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Teen drinking is a 'crisis in the making'

By LOIS JORDAN

Let me begin this article on a personal note. My husband, Bill, and I graduated from Highland Park High School in 1968. Our two daughters graduated in 1992 and 1994 from Highland Park. When Brooke was a freshman at Baylor, she attended a funeral of one of her friends. As I sat with her in Saint Michael's and All Angels church, it occurred to me that our daughters had gone to more funerals than my husband and I had at that time. What a wakeup call!

One more time I was convinced that "times are not the same" as when we were in high school. Several things account for that. Kids today are begin-

ning to drink alcohol in junior high much like we may have in high school, and they are drinking in high school much like we may have in college. Not only is their initial usage happening approximately three years earlier, but the type of alcohol is also stronger.

I remember that if we could find a six pack of beer, we thought we had accomplished something. Today, the kids are drinking liquor (shots).

We also may have had alcohol for a special occasion (a dance, graduation, etc.), the kids today are drinking on a regular basis (weekends, weeknights, etc.).

In addition, the world around the kids today is significantly different.

GUEST COLUMN

Our country was attacked Sept. 11, 2001. Chronic diseases such as cancer, leukemia, diabetes, heart attacks and mental illness are everyday occurrences in the lives of our kids. Many kids are growing up in homes where their parents are depressed, unemployed or alcoholic. On the other hand, some are growing up with their parents so active in social activities such as Junior League, tennis, golf or travel that they lack structure and accountability.

I don't wish to come off as blaming, yet having grown up in the Park Cities and having raised two children here, I know what I

am talking about. As parents, we need to examine our attitudes and beliefs about alcohol. It is not just a benign substance to be used for entertainment.

If alcohol were created today, it would have to be studied by the Federal Food and Drug Administration to determine whether it is a food or a drug. Once determined a drug, the FDA would then assign it as a "scheduled drug" by studying what addictive qualities and harm affects it had. For example, heroin is a "schedule I" drug. Alcohol would be a "schedule II" drug.

So here we have a crisis in the making. Toxic substances, a struggling world, physically and emotionally underdeveloped kids, parents overwhelmed and

depressed and we want to call it "partying!" If we can learn to become comfortable in our own skins without mood- or mind-altering substance, then we can support our kids in the same manner.

"Life is difficult," as Scott Peck says in his book *The Road Less Traveled*. Nevertheless, I believe we can learn to live life on life's terms.

We must take an honest and courageous stand on the truth about alcohol use and abuse. Our precious children's lives depend on it.

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