



CRASHING THE PARTY

(A Semi-Apology to Child #3)

BY MONICA PITRELLI

Recently, I did a little math. Three kids. One birthday party a year until, say, age 10. That's 30 birthday parties in 13 years. That's 30 themes to choose, 30 cakes to order, 30 invitations to design, and – if they each have 10 guests – 300 kids to host.

Flashback: It's late summer, and my mom's wearing that terrible blue terrycloth jumper (like the one I wear myself these days). She's calling the kids in my cul-de-sac in coastal Virginia to join us in our backyard.

This was a time when Halloween costumes were bought at the grocery store (the plastic kind that only covered your front – remember those?). Mobile phones didn't dominate our worlds, and traffic meant Dad would be home at 5.20pm rather than 5pm. But birthdays were just as special as they are today.

Hearing my mom, the kids came running. We would gather around our picnic table, sing "Happy Birthday" over homemade cake, and eat Skittles by the fistful from an oversized Tupperware bowl. It didn't get much better than that.

Fast forward to today. I have a few questions. Like when did I start planning my kids' birthday parties a month in advance – must get that WhatsApp save-the-date out in time! – while other birthdays (husbands', my own) get a 36-hour "guess we should do something" shrug? And when did kid party venues start pricing in the quadruple digits? And these goodie bags – can we just stop with this? Someone, please, start the trend.

I was only a third of the way through my part-time gig as a professional party planner when it happened. I broke on Party Number 10.

It was my third child's second birthday. When my first child turned two, I was flushed with time and Pinterest inspiration when I suggested something along the lines of "Enchanted Forest" as the theme. She wasn't impressed. She wanted Elmo. "Elllmooo!!!" Then my second child followed suit, and it was Elmo Part 2.

The third child was not consulted. Not really a fan, she was getting an Elmo party no matter what. I had Sesame Street streamers in the closet after all.

But that's not all she got. She got mismatched plates and cups (a little Tinkerbell here, a little Hawaiian luau there). She got a used, life-size Mylar balloon of Big Bird (not filled with helium mind you, but we did tape it to the wall). Printed Etsy invitations for her baby book? Sorry, third child. Little bespoke goody bag tags thanking guests for attending the party? Not this time. Surely, she got a professionally made custom birthday cake? We baked our own for about \$20.

We've had face painters before, and we've rented out gyms and bowling alleys. This event's entertainment – kicking around balloons in the living room followed by swinging at the condo playground – was as big a hit as any. Then we noshed on pizza and grilled vegetables by the barbecue pits. It was the happiest party I've ever thrown.

Did my girl mind? Of course not. Did her friends? Not at all. How about the many helpers in attendance? I sensed mild disappointment in my own. For the last party, she was charged with placing pink polka-dot princess straws in faux 1950s-era milk jars after all.

My neighbour recently invited us to her son's birthday party. She gently asked if I would put a nominal amount of money (\$5 or less) into an envelope as a gift, so that her son, per family custom, could choose one gift at the toy store with the proceeds.

How lovely.

Party Number 11 is still six months away. Maybe I'll get a second wind. Or maybe, friends, I'll see you at the barbecue pits. *æ*

TELL US A TALE
& Win \$200

Here's your chance to get published – and make some money at the same time. We're looking for 500-word written contributions on any funny, poignant, practical or even controversial topic that touches on expat life in Singapore. Simply email your stories in a Word document to contribute@expatliving.sg and we'll consider them for inclusion in an upcoming issue.