

Pajama games

Remember those all-night giggle and gab sessions? Here's the PJ party updated from A to zzzz's.

BY KRIS FRIESWICK



The slumberettes (clockwise from bottom left): Kris, Stephanie, Esther, Gail, and Andrea.

PROLOGUE:

Pajama parties were as much a part of my early teenage years as acne, geometry, and my crush on Steven Lavoie. I was the one in the flowered, flannel Lanz nightgown sprawled across the Oriental rug in my parents' family room with my best friends, playing truth or dare, speculating about the virginity (or lack thereof) of various classmates, telling dirty jokes, and divulging our deepest, darkest secrets—all washed down with Coke and a pizza chaser.

Now, let me not whitewash the past. There was always the morning-after worry that maybe I'd revealed too much about myself, to say nothing of the Sunday coma that was guaranteed after a sleepless Saturday night. But it all seemed worth it for a chance to explore—uninterrupted, we hoped—the mysteries of womanhood, everything from how to apply eyeliner, to how to French-kiss (eyes open? eyes closed?), to how, for God's sake, are you supposed to get a tampon in, and are you *sure* it will

CAST

- **Kris Frieswick, 36**
Author and instigator; single
- **Stephanie Rotstein, 35**
Pediatric physical therapist and sister of author; married with a 2-year-old daughter
- **Esther Shein Wishnow, 38**
Freelance writer who works at home; married with two children, 4 years and 9 months
- **Gail Mercier, 37**
Founder of insurance claims adjusting company and best friend of author; married with a 2-year-old son
- **Andrea Baker, 33**
Internet consultant; single

PROPS

- Cameras
- CDs (highly recommended: Aretha Franklin, Fiona Apple, the Pretenders)
- Nail polish and pedicure kits
- Chinese food take-out menu
- Soda, beer, wine, chips, and dip
- Trashy videos
- *True Confessions* magazines
- Ouija board
- Book of sex tips
- Sleeping bags

SETTING: For old times' sake, family room of the author's childhood home

Author's note: My father has been banished for the night so he will not reprise his role as human clock ("Girls, it's 1 a.m., don't you think it's time to call it a night?" "Girls, it's 2 a.m., go to sleep!" "It's 3 a.m., *enough already!*"). Some experiences should not be repeated. If you'd seen my father in his pajamas, you would agree.

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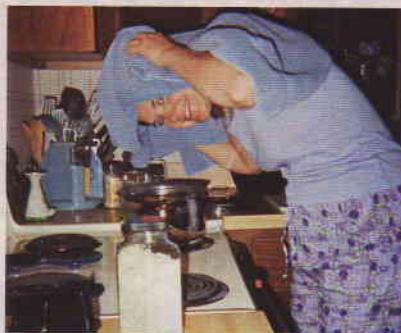
come out again? But more than that, it was a Y chromosome no-fly zone. We were away from boys (though of course all we did was talk about them). We were away from siblings and parents. It was a chance to reassure—and be reassured—that we weren't alone in our muddled, confused feelings, that, plain and simple, we weren't alone.

That's a feeling worth recapturing, and a slumber party with my closest friends seemed just the way to do it. If nothing else, it would net me a pedicure and give my married-with-children friends an excuse to get out of the house.

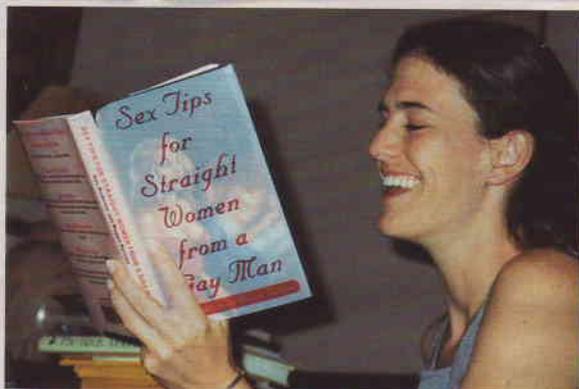
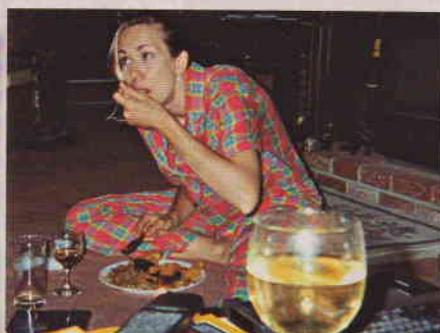
ACT I: 6:00 P.M.

