

## Party at the Palace: Part One

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*Originally published by Kamloops This week*

Sometimes I feel like a terrible mother, but I dread birthday parties—and I don't mean my own. I have no problem with a day devoted to me. It's those cake and candy consuming, crazy kids' parties I'm afraid of.

My daughter deserves to remain deluded, thinking her mother looks forward to the coming weekend, when a gang of girls will invade our home.

But the truth is, while I love kids, I don't love the stress of party planning, not to mention the reality that my children are getting older, which can only mean I am too.

Not only is my baby turning 9 but I am about to host what my daughter has dubbed "the Linden Luau", which is another way of saying a tropical-theme party, complete with bikini-clad babes (her friends), Hawaiian pizza, frothy fruit drinks accessorized with little umbrellas, and best of all, a stay-up-all night sleepover.

Maybe I'm just feeling the pressure of trying to keep up the party pace set in Abu Dhabi. During our first year in the Middle East, we attended a party at the palace, where a little Sheikh hosted a shake down never to be duplicated by a mere mortal mother like myself.

Part One of our story begins with a Hallmark invitation. On the outside it looked innocent enough. A sparkly, smiling sun announced a child's birthday party. It was when I read the inside, announcing the party was at Al Bahar Palace, that I got excited.

I knew, of course, that Sheikh Zayed Junior, grandson of the country's leader, was in my son's kindergarten class. I'd seen his nametag at his table: Sheikh Zayed bin Mohammed.

But I certainly didn't expect an



Photo by Paul Linden

invitation to his party! What do you give a Sheikh?

I asked two young National women who worked at the front desk of the school if I should bring a gift for the family or something...maybe my Mexican Bean Dip?

They smiled sympathetically at my naivety and said that even if I brought something the hosts would never know it. So it was decided I'd bring nothing.

And nothing it was. Including the invitation.

The entire family was dressed to the nines when we arrived at the palace gates, which were carved of wrought iron and gallantly guarded by army-fatigued men positioned in two hummers, situated like bookends on both sides of the elaborate entrance.

We smiled nicely at one rather unfriendly chap who with his massive machine gun slung over his shoulder, came to check out our vehicle before demanding the invitation that might prove we were invited.

We said we didn't have it. He said see you later.

It took a while to weave our way out, head home, then return again, making our way through the rows of police cars guarding the street. When we arrived back at the gates, we were prepared, invitation and a beautiful bouquet of flowers in hand.

This time the guard waved us in—or at least some of us. The gates swung open for the children and I but poor Paul was not so pleasantly rejected. No men allowed.

My husband would have to watch as a driver picked up his family, touring them through the grounds before dropping them off at the party villa. The guard informed him, waving his gun my way, that the woman—his wife—would call him when it was time to go home.

Paul smiled. Because there is nothing else to do when a man with a machine gun smiles at you. He was disappointed he couldn't go in. He was hungry. He was wearing a tie for nothing.

He kissed us good-bye, leaving instructions to call his cell if they tried to take us hostage.

And there I leave you for this week, as my husband left us at the palace gates, for that day.

Stay tuned for the conclusion of "Party at the Palace", where cakes the size of kitchen tables, clowns who entertain guests, and feasts fit for a king—I mean Sheikh—are all in a day's birthday party.