

40-year-old PARTY VIRGIN

THE VENUE'S A DUD, THE FOOD'S A FLOP AND NO-ONE TURNS UP. NO WONDER ANDREA CHILDS HAS NEVER THROWN A PARTY - UNTIL NOW

This September, I may be the first 40-year-old to issue a blanket invitation to my birthday party on Facebook, then watch, happily, while my house is trashed by teenagers, high on bottles of WKD and the prospect of global infamy, once videos of the carnage are posted on YouTube. Foolish? I don't think so. At least people will *be there*.

I am party phobic. It's not that I don't like parties - I love other people's - it's just that the reasons for me having one (celebrating with friends, having an excuse to dress up, get drunk, dance like an idiot) are always outweighed by the fear that no-one will turn up. Which is why, each January, I make wild promises to sceptical mates that this will be the year I finally host a do, only to bottle out.

But, this year is different. Really. Not only is there the significant birthday, but I'll also be celebrating 20 years with my husband. (It may not surprise you to know that, rather than a wedding reception, we had a meal with close family and friends.) We also have two children, whose arrival in the world we've failed to celebrate with any large-scale bash. Surely, I tell myself, the time for my party has arrived.

I'm still petrified that nobody will come and, if they do, that they won't get on. I know it's a joy that we become close



to people at every life stage, but am I the only one to wonder if my university friends and school-gate mum mates will have anything to say to each other? Then there's the fear of not doing it right - whether the venue will be too smart or too ropey; how much food will people expect; should I be providing all the drink? When I go to a party, I don't think about any of those things. But, faced with being the hostess, I have an attack of 1950s-style housewifery and start worrying whether devils on horseback are simply a delightful canapé or the four riders of the apocalypse out to punish me for sins against entertaining.

Some people reach the age of 40 with 39 years of birthday parties behind them,

and I'm sure this gives them a helium-ballooned sense of optimism about holding any type of get-together. Being the daughter of a party phobic (there's a tragic family tale of a birthday, my mum in her best frock and *no-one turning up*), that just isn't the case for me.

I remember one impromptu do, when I was six, when my mum arrived at the school gates and invited all my friends back for jelly and ice cream - I was so overexcited, I behaved like a prima donna and got told off for not playing nicely.

The only time I've actually 'organised'

anything was when I was 17. Drunk at a friend's house party, I rashly invited everyone there to my home the following week. I didn't know, until the night, whether anyone, apart from my close friends, would come, but the beer cans and cigarette burns the following morning told the tale. I couldn't actually remember, because I'd had so much wine to calm my nerves that I passed out in my bedroom for the whole night.

But, this time, it will be different. After much agonising, I have chosen a venue (too big, and, if there aren't enough people, it will seem like the saddest party in the world; too small, and it will be too packed to dance). I've picked a date after the school holidays to maximise my chances of a full guest list. So, now there are just drinks, food, music and what I'm going to wear to think about. Oh, and worrying how many people will RSVP. Here's to a happy birthday to me! 🍷

'The only time I organised a party, I had so much wine to calm my nerves, I passed out'