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Golfer, Cook, Anchor

JUNE 2005



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merely a recognition that many do. For that matter, we don't suggest that high school students spend \$3,000 to rent a Hummer limousine for prom night, either.

A Foodie's Love Fest

I love every issue of your magazine and look forward to sitting down with each new one when I see it in my mailbox. Because dining out is such a big hobby of ours, I particularly enjoy your reviews and updates on new dining establishments in the area. And the format of your restaurant listings makes it especially easy to find new ones to try. From one foodie to another, thanks.

Colette Ebert
Harrison

Diverse Views

As one might expect in your high school rankings in your March issue, relatively small, suburban schools ranked considerably higher than poorer, larger, urban schools like those in New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, and Yonkers. Your findings are based on test scores, graduation percentages, and college attendance. This picture should be great news for all those families living in the "good" education areas of the county.

However, this picture does not tell the whole story. These scores show that schools that are better in preparing their students for exams succeed better than others. And I should note that larger, urban schools offer something smaller, elite schools do not: diversity. It is imperative that students be exposed to a variety of ethnic, religious, and national groups. If, on the other hand, all we want is high-scoring, Ivy League-bound graduates, the current state of educational affairs is fine.

Dr. Michael Taub
Bronxville

We'd Love to Hear from You

Send your comments along with your name and address to Westchester Magazine, Attention: Editorial Department, 100 Clearbrook Road, Elmsford, NY 10523. Or e-mail us at edit@westchestermagazine.com. We reserve the right to edit letters for clarity and space restrictions.

A Journey of Discovery

When we first launched this magazine four-and-a-half years ago, what we had in mind is a magazine for and about Westchester. That is, a magazine for you—you who live here, you who work here, and you who may just be on a visit here. Month after month we work to put out a magazine that tells you about the people, places, services and issues affecting our county.



At home with the Browns: Esther Davidowitz (center) with Aaron Brown and his wife, Charlotte Raynor

Of course, in our mission to serve you, we end up serving ourselves as well, discovering all that's wonderful in (or truly interesting about) the county and meeting some rather interesting and talented neighbors. (Thanks.)

Which brings me to CNN anchor and Westchester resident Aaron Brown. When I learned that he lived in Westchester, I did what most any journalist would do: I asked for an interview. Brown agreed. Much to the envy of my journalist friends, I hung out with Brown at his CNN office and watched him prepare his news show. (Yes, I also got to see the sets of Larry King, Anderson Cooper, and Paula Zahn). I also visited Brown and his lovely wife at their Colonial-style home. To find out what I learned, turn to page 60.

FREELANCE WRITER H. M. EPSTEIN WORKED FOR FOUR months on the article that begins on page 64, entitled "A Parent's Nightmare." We asked Epstein, the mother of a seventh grade son, to look at the enormous problem of underage drinking from the parents' perspective. "I learned so much by listening to the concerns of parents around the county," Epstein says, "intelligent, caring people who feel confused and frightened about how to protect their children, and now, how to protect themselves." Epstein adds that sharing her work on this article with her son has opened up a terrific dialogue on the topic.



H.M. Epstein



Kevin McMurray

SPEAKING OF DISCOVERY? DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE'S scuba diving around here? Well neither did we. Kevin McMurray, who lives in Brewster with his wife of 20 years and two teens, is a scuba diving fan who has gone underwater "all over." But, he says, he's partial to the area from the Connecticut shore to City Island "because of all the wrecks you can explore." Any memorable experiences? "I was lost inside the wreck of a tug boat that sank in 1984 for a few terror-filled minutes. Being stuck inside a steel room with no light is a hair-raising experience." I'd say. See his piece on local scuba diving on page 35.

