

Back to the future as US adults relive school days with proms

Will Pavia New York
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In the town of Decatur, near Atlanta, Kristin Leydig Bryant and her friends are preparing for the prom. There will be punch, a DJ, a ball room with garlands of crepe paper decorations and a photographer on hand to record this significant moment in their lives, as they stand with their dates on a white bridge strung with balloons.

Her only anxiety is that she does not yet have someone to take her. "My husband won't take me," she said. "He hates that kind of thing."

Mrs Bryant, 43, is a business consultant and the night for which she is preparing, in a state of excitement, is an "adult prom", a new phenomenon in the social life of the nation.

This spring, while teenagers prepare for high school proms, adult versions are being held in cities across America allowing men and women to relive the seminal event from their school days.

"Prom the way you always wanted," said an advertisement in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Another in Fort Wayne, Indiana, promised that everyone would have a genuine chance to be Prom King or Queen. "Missed your chance in high school?" the organisers asked, tapping into some no doubt bitter memories. This time around those honours would be decided by a raffle.

"A lot of the appeal is maybe somebody didn't have a good time the first time around," said Jasen Von Guinness, 33, an estate agent who organised an adult prom in Albany last year. "Maybe they weren't so outgoing then, maybe they feel they didn't do it right."

His school prom had gone swimmingly. He and his friends had hired a limo, Alison Vanbell, his high school girlfriend, had agreed to go with him. "It was a great experience that allowed underaged kids to drink for the first time," he said. The second time around. "I had just gotten together with my girlfriend so bizarrely I was almost more nervous." The benefit of a rerun was that "people are a lot more mature" he said. "There is no posturing."

Reports from some adult proms suggest that the events successfully recreated many of the original elements: awkward dancing, women wondering what had happened to their dates and lavish expenditure on gowns and spray tans. Some couples still had to be home by midnight, though this time around it was to relieve the babysitter.

A married couple who went to their high school prom together all those years ago will be at the Decatur adult prom, to be held on Friday. Some women were daring to wonder whether they could fit into the same dress. “One lady said that she was going to sew her two prom dresses together and see if she could fit into that,” Mrs Bryant said.

She regards it as a chance “to do fun high school things with people you are actually friends with. Your high school prom was not necessarily that pleasant.”

Hers, at Greenville High School in Tennessee, was marred by the sight of her date being taken away in a police car. “He had been overindulging,” she said. “I had to find my own ride home. Then on Monday morning I was informed that I was being kicked out of the National Honor Society because I had admitted to drinking a wine cooler.”

Only one? “One was all I admitted to drinking,” she said.

This time around she hopes to be Queen. “The person with the finest horror story from their original prom gets the crown,” she said. “I think I’ve got a pretty good chance.”

Forever young

- Proms — short for promenade — have origins in 18th-century English debutante balls of the social season
- By the 19th century the balls became popular at East Coast universities, before their introduction in the 20th century to high schools where they signified a passing into adulthood
- In the past ten years the prom has become popular in Britain, marked by a growth in limousine rentals