



Browned

off

Kevin Harcombe discovers that both pride, and Maltesers, come before the fall...

As I tear it open, the giant bag splits and suddenly it's raining Maltesers inside my car. Scooping up a handful from the footwell into my mouth I pull away, slobbering and, every so often, feeling round my seat for a stray chocolate to pop into my mouth. I am en route (which is French for 'late') to a staff 'do'. I don't often go to these occasions because I like staff to be able to relax and let their hair down (i.e. get roaring drunk) without worrying about having the boss glaring at them or, worse, joining in. The occasion of the gathering is the wedding of my secretary - or PA as I call her when I'm feeling the need to fail to impress someone with my own importance. Teachers, dinner ladies, cleaners and parents are all in attendance to celebrate.

Etiquette on these occasions can be tricky. Should I dance with the many party-goers urging me to demonstrate my snake-hipped liteness on the dance floor, or be offended that no one actually asks me? How far should I 'work the room' and risk being ambushed by grumpy, non-teaching other halves, press-ganged into attending, and taking it out on me by whingeing on about how I don't pay their partners nearly enough? And how far should I respond by referring to their partner as a work-shy incompetent who is lucky to have a badly paid job?

As you can tell, I'm a natural party animal and these are joyous events for me, but everyone else

seems to be having a good time simply chatting or complaining about the fact there doesn't appear to be any food, or dancing to a ship's fog horn being blown repeatedly over a backbeat of rapid cannon fire. Do I sound middle aged and staid? Good.

Clutching my pint of lemonade (meet your designated driver for the evening) and mingling so the guests don't think I am the misanthropic, socially dysfunctional type, I happen across a group of parents in the darkening garden. Their children are excited to see me as they charge round shining torches at each other. One of the reasons I love my school is that the area is socially diverse and the parents friendly and imbued with tremendous common sense. So for quite a few minutes I listen as they tell me how the children adore me and how I'm a wonderful person and superb headteacher and can't I go and run such and such secondary where their child has gone on to? This is undoubtedly gratifying and I respond with appropriate and genuine self-deprecation, just fleetingly thinking this is what it must be like to be Prince Philip on one of those South Pacific islands where they decided to worship him as a god.

Just as one mum is telling me how the children are "in awe of" me, Morgan (Y3) shouts out, "Mr Harcombe's got brown stuff on his bottom!" Children's torches illuminate my rear like searchlights picking out a fleeing criminal. Other parents and children and, I'm pretty sure, a passing barman, crouch down and peer closely and intently at the seat of my pants. The uncomfortable ensuing silence is broken when a mum, with furrowed brow, suggests, "Chocolate?" A dad shakes his head, uncomfortably close to my behind and declares, with all the elation of Archimedes in his eureka moment, "Maltesers!" It wouldn't happen to Prince Philip.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Harcombe is a Teaching Award winner and headteacher at Redlands Primary School, Fareham. To read more articles by Kevin, visit the Teach Primary website teachprimary.com

