



One-Man Stand

By Larry Strauss

As they dropped off Carly's friends, the mothers and stepmothers hung around a while to check me out, to scrutinize my house and see if this single dad was capable of taking care of their precious children. Several asked if I knew what I was getting myself into. One wanted to know if I planned to feed them; another was curious to know where I would be sleeping. I must have satisfied them—by 6:30 the mothers were all gone and for the

Carly's Dad

saying, although direction seemed elusive on a floor full of blankets, sleeping bags, stuffed animals, socks, chunks of birthday cake. Other girls had to be positioned next to or in the same bag as their friends. Then it was time for ghost stories, which led to disputes about whose turn it was to tell

them. Next, two girls broke out walkie-talkies and conducted amplified conversations from inside their bags. I went to bed about 1 a.m.

Within five minutes I heard footsteps. It seemed they were all over the house. When I emerged from my room everyone was lying quietly in her sleeping bag. We did this exercise three times. At 1:30, the girls complained they

were hungry. They wanted pizza.

I'm not sure when I went to sleep. I don't really know when they went to sleep either. I do know when the first ones woke up: 6:30. They were in the kitchen, hunting for food, giggling. A head count disclosed that no one had disappeared in the night. My den looked like steerage, bodies spayed out on the floor, on sofas, on each other.



I thought I might be banished from the PTA for dereliction of parental duty. But the moms seemed to regard me with a new kind of respect, like I was one of them now. I'd survived the ultimate test—the slumber party.

Still, they woke up calm. They changed and ate breakfast without any of the hysteria of the night before. They were all so sweet—like Carly, when she is not among her friends. I hated to spoil the mood so I postponed the commencement of Carly's ultimate brainchild: spraying shaving cream on the front of the house from the driveway and throwing water balloons at a shaving cream bull's-eye on the side of one wall. They were thus engaged when the mothers and stepmothers began to arrive.

I thought I might be banished from the PTA for dereliction of parental duty. But the moms seemed to regard me with a new kind of respect, like I was one of them now. I'd survived the ultimate test—the slumber party.

As we waved goodbye to the last girl, Carly turned to me and asked if we could do it again.

"Sure," I replied. "Let's do this every weekend."

Larry Strauss' third novel, "One Man, One Vote," is due out next year.