

# The Great Sleepover

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*By Eli Sesso*

All my friends were jealous when I told them that I was moving from Winnipeg to the hot desert of Phoenix, but I didn't understand why. What could Phoenix possibly have that Winnipeg was missing?

The instant our plane landed in Phoenix I hated everything about it. There was pollution everywhere, there were no ice rinks for hockey, I had to make friends with Americans, go to a brand new school, and our new house was smaller than our house in Winnipeg. Everything about this city was awful.

One fateful day, my opinion about Phoenix changed drastically. It all started on the Monday of spring break. I was in my room chatting on the internet with my old friends from Winnipeg when my dad busted into my room and told me that I had gone past my computer/TV/video game time limit for the day. This was starting to become a routine and at this point I would usually head for the basketball court to watch the older kids play.

I still hadn't really met any real friends because I was too shy to approach anyone but there was one guy, Justin, who was forced by the teacher to show me around on my first day. I guess he was the closest thing that I had to a friend. He was occasionally at the basketball court and I would sit beside him. We watched

his older brother play. His brother was really good. He could even dunk the ball without anyone lifting him.

I don't want to sound like a racist or anything, but Justin and his brother are black. Actually a lot of people in Phoenix are black. I don't have anything against black people; I'm just not used to so many being around everywhere. There aren't nearly as many black (or I guess "coloured") people in Winnipeg. Despite having talked only a few times, I would have considered Justin to be my friend. That means that I'm not a racist.

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When I arrived at the court I was happy to see Justin sitting in the stands. I greeted him and I tried to act as cool as I could.

"Hey man."

"Yo, what up"

"Not too much. What up with you?"

"Nothing man, what you doin' tonight?" He muttered. He was always muttering, I guess it made him seem more relaxed.

"No plans. What are you up to?" I asked him.

"Huh?" He didn't hear me. I guess I muttered too.

"I'm not doing anything tonight. Well, I don't have any plans yet. What are you doing tonight?" I felt stupid. I think I was subconsciously trying to talk like him. I felt like a follower. He didn't seem to notice at all.

"Check it out: my parents are out of town and my bro is having a big party tonight. I'm going to have a few

people over too. You can come too if you're down. I just got the new COD."

Wow! This was super! It was looking like Justin considered me his friend as well. I tried my best to not act as excited as I was feeling.

"Cool, for PS3?" I asked, ignoring my racing heart.

"Yeah."

"How many controllers you got?"

"Just 2."

"Well I have 2.. too. I can bring them if you want." I just said yes to his invitation without actually saying yes. That was pretty clever of me. I was pumped.

"Sweet. My bro is trying to get some beer so we might be able to steal some off him if we're lucky." Justin said.

I panicked when he mentioned that there would be alcohol. Did I just get in over my head? I've never been drunk before, I've never had more than a few sips of my parents' beer or wine. I didn't have much of a choice though, I wanted to be cool and fit in and this is quite possibly the greatest chance that I would ever get.

"Sweet. Sounds like a good time."

"And you can sleep over if you want. We'll probably just play PS3 all night."

"Alright, well I gotta scamper home for supper, I'll come by after. And I'll bring my extra PS3 controllers." I can't believe I actually used the word *scamper*.

"Later".

I hope that Justin didn't see me actually scamper all the way home. I was just really excited.

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My parents were beaming with pride throughout supper. They just stared at me with big grins the whole time. I could tell that they were trying to act cool though and they didn't ask too many questions but I knew that they wanted to give big bear hugs and present me with a plaque engraved: *World's Greatest Twelve Year Old Who Can Make Friends in New Cities Without Too Much Difficulty*.

I didn't want to get to the party too early so I waited until 8. My mom offered me a ride sixty thousand times even though Justin only lived 3 blocks away. I was happy that I chose to walk. It gave me time to calm down and relax my nerves a bit.

I was the first one of Justin's friends to arrive. His brother had 5 or 6 people over already. They weren't drinking any beer yet, they were just playing PS3. We sat and watched them play. It turned out that they had enough controllers so I left mine in my backpack. I was disappointed that they didn't give me a turn to play, but also relieved. I was feeling nervous around all these older guys.

Later that night, Justin's brother and his friends (there were about twenty of them at this point) were getting more and more aggravated. To get the booze they waited in the parking lot until someone accepted their offer to buy them alcohol. They handed some guy \$120 in cash and then left because the guy promised to bring the alcohol to Justin's house later. He claimed that there were some cops watching and making sure that

no-one bought any booze for minors. It was a little after 11 o'clock and this guy still hadn't arrived.

