked, shouted, gave group hugs. I think it was a ritual of some sort.

The boys arrived at 7:30 (as ordered by the girls), but were, thank goodness, more subdued. They stood, hands in pockets, on the periphery, until someone suggested football.

It was a dilemma. Should I let them run through flower gardens, annoy the neighbours, get hurt? Or should I go with the flow, look the other way, keep my fingers crossed? Should I make myself disappear, should I stand in the middle of everything, should I be old and stern and responsible, or should I be just one of the “guys”? So I did it all, and ended up with a headache.

When they moved the party inside, I could feel my stomach tightening. How noisy would it get? What if they wanted to turn the lights out? Blast the music? Move the furniture? Break things?

But these kids were cool. They made themselves at home, and it was sort of fun to watch the dynamics. Boys watched the hockey game. Girls listened to music or went to do their hair again. And each group pretended not to notice the other. Later they sat on the floor, watched a scary movie and nibbled on about four of the 40 sandwiches I had made.

When it was over, I looked around. The house wasn't spotless, but it wasn't too bad, either. The yard was fine – the grass was crushed in places, but it was okay. There were a few potato chips on the rug. I felt respected and liked. And my daughter had the best party of her life.

Great eight kids? I'll take 'em any time.