The phone rings. It's Esther, whose daughter is displaying truly impressive lung power in the background. "I'm having a little trouble getting out of the house. I'll be there at around 7:00, okay?" Disaster averted: Cancellation at a slumber party is like getting a pimple on prom night.

When my friends, hereafter referred to as the slumberettes, finally arrive and have settled themselves on the sun porch, beer or wine in hand (a definite advan-



The sharing of intimacies was punctuated with facials (Esther, top left), Chinese take-out (Stephanie, top right), and laughter (Andrea, right).



was. "Once you go thong you never go back."

"Well," hedged Stephanie, squirming a bit. "It *does* take some getting used to. But check it out—no panty line."

Ah, let the sharing of intimate information begin. I must confess that I had pretty great expectations. When, during the slumber parties of my youth, we discussed the male member, it was all pretty theoretical. Now, of course, we had con-

"No, Mommy can't come home right now 'cause Mommy is on a play date. Love you too. Put Daddy on. No, the jar of green beans is for Sydney's dinner," she said as though explaining things to a not very bright 4-year-old. "The oatmeal is for her breakfast.

"No, there's no man here. That's Elvis Costello."

If not for the fact that we had better jewelry, better attitudes, and much, much better skin, it could have been 20 years ago.

tage of adult pj parties), and a CD is playing on the stereo, I breathe a contented sigh of relief.

My recollection of teen slumber parties was that they had a very particular pace. The chatter would start out tame—definitely G-rated—and would get deeper and decidedly more intimate as the hour got later, as the lights and our defenses were lowered.

No decent waiting period for us this time around. We cut right to the chase. At least my sister Stephanie did. "I have an announcement to make," she said standing up and proudly addressing the crowd. Long pause. "Ladies, I am wearing a thong."

An explosion of applause.

"Oh, my God," said Gail. "I hear they're wicked uncomfortable."

I piped up that I'd been wearing a thong long before Monica Lewinsky

siderable—you should pardon the expression—firsthand experience.

For the first time that night (and not for the last) I would be disappointed. The talk veered quickly to what I like to call aural contraception: tales of childbirth and sleep deprivation.

"Natalie was jaundiced when she was born and then she was colicky for the first three months and she's up at dawn every day," said Stephanie.

"I was in labor for three days," moaned Gail. "I had all these internal monitors sticking out of me. I was right in the middle of pushing the baby's head out and the doctor disappeared. The nurse said he had a tee time. And then..."

Fortunately, a cell phone went off just at that moment, and three women tackled their purses with a speed and force that would have made them top picks at an NFL draft. "Hi, Sam, honey," said Esther.

ACT II: 9:00 P.M.

It all looked so familiar—we hunched over our feet applying toenail polish, eating too many potato chips, and talking, talking, talking. If not for the fact that we had better jewelry, better attitudes, and much, much better skin, it could have been 20 years ago.

Ah, but 20 years ago, we were barely pecking our way out of the shell. We were always thinking in terms of the future—what we'd be, what we'd do, how great it would be. Well, okay, here we are and we're still struggling, if at a much higher level. Now, it's with our children instead of (or in addition to) our parents, with bosses instead of teachers, with promotions rather than S.A.T. scores, with husbands instead of boyfriends.

On the other hand, some of us are still dealing with the boyfriend stuff. In fact, just the night before the party, I had broken up with my most recent beau, news I was reluctant to break to my sister because the guy had been so sweet with her daughter.