Esther Davidowitz
Editor-in-Chief

A Parent's Nightmare

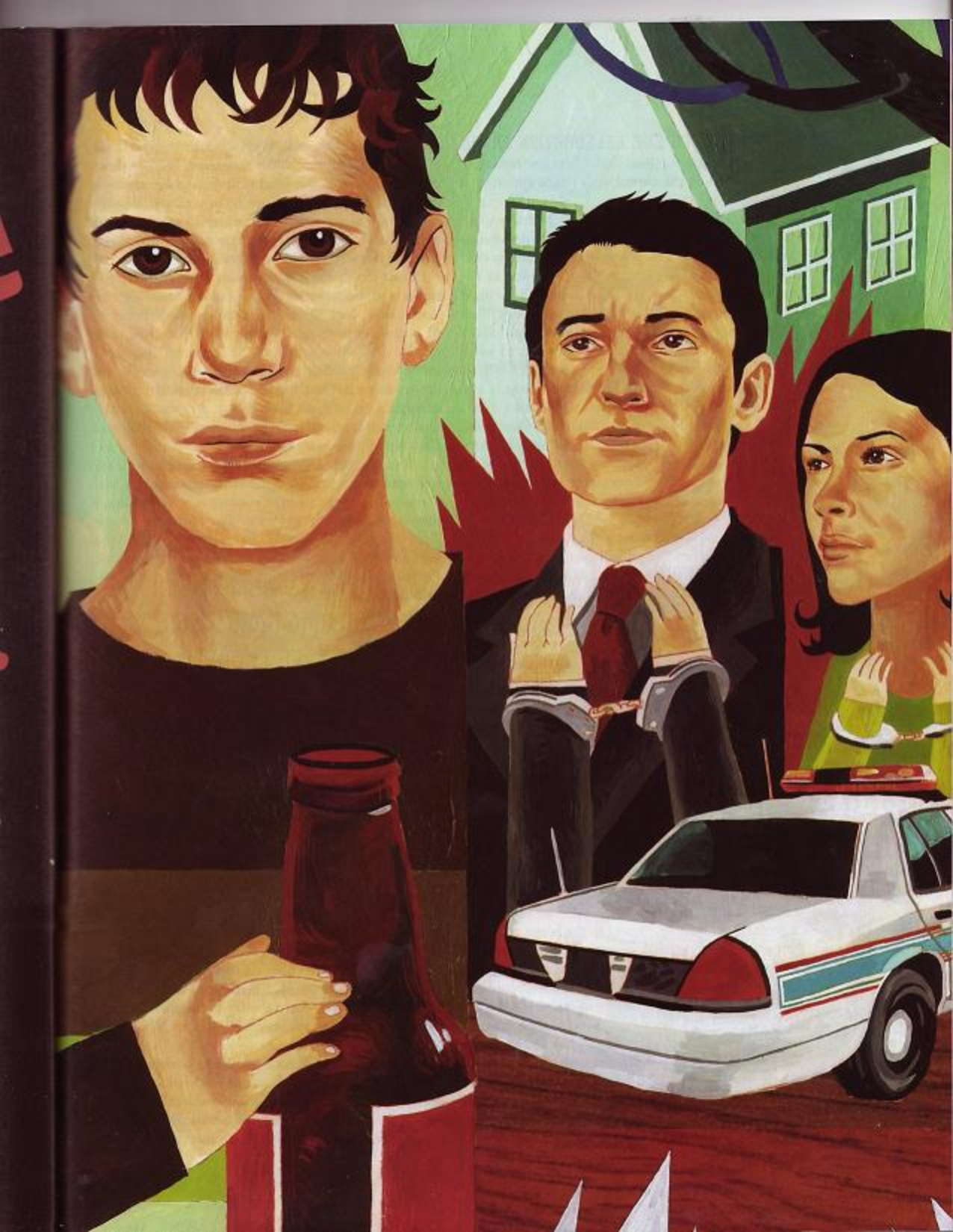
Kids → Alcohol

↓
Cops → Jail

A sedate holiday party for their teenage daughter suddenly metamorphosed into an alcohol-soaked bash in Paul and Christine Taxins' basement. Now they face consequences they never imagined

BY H.M. EPSTEIN
WITH MARK FRANKEL

Illustration by Joshua Gorchov



THE NEW YEAR'S EVE CELEBRATION ENDED

unexpectedly early for Paul and Christine Taxin and their family, when the Greenburgh Police appeared at their front door in Scarsdale.

