

Why We Went to Parents Night

Mrs. Crittendon made us an offer we couldn't refuse.

Ned S. Hubbell

Did you ever get a telephone call from one of your children's teachers — a call that did not spell trouble? We did at our house and we'll never forget it. It was five years ago, when our son Gary was a high school senior. And it came at the best time of the day to catch us at home — smack in the middle of dinner.

When the phone rang, Gary bolted from the table to answer it, hoping it was you-know-who. But when he heard the voice at the other end, the color drained from his face. He muddled a "yeah," put his hand over the mouthpiece, and beckoned to me, "It's for you."

"Tell them I'm eating. I'll call back later," I said.

"You don't tell her that. It's Mrs. Crittendon," whispered our panicky senior.

"I don't know any Crittendon," I said.

"I do," he croaked, "it's my homeroom teacher!"

"What'd you do?" I demanded, swallowing the last of my mashed potatoes and heading for the phone.

"I didn't do anything," said Gary.

I unpeeled his fingers from the receiver and tried to smile.

"Hello?" I said gamely.

I didn't know that Mrs. Crittendon was one of 162 people making the same type of call to all parents of students enrolled in Northern High School. I didn't know Mrs. Crittendon, let alone the fact that she was following an outline devised by a faculty committee.

"Are you at the dinner table?" she asked.

"Oh no," I lied, "we just finished." We were finished; the whole family was riveted on that telephone.

"What are you and your (wife/husband — pick the appropriate one) doing next Thursday night (do not tell them why)?" she read from her outline.

"Nothing," I said, "Why?"

"Can you spare one hour (do not tell them why)?" she continued.

"An hour... why... I guess so. What for?"

"Next Thursday night, at 7:30, we're having our Open House at Northern High," she explained.

Then she ad-libbed: "You know, your son Gary just starts my day. He's really great to have around. And I'd love to meet his folks."

Then she gave the punch line: "Will you come?"

What could I say? We went.

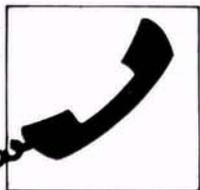
And we met her and a lot of other teachers who, before that, were just last names on a computerized report card.

We really enjoyed the entire event and were part of the largest turnout of parents ever to attend the school's annual Open House. That mass telephone campaign really paid off.

Come to think of it, if my wife and I want someone to come to our house, we don't send them a dittoed invitation. Or put a notice in the newspaper. We call them up and invite them.

I'm sure glad they called us that night. It left us with a good feeling about the school.

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