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"What was wrong with this one?" demanded Steph. "God, you're so picky."

What was wrong? Well, I countered, how would *she* feel about a man who described his job (as an hourly temp employee designing PowerPoint presentations



pajamas. Andrea wore a sexy white satin deal, and I had on a purple tank top with matching bottoms. The married women, meanwhile, stuck to T-shirts and sweat-pants. Maybe it was a bait-and-switch kind of thing.

Here was my plan: get up close and personal with Moo Shu chicken and play some of the games I'd brought, among



We still partied, but the moms really wanted to slumber.



them Pin the Male Member on the Male, so we could ramp right up to the silly, immature portion of the program.

Here was my friends' plan: watch *The Way We Were*.

Ever the gracious host,

at a bank) with terms like "top dog" and "comanager" of a design department?

"What a loser! Good call on the break-up," amended Stephanie. "I should have had more respect for your judgment."

One of the slumberettes, knowing a musical cue when she heard one, turned up the CD player as Aretha Franklin's anthem came on. "R-E-S-P-E-C-T!" we chimed in, jumping to our feet and singing at the top of our lungs. For two and a half minutes, we were all fabulous, full-chested, full-throated women. Yeah, respect was the very least we deserved.

"Hey, I'm top dog at getting more beer," said Andrea when the song ended.

"Anyone want some?"

"Will you need me to comanage that?" asked Esther.

ACT III: 10:30. P.M.

We ordered Chinese food and changed into our pajamas. I say with pardonable pride that the single women had the best

I figured we'd be up until the crack of dawn anyway and there'd be plenty of time for games. Plus, the movie title fit so perfectly with the evening's theme.

So for two hours, we watched Barbra Streisand chase Robert Redford through college, through the postwar '40s, sacri-

fice her commie ideals to follow him to Hollywood, put up with his infidelities and bad screenplays, and then get dumped right after she gave birth to their daughter.

"Dear God," said Stephanie. "What a loser."

"Him or her?" asked Andrea.

"Her. That's what happens when you chase and beg. They take you for granted."

I saw this line of thinking as progress. Twenty years earlier, the movie would have spun us into Redford-hating fury.

We would have worshipped Barbra as a heroine, an unsung paragon of virtue and strong ideals. Now, our main reaction was bafflement at the implausible pairing of these two in the first place.

And what about us? What about the way *we* were now? Stronger? More confident? Better able to roll with the punches? I turned to ask Gail's opinion. She was fast asleep under the coffee table.

"Yeah, I'm pretty tired too," said my sister. "I'm going upstairs to sleep in one of the beds. If I sleep on the floor, my back will go out."

"We have to sleep on the *floor*?" asked Esther, as if I'd just suggested staging a panty raid.

"Yes, of course, we have to sleep on the floor," I whined. "That's what you're *supposed* to do at a slumber party. Stay up all night, read the sex quizzes in magazines, read tarot cards and horoscopes."

But Esther was already asleep, as were Andrea and Steph. When had it happened, I wanted to know, that the emphasis in slumber party changed from party to slumber?

It was barely midnight. I sat there looking over at the lumps that were my friends and in the spirit of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," hunkered down in my sleeping bag. The party hadn't turned out at all as I'd planned—but it had turned out exactly right. If the slumber parties of my youth made it clear how far we had to go, this one told us how far we'd come. "When you're younger, it's like you're trying to figure out your identity," said Stephanie a few days later. "You all play with roles. Now, it's more about accepting who you are and who everyone else is."

The single women had the sexiest pj's. The married women stuck to T-shirts and sweat-pants. Maybe it was a bait-and-switch thing.

Gail put it best. "When we were little," she said, "slumber parties were all about the drama. It was all gasp! 'He said *that*?' or 'She did *what*?' We were insecure. Now, we're battle-scarred. We don't care what people think."

What I think is that we're going to do this again very soon, my friends and I. Stephanie is going to bring the catalog from Frederick's of Hollywood, Gail has promised to score some risqué fortune cookies. I'll bring the No-Doz. □