The evening started on a bright note. Not only was it a holiday, but the next day was Paul Taxin's 49th birthday, and as customary, the couple—he a successful dentist with a 20-year practice in New Rochelle; she the manager of his office—was celebrating with a dinner attended by some of Christine's tight-knit family. Their daughter Julianne, an 18-year-old senior at Ardsley High School, was having 10 or so friends over to watch MTV's "Iced Out Ball." Tables were set up in the basement with soft drinks, bottled water, and snacks.

The first teenage guests arrived a little after 9 pm, while the adults dined upstairs. Denise Quattrucci, Christine's sister who was at the dinner with her husband, mother, aunt, and grown nephews, said that while they could hear muffled music, there were no signs of anything amiss in the basement. "There was nothing out of control," Quattrucci says.

But New Year's Eve is a big night, especially if you're young. Word of Julianne's small party had gotten out among local teens and had been quickly telegraphed around town by e-mail and cellphone and text message. Teens started arriving on their own.

By 9:30 pm, when Christine Taxin went downstairs to greet her daughter's guests, there were 15 to 20 teens there, but they were all kids she knew, according to Julianne's friends and partygoers' statements to the police. No one was drinking then.

Then things started rolling faster. "It was kind of boring, so some people started calling some juniors," David Weinberg, an 18-year-old Ardsley senior, later told police. According to at least one teen, some boys brought along six-packs of beer; bottles of rum and vodka also appeared. Most of the party crashers later told police they slipped in unobserved by the adults by using the basement door. "They were all people from school, even the college freshman home for the break," says Leslie*, a high school senior who was among the few invited guests.

Both kids and adults present in the house agree that the party picked up more velocity after 10 o'clock. "At 10:15 a huge group arrived; at 10:30 another huge group came in," says Amy*, who was also invited. "People who crashed were drunk when they came in. We got them to leave, but then they came back because they were too drunk to go home."

By 10:30 pm, the basement was jammed with at least 50 teenagers, drinking and partying like a TV-inspired house party, according to Amy. "The place got crazy," Leslie says. Around that time Christine Taxin ventured downstairs again, this time to quell the loud music,

says Amy. Christine was visibly upset by the chaos she discovered. "She came down and asked, 'Why is there alcohol?' She shut off the music and got everyone's attention," Amy reports. Christine offered to drive anyone who needed a ride—"She said, 'Please don't drive home,'" Amy remembers—but there were no takers. Then Christine returned upstairs.

About 15 minutes later, according to Quattrucci, four uniformed Greenburgh police officers stood at the Taxins' front door. The police said they were responding to a tip about underage drinking on the premises. They entered the house, quashed the basement bacchanal immediately, and told the kids to call their parents; the party was over. Then they came back upstairs. "We're going to be taking you in for serving alcohol," Quattrucci says one of the officers told Paul and Christine. Everyone was stunned.

"The next thing we knew," Quattrucci says, "Paul and Christine were being taken away. Christine was very upset, saying, 'I can't believe this is happening. I didn't give anybody anything. I'm trying to do the right thing.'" The Taxins were hauled off to the Greenburgh Police Station; there, their lawyers say, Paul was placed in a holding cell, while Christine was handcuffed to a bench.

They were released a few hours later. New Year's Eve may have been over, but the Taxins' troubles with the law were just commencing.

