

Opening Story, Unit 3: The Party

Greg entered high school at age 13. Just a couple of weeks into his freshman year, he came to me and said that there was a party at the Kim's house that Friday night and begged to go. I thought I had asked all of the appropriate questions. According to my son, it was a back-to-school party for freshmen only. And yes, Mr. and Mrs. Kim would undoubtedly be there. Well, I knew the Kims. I had coached the kids in soccer. So, I said Yes. Then Greg asked for a later curfew for that one night only. After much debate and discussion about responsibility, we settled on 11:00 PM.

That Friday, Greg left the house at about 6:30 PM for the party. My wife was working late that night, so I asked Robert (my compliant child) if he wanted to watch the local high school football game with me. Robert was excited about watching the annual cross-town rivalry, so we left the house early. Kids are so easy at age 11. Parents are still cool, and at that age, it isn't yet a social teenage death sentence to be seen with your parents in public.

As we got into our truck at the end of the game, I suggested to my younger son that we drive by the party. After all, the Kims lived just around the corner. Robert got this huge grin on his face, rubbed his hands together, and said, *Ooooooh Kaaaaaay!* I observed this sudden display of emotion and asked my son what *Ooooooh Kaaaaaay!* meant. *Oh, nothing, nothing,* he answered without looking me in the eye.

Now, it is my experience that younger brothers will not normally rat out their older brothers. But, they love to be there when you catch them dirty. As I drove by the Kim's house, it did not take me long to come to the realization that this was not the same party my older son had described to me. The local police department had the street blocked off. There were drunk and stoned kids sitting on the curb, laying in the gutter, sprawled on front lawns, and throwing up in Mr. Jacob's rose bushes. I spoke to one of the police officers and said that if he wanted, and let me through, I would lighten his load by taking as many of the drunk *freshmen* as my truck would carry. He looked at me as if I were crazy and said I could have as many as I wanted. Well, I did not see my son. I did not see any of his friends. But I did see a sign on the side gate to Mr. & Mrs. Kim's rear yard. The sign read *\$10.00 all you can drink.*

By the time I returned home, I was not a happy camper. When we hit the front door, I barked at Robert, *Go to bed. Oh, please don't make me go to bed,* he begged. I figured he might just learn something from his brother's mistake, so I told him to sit on the sofa and instructed him not to say a word to his brother. We sat on the couch and waited for Greg.

At about 10:35 PM, Greg returned home. Now when a child asks for a later curfew and returns home early, that should be a parent's first clue that something is not right. Greg walked into the house, trying to act as sober as a drunk 13-year-old can act. He saw his brother and me

sitting on the couch and made a right turn into the kitchen. Greg stood in the middle of the kitchen for what seemed like a full minute. He finally moved to the refrigerator, opened the door, and stuck his head inside. Greg stayed in that position for what seemed like an eternity. Robert finally asked, *What's he doing?* I answered I believe he is trying to use the cold air to help sober himself up. Robert seemed satisfied with the answer and nodded his head. Then suddenly turned back to me and asked, *Does that work?* Smart kids want to plan for the future. I said, *no. Greg will be a cold drunk when he finally gets his head out.*

Having no other choice, Greg finally left the kitchen and stumbled into the family room. With vomit on his tennis shoes and swaying back and forth, Greg somehow managed to stare straight ahead at the TV without falling over backward. It took him almost a full minute to engage his mouth. *So, what are you watching?* That was it. Robert couldn't control himself any longer. *You! We were watching you! You dummy!*

The thought didn't hit me until much later. What if I hadn't been home when Greg returned home? What if I had been asleep? What if I hadn't driven by that party? My wife and I still don't know if that was Greg's *first* experience with alcohol. We do know it was not to be his last.

That was some time ago, before smartphones, mobile apps, and teen sexting. In today's society, parents face a much more significant challenge supervising their children.