

Prom or Transcript?

By Barrington H. Brennen, June 20, 2007

Once again we have reached the most painful time of the year for many parents and guardians--preparing for school prom extravaganzas. According to the Random House Webster's College Dictionary, a prom is "a formal dance held by a high school or college class." A prom was simply intended to be the end-of-school-year-dance for high school seniors. Instead, it has become a giant monster of extravagant spending, more-than-a-wedding-show-off-party, vulgar dancing, and sexual exploitation.

Today's high school proms, oftentimes supported by misguided parents, self-pleasing onlookers, is a time when the cost for dresses, suits, limousines, hairstyles, can far exceed the tuition for one school term or even a year or two in some cases. The \$300 hair dos, \$300 limousines, \$150 suit rentals, \$800 bear-top formal gowns, \$150 shoes, can add up to a down payment for a small home. To further exasperate this burdensome financial outlay, there is the eternal lost of virginity and ruin of personal dignity--a painful right of passage to adulthood. What an unwise use of money when these budding young adults (high school graduates) have no or very little of life experiences, nor have they ever made life-changing decisions. It's shocking and embarrassing at times to see the hundreds of spectators who gather in front of hotels, sometimes hours before the promenade begins, to cheer their favorite couple's arrival. They are there to watch the entrances of teenage couples dressed in apparels often more lavish than most wedding attires.

PROM PRESSURE

The pressure from peers to attend a high school prom and to join the show-off gang with all the trappings and glitter is awesome and seemingly unavoidable. I often wonder why parents allow and support such an extravagant use of funds and the ostentatious prom entrances. Why do hundreds gather to cheer these teenagers who often appear more mature than they really are? Why do they need giant limousines, helicopters, escorts, and the long receiving lines of people filled with false pride? Perhaps the greatest prom pressure is that of sex. Another expense for prom night is the purchase of condoms. One teenager said: "A lot of teens decide to have sex for the first time on prom night." "Or, they may think that having sexual intercourse on prom night will make it that much more special. Having condoms handy would only be smart." Often going along with sex is alcohol and drugs. Too many teens think of prom night at the greatest night in their life and they want to make it that way. This is a great mistake. There are other things more important. Yes it is the last time with childhood friends, but life is just beginning, not ending.

Some male students would not agree to escort an eager female student to the prom unless she agrees to have sex with him. One female student after the prom was shocked when her escort, while attempting to caress her legs, said: "Let's go and rent a hotel room for the night." She pushed his hands off and said "You are messing with the wrong girl tonight. I am going home and no other place with you." Cheers to that girl! But far too often proms become a night of orgy, loss of virginity, sometimes a painful introduction to the HIV virus, drugs, and alcohol.

THE TRANSCRIPT

Isn't it sad how some teenagers begin dreaming of a prom from the time they enter high school and ignore the eager steps of learning? It is as though they are on a path of no return. Unfortunately, they are not on a learning path; they are on a "prom" path of which the outcome is dismal. Their grades are low, and upon graduation too many prom dancers have only received a school-leaving certificate. Imagine a school having 300 students completing high school and only 150 of them obtaining the minimum

requirement (2.00 and above) to receive a high school certificate, but they are all celebrating as though their goal was only to reach prom night. Perhaps parents should make prom attendance an award-winning affair. Only if their children make a 3.0 or above average they would be allowed to go to the prom.

The sad truth is when these mindless teenagers knock on doors looking for a job, the potential employer will not be asking for the prom expense list or how beautiful they were on prom night. The potential employer will be asking for their transcripts. Too many students who are dancing their hearts and bodies out on prom night will be deeply disappointed when they cannot get the job they dreamed about all those years. Why? Because their goal was to get to "prom night" and not to have good grades that will give them a transcript that will make it easy to enter college or get a good paying job. Good transcripts are testaments of bright, intellectual, willing-to-learn students. Prom night extravaganzas offer nothing for the future well-being of individuals. Instead, for far too many, they may guarantee shame, embarrassment, guilt, and a loss of dignity.

THE DANCE FLOOR

Sometime ago I decided to see for myself what happens at a prom. What shocked me the most was what happened on the dance floor. Teenaged girls and boys who had the appearance of naivety and innocence were "getting down" on the dance floor. I saw girls lifting their expensive dresses as they gyrated to the pulsating music before boys with clearly sexual strokes. As the sensual, rhythmic music continued to beg the dancers to "do it," I saw them (boys and girls) rubbing, stroking, grasping, and clasping, as though they were making out on the dance floors. They did not see me as I stood in a dark corner. I quickly left gasping for breath, ashamed, angry and shocked to my wits. No wonder these dancers leave there sexually charged, almost to a point of no return. Now some of you readers might be wondering if I am a green horn, traditional, and old-fashioned. Say what you like, undeniably, prom night has become one of this century's greatest diabolical sexual exposition. It is only slightly and remotely removed from the ancient Roman and Greek worlds where sexual goddesses pleased the appetites of hungry male chauvinists.

TIME TO CHANGE

If you leave it up to me, there will be no more proms. Proms are ruining too many of our teenagers. Those readers who feel that we should keep the tradition, I am suggesting the following: 1) Have one parent in attendance for every twenty students at the prom. 2) Stop the dancing. Focus on wholesome entertainment. 3) Change the name to End-of-Year Gala Banquet. 4) Parents or school principals make attendance to the banquet admissible only when at least a 2.5 grade point is achieved. 5) Parents, start planning early. One student said: "If you start talking to your kid in March of their graduating year about why they should not want to go to the prom, then this is not the time for a rational discussion, this is the time for damage control." If you do not want your child to go to the prom start talking about it from Grade 7. 6) Reduce the expenses. Spend wisely. Set a low budget and stick to it. Remember, the banquet attendance, nor will the cost of the paraphernalia be added to the resumes. Radical suggestions! Think about it.

Barrington Brennen is a marriage and family therapist. Send your questions to P.O. Box N-896, Nassau, The Bahamas. Or email question@soencouragement.org or call 242323 8772, or visit the website www.soencouragement.org