NEWS OF THE ARREST QUICKLY SPREAD. THE DENTIST AND his petite wife were turned into media poster children for all that suburban parents could do wrong when confronting teens and alcohol. Westchester County District Attorney Jeannine Pirro accused them of abrogating their parental responsibility. *Mom & Pop Booze Bash for Teens*, shouted a headline in the *New York Daily News*. The *Journal News* called them guilty of "drunken logic." Even Bill O'Reilly chimed in, featuring the incident on his popular cable show and delivering the judgement: "It's against the law to do what these parents did."

Let's be clear: teenage drinking, which some claim has reached "epidemic" proportions, is a problem both here and across the country. It seems as if every other week there's another story of police busting yet another teenage alcohol-fueled bash somewhere in Westchester. In late April, for example, New York State troopers arrested 36 teens, who reportedly commandeered a Cortlandt Manor house for a party while the kid's parents were away.

But lost amid all the shouting and headlines is the seemingly impossible predicament facing suburban parents trying to raise real flesh-and-blood teenagers, many of whom, let's be totally frank and realistic, do drink beer, wine, or hard liquor and often in potentially unsafe loca-

*Names marked with an asterisk have been changed at the speaker's request.

tions. How can we parents keep them safe if they do drink? How do we teach them responsible drinking, if all social drinking under 21 is banned? Many of us, after all, as teens did our own illicit imbibing.

The Taxins' arrest ups the ante further. No one is accusing them of supplying alcohol to underage youngsters. Instead, they're charged with a crime of omission—not preventing teenagers in their home from drinking alcohol the teens themselves supplied. "From our perspective, it makes no difference," says Greenburgh Chief of Police John Kapica, a man of vigorous opinions. "You can't thwart the law by using as a defense, 'Yeah, I had thirty kids drinking in my basement, and I knew about it but I didn't give them the alcohol.'"

THE TAXINS DECLINED REQUESTS TO DISCUSS THE INCIDENT. (FULL DISCLOSURE: Paul Taxin's dental practice has advertised in *Westchester Magazine* and Julianne Taxin has interned in the marketing department.) To friends and neighbors, it's impossible to imagine a professional, respectable family like the Taxins winding up on any police blotter. "They're fabulous neighbors," says Paula Froimowitz, who lives nearby, "loving, caring, great parents." Her husband, Ray, couldn't agree more: "They're nice, generous people. They wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Christine was very upset, saying, 'I can't believe this is happening. I didn't give anybody anything. I'm trying to do the right thing.'"

Like many suburbanites, the Taxins' lives are said to revolve around their home and children. Married for 13 years, the couple is known in the community. Close friend Jane Eisner of Peekskill calls Christine Taxin "the minivan queen of life. She'll drive anybody anywhere." The mother of three children from her previous marriage (two grown sons, aged 31 and 27, as well as Julianne), Christine has raised funds for Friends of Karen, a Westchester-based charity for children battling life-threatening illnesses and their families, and volunteered in the local schools. Paul, a heavyset New Rochelle native and father of 16- and 15-year-old sons from his prior marriage, has coached Little League.

The couple usually socializes among a small circle of family and friends. "I've been to a lot of their parties, and I've rarely seen hard liquor served," says Eisner. "People tease them about it because they rarely drink. Paul usually serves only wine."

There's little place for good intentions, however, in the current public debate over what to do about underage drinking. Thanks to tougher drinking laws and the public attention focused on the problem over the past two decades by groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), underage drinking has declined significantly over the past two decades, though it's been creeping back up over the last dozen years, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The NHTSA's overall conclusion: "Most youth drink; a majority drink at least monthly; a substantial minority binge drink regularly."

Indeed, according to a 2004 University of Michigan study, 12 percent of eighth graders have binged. Among high school sophomores and seniors, the rates were 22 percent and 29 percent, respectively. Kids binge because "they

(Continued on page 196)



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A Parent's Nightmare

(Continued from page 67)

want to get drunk," says Chief Kapica. "They want to get drunk as quickly as humanly possible."

