

Nick and Choose { NICK ALTSCHULLER }

BINGE BENEFITS

How to party your way to enlightenment



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MY FIRST WAVE OF bachelor parties arrived in my mid-20s. Back then I was impulsive, unattached and able to kick a hangover with a breath of fresh air and a greasy breakfast. Wet behind the ears and still imbued with collegiate curiosity, I gathered life lessons from the haze. For example: Five beers fit inside a Frisbee, never use a blow-up doll as a pillow and if you give a stripper permission to whip you with a belt, you'll both walk away scarred.

A second wave of bachelor parties arrived in my early 30s—three in a row this month, in fact. Years ago, I would've met this with breathless anticipation, but now the prospect gave me night sweats. The first one was a Florida bender attended by my rowdiest pals. After considering my obligations to my career, my finances, my loved ones and my health, I decided to skip it. I realized I'd made the adult decision when a friend came back with a broken elbow—it hung purple and distended like a waterlogged eggplant. As the two of us drove up to Montreal for party number two, I was already thinking of how to best dodge a hangover for the return trip. Maturity, it seemed, had finally, sadly arrived. But then we spent half the drive crafting dirty texts for our iPhones to read aloud, so I didn't worry too much.

I like to believe that I remain open to life's teachings even in its debauched moments. During our Montreal excursion, we smoked cigars and discussed Apple's IPO. We debated the situation in Syria. And, while socializing in the hotel before a classy steak dinner, we spent an hour and a half talking about poop. One guy later said it was the most fun he had all weekend. Another agreed. The lesson: While you may now be an inner curmudgeon, you've still got your inner three-year-old.

It was a younger crowd, and I admit to fleeting moments of feeling superior, the height of my arrogance arriving after someone suggested that, given my tenuous likeness, I be introduced around a bar as Maroon 5 singer Adam Levine. No matter how many women laughed



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in my face, it was OK because "it's a numbers game, man." This spurred another beer order and the discovery that while circumstances may lead you to climb on a high horse, you can make that nag drink as much as you want. But a sense of superiority fades when you're passed out on the floor.

Ironically, the third weekend of debauchery marked a very adult turn. I'd known the bachelor for almost 14 years, and while I normally can't even plan a trip to the refrigerator in advance, I found myself tasked with arranging the evening's transportation, making reservations and writing down-payment checks for our lodging. Suddenly, a binge had turned into an administrative job.

For our big night out, we wanted our nerdy bachelor to wear a costume that both humili-

ated him and broadcast his true character to the outside world. After bandying ideas around, I had a flash: Batman. It turned out to be the perfect choice, because when we gave him the costume he dropped his pants to reveal the pattern on his underwear: Batman. Apparently, the adage used by newlyweds holds true with old friends: When you know, you know.

Of course, the price for that sort of insight is experience and, ultimately, adulthood. These are the things you reflect on when it's 9 am, and you're on your hands and knees scrubbing stripper heel marks from a hardwood floor. But you're not alone in having to grow up. With each friend who gets married, the gang comes together to mark the passage. A bachelor party is a happy rebellion, a brief moment of uncivilized, futile resistance against change. And when the ritual generates a headache that could crack a skull like the crust of a crême brûlée, you're all but praying for the passage of time. ***

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