Paradoxically some observers believe that stringent anti-alcohol attitudes and the higher drinking age are actually fueling teen drinking. Ruth Eng, a professor of Applied Health Sciences at Indiana University in Bloomington, links the drinking age of 21 to the country's failed experiment with Prohibition in the 1920s. She opines that "the increase in abusive drinking behavior is due to 'underground drinking' outside of adult supervision...and because of lack of knowledge of responsible drinking behaviors."

In other words, the more effective police have become in banishing minors from bars and clubs, the more kids drink where adult supervision—and its restraining influence—is entirely absent, such as golf courses, parking lots, or in the woods. "We put our kids, with all our vigilance, in a really worse situation," one Mamaroneck mother of three states.

Many parents say they fear that their over-regulated high school students won't know how to moderate their behavior once they're on their own in college. A Bedford mother, whose children range in age from seven to 22, believes Westchester teens "never really learn what it means to be a responsible drinker, because the parents are constantly saying, 'No, no, no, no. It's illegal. You can't do that.'"

For that and other reasons, Professor Eng advocates lowering the drinking age to 18 once again. She is not the only one. Many baby boomer parents, who came of age when the drinking age was lower, believe it makes no sense for 18-year-olds to be legally treated like adults, but deemed too immature to order a beer. Says a Chappaqua mom whose eldest son has already graduated from college: "I stand on the side that if you're old enough to go to war and vote, you're old enough to drink responsibly." Citing similar arguments, a bill was recently introduced in Vermont to permit 18-year-olds to drink legally.

That measure, however, is not catching on. If anything, the national mood is

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swinging toward tougher drinking laws. Over the past two decades, all 50 states have raised their drinking age to 21 under federal pressure. And at least 19 states—New York is not among them—have gone further and made it a criminal offense for adults to knowingly permit minors to drink alcohol in areas under their supervision, regardless of whether or not they provided the alcohol. Ohio Parents for Drug Free Youth has created an adult awareness program called "Parents Who Host Lose the Most," to publicize the legal and financial ramifications of hosting teen parties where liquor is present. The program is now being rolled out in other states.

New York law, on the other hand, is straightforward. Anyone under the age of 21 may not purchase or consume alcohol; furthermore no one is permitted to serve or sell them alcohol. There are three exceptions: minors may be served alcoholic beverages as part of a religious ceremony; for educational purposes, such as tasting their concoctions at bartending school; and in their own home with their own parents. But they may not become intoxicated under any circumstance. If they do, it becomes a case of child abuse.

PAUL AND CHRISTINE TAXIN WERE arraigned in Greenburgh on January 4 and charged with "unlawfully dealing with a child in the first degree," a misdemeanor usually reserved for use against miscreants that exploit children. The law prohibits individuals from giving or selling—or causing to give or sell—alcoholic beverages to anyone underage. A month later, they returned to court to find themselves facing an additional charge, added by the D.A.'s office, of violating a section of the state's Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) laws, originally written to govern distillers, wholesalers, retailers, bars, and restaurants. The couple pled innocent to both counts; each violation carries a maximum jail term of one year. (If convicted, Paul Taxin could also have his license to practice dentistry revoked.) A tape of the Taxins looking forlorn and overwhelmed as they left the >>

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A Parent's Nightmare

(Continued from page 197)

Greenburgh courthouse was shown again and again on local News 12 Westchester.

The Taxins' attorneys declined to discuss the details of the case. But in their court filings, they argue that police and prosecutors stretched the law to cover a variety of inconvenient facts. In none of the accompanying depositions taken from teenage partygoers did any of the underage drinkers say that they had received any alcohol from the owners of the house (the filings make the further point that, in 10 of the 11 depositions, Paul Taxin was not even mentioned). Chief Kapica admits there is no evidence that either of the parents served or purchased any of the alcoholic beverages found in the basement.

According to the police, the Taxins walked into trouble the moment Christine walked downstairs and offered rides home. By doing so, the police argue, she tacitly admitted that she was aware that illegal drinking was occurring in her home. Greenburgh police contend she should have called the police immediately or, at the very least, called all the kids' parents to come take them home—and then she should have guarded all the doors so no one could leave or enter until all the parents arrived.

OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, LOCAL LAW enforcement officials have embraced a tough, no-holds-barred attitude in their fight against teen drinking. That wasn't always the rule. In a 2002 case that earned national headlines, parents of a Horace Greeley High School football player were arrested for hosting a team party lubricated by free-flowing beer and a stripper performing in their Chappaqua backyard. The couple pled guilty to endangering the welfare of children and received a year's probation and 100 hours of community service.

In Greenburgh, police attitudes apparently stiffened in response to the boasts of some high school students. The January 2002 publication of a special section of *The Edgemont Campus*, the student newsletter for the Edgemont Junior and Senior High Schools, entitled "Drinking at EHS," seemed to thumb its nose at the law. When Police Chief

Kapica read what he characterized as "the little section about the Greenburgh police force, and how fun it was on a Saturday night to run away from the cops, and even if they catch you, they don't do anything anyway," he decided it was time to revamp their "policy of counseling these youngsters rather than taking law enforcement action."

"The schools are doing their job, we're doing our job. Where's the weak link here?" says Kapica. "The weak link is in parenting."

Simultaneously, Dobbs Ferry Police Chief George Longworth along with Captain Joseph Delio, head of Greenburgh's detective division, decided local police should band together to combat substance abuse, launching the Greenburgh Drug & Alcohol Task Force. Joining together the Town of Greenburgh Police plus the police forces of seven villages (Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Elmsford, Hastings-on-Hudson, Irvington, Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow), the eight entities erased the lines of jurisdiction for drug and alcohol issues. Preventing underage drinking has been a priority. Between November 2002 and March of this year, the Task Force made 297 alcohol-related arrests (it also is credited with 425 drug-related arrests). Most—some 200—of the alcohol arrests were of teens 16- to 20-years-old.

Kapica believes he has residents' support but admits: "There are some people who feel we are going too far." Yet he also considers the media attention paid to the charges against the Taxins "worth a million dollars of publicity." He says, "If it persuades three or four parents not to have these parties—and stops one kid from getting hurt—then it's worth it."

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO? ON THE SPECTRUM of parenting choices, there are two opposing points of view, with most of us careening in the muddy middle. On one side are parents who, afraid their children will drive drunk or ride in the cars of other inebriated teens, have given up on deterrence and opted for the safety net of permitting drinking in their home. On the other extreme >>

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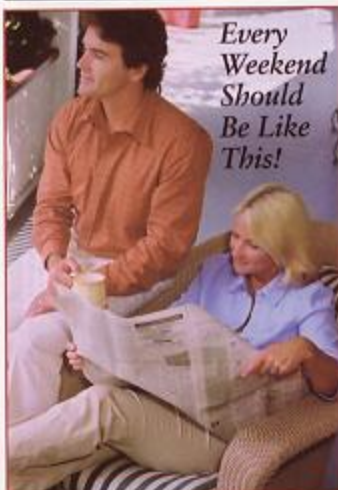
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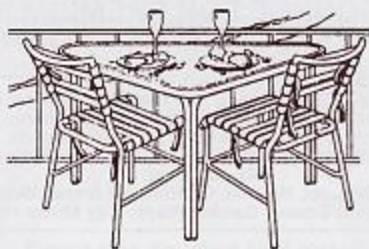
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A Parent's Nightmare

(Continued from page 199)

are parents who believe their children are the statistical exception.

Many intelligent, well-educated parents swear up and down their high school student never had a drink. They may be right: 20 percent of students graduate from high school without having experimented with drugs or alcohol. However, here's a scary statistic from the MADD website: "Forty-four percent of all the youth who have had drinks in the past year were described by their parents as nondrinkers."

**"The schools are
doing their job.**

**We're doing our job.
What's the weak link
here? The weak link
is parenting."**

Sheila*, a mother of three from Northern Westchester active in her PTA, says she possessed no illusions about how prevalent underage drinking is in her community. Yet she was still rendered thunderstruck when her 13-year-old daughter was caught drinking at her church Catechism-class graduation party. The hostess had noticed a group of kids sitting around a table and sharing a water bottle, which was strange because there was a table filled with water bottles. When she investigated, Sheila's daughter was the one left holding a water bottle filled with vodka. "I'm not one of those people who thinks my kid won't drink," Sheila says. "I think my kid will drink, but I didn't think she'd start in eighth grade."

Her daughter was grounded for a month and is still paying a price. "We don't trust her, and we tell her to her face we don't trust her," Sheila says. "We watch her like a hawk."

On the other side are those parents who try to *manage* their children's drinking by permitting them and their friends to have alcohol inside their

home. Although they may be breaking the law, for the most part they are neither cavalier nor advocating risky teenage behavior. They are parents trying to protect their children from what they see as the undeniable drawbacks of secretive drinking. They believe they will have more control over potentially difficult situations if they allow kids to drink in an environment they can supervise.

Take Caroline*, a Northern Westchester mother of four children 11 to 18. "I have no problem taking all their car keys and having these older kids, 17, 18, and above, drink inside my home." When her older teen turned 18, she and her husband held his birthday party in her basement where they served alcohol, mainly beer. "It didn't get terribly out of control," she says, "because I knew every kid who came."

"The bottom line is you want to protect your kid," Caroline declares. "That's it." But she admits that having allowed beer at her son's birthday was nerve-racking. "Some of the kids promised me they wouldn't drive home, but they did. What do you do? Call the parents and say, 'Your son is driving drunk?' You're stuck. But that's the risk you take."

Most parents seem to fall in the middle of the spectrum, between idealism and pragmatism. They tell their kids that drinking is illegal, unhealthy, and there are serious consequences if caught. However, they are realistic enough to understand the odds are high their children will drink and they try to develop mechanisms for protecting them as much as possible.

THE TAXIN'S LEGAL ORDEAL SHOWS NO evidence of ending soon. During a brief court hearing in early May, Greenburgh Judge Doris T. Friedman dismissed the second charge against them of having violated the ABC laws. After the hearing, Christine Taxin read a brief statement: "We intend to fight the remaining charge and let the people of Westchester, not the district attorney, determine whether our conduct as parents was criminal." A hearing has been set for August 2 on a >>

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A Parent's Nightmare

(Continued from page 201)

defense motion to throw out police evidence in the case.

While local media have spotlighted every twist and turn of the Taxin case this spring, the busts of two other teen drinking parties by Greenburgh police in March attracted comparatively little notice. In one case, police who broke up a party in a Greenburgh home reportedly found the mother asleep, oblivious to

**"Some of the kids
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wouldn't drive home,
but they did. What do
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the revelry. Days later, cops breaking up an underage Dobbs Ferry party reportedly discovered the mother home watching TV; she, too, claimed to have no idea what was going on underneath her own roof. Neither woman was charged.

The resolution of the People of the State of New York vs. Paul and Christine Taxin will answer the legal question of their culpability. But the publicity surrounding the case has already produced one unintended effect: some teens who drink now may believe they must legally shield their parents. Recently, as a Westchester dinner party was winding down, one couple called their daughter to say they were heading home. She cautioned them to delay. "I need to protect you guys," she told her parents. "I'll call you when I've gotten this place cleared." Sheepishly, the couple told their hosts they couldn't leave.

It wasn't safe for them to go home yet. **W**

Frequent contributor H.M. Epstein hopes she never finds her basement filled with inebriated teens.