Right when I thought that Justin and his friends would start rioting there was a knock at the door. There was a round of applause when it turned out to be the guy with the booze. I couldn't see him when he entered the house because the living room was around a corner but I could hear him talking and my ears perked up like a dog who just heard the word "treat" or "walk". It was the weirdest feeling ever. I could recognize his voice but my brain couldn't place who this person was. My stomach and heart however, knew instantly who it was and they were tangled with excitement. My brain was intrigued enough by what my innards were doing that I decided to go to the washroom to sneak a peek. When I turned into the hall my jaw dropped. Standing next to the table with a beer in his hand was the one and only: Wayne Gretzky. It was like God himself was in the room but everyone was acting natural. Nobody seemed to recognize him. I was bewildered! Hadn't anyone seen his picture in the newspapers? Or seen his highlights on ESPN? When I lived in Canada I knew who Michael Jordan was, shouldn't they recognize The Great One? I decided not to bring too much attention to myself and to keep it cool as well. I'm sure Mr. Gretzky has had enough drooling fans ask him for autographs. But I knew that I *had* to meet him but I would have to wait for the perfect moment.

"Anyone got any Coke for sale?" Wayne Gretzky asked as he looked around the room.

"There are lots in the fridge dude, don't worry about paying for it, my mom won't notice it missing. You want some rum with it or anything?" said Justin's brother while typing a text message on his phone.

"Naw, I changed my mind, I'll just stick with beer for now." Gretzky told him, with an odd smirk on his face.

Justin was still in the other room so I quickly walked back to go tell him the news. I sat beside him casually and I quietly said "Dude, Wayne Gretzky is here."

Justin didn't blink or even take his eyes off of the television set.

"Who?"

"Wayne Gretzky! The greatest hockey player of all time! He's the coach of the Phoenix Coyotes." I was trying to not get too upset at him but it was hard.

"If he's the greatest player of all time, why is he stuck behind the bench coaching?"

"He was the greatest before he retired. Now he coaches."

"He's retired? How old is he? 65? What the hell is he doing here?"

"He bought the booze for your bro and his friends. I need to meet.."

"There's beer here?" Justin interrupted. "Let's go try to get some!"

Justin rushed into the kitchen and I followed him slowly. When we got there Wayne was gone. My heart sank. Forgetting my shyness I asked everyone in the room where he went.

“Who?” answered a girl after nobody else said anything for a long awkward moment. I was getting tired of this question.

“The guy who bought all the booze.” answered Justin, who for some reason now had an open beer in each hand. “I think he went out for a smoke.”

“Can we have a beer?” Justin asked.

“No. You’re not old enough.” Justin’s brother replied.

“Aw come on! Let’s give him and his friend one!” One of Justin’s brother’s friends said.

“We’ll share one!” Justin begged.

“Fine. Take one of Meaghan’s Bud Light Limes.”

Justin thanked his brother, ran to the fridge and grabbed one. Meaghan made a grumpy face but I was the only one who noticed. Justin poured a little less than half of it into a glass for me and he took the bottle. As we were walking back to the living room I hesitated. This could be my only chance at meeting Wayne Gretzky. Nobody back home would believe me when if I told them that I shared a beer with Wayne Gretzky!

I snuck away from Justin who didn’t realize that I was no longer behind him. I think he was too enthralled with his half bottle of beer. As I approached the door I could see that Wayne Gretzky wasn’t alone. Riding my adrenaline I walked through the door and then I continued up to where they were talking. Wayne Gretzky was talking to three girls. They had created a tight circle (or I guess square?) with their bodies and I tried to enter into the conversation but I couldn’t quite get in there without pushing anyone. I think I was only half way in

but I was satisfied. I was hoping I could say something insightful and then they would see me and spread out a bit. I listened very carefully for my chance to contribute. Wayne Gretzky was talking:

“Have you girls seen the new Ford Shelby GT500? It’s one of the fastest cars ever made.” I think he glanced at me as he said that but I don’t know if he saw me.

The girls shook their heads. They were more enthralled with their Bud Light Limes than the question. Americans sure like their beer!

“Do you want to see one? I did some commercial work for Ford so they gave me next year’s model. It’s not even released to the public yet.”

The girls didn’t really answer. They were hesitant to get in a car with this stranger.

“You can bring your beers if you want.”

“Yeah sure. We’ll come.” One of the girls replied.

I wasn’t sure what I should do but I decided to follow them. At this point it must have been impossible for Wayne Gretzky to not have noticed me. We walked towards his car and nobody said anything. I tried to think of a good question to asked Wayne Gretzky but everything sounded lame in my head.

When we got to the car, Wayne Gretzky asked the girls if they wanted to see how fast it could go. The girls agreed but I had the feeling that they just liked the idea of being allowed to have open bottles of beer inside a car.

I knew that this would be my one and only chance to talk to Wayne Gretzky so I decided to be brave and

ask if I could join them. Wayne Gretzky was quick to respond.

“Sorry little buddy, I don’t think there’s enough room.”

I was so disappointed and I could feel myself about to cry but luckily one of the girls spoke up for me.

“We can squeeze him in, it’s no problem.”

Wayne Gretzky gave a little shrug and then he went in the car. I took this as a yes and I opened my door and went in as well.

I had to pretty much sit on one of the girls’ laps so I felt a little bit like a baby but the car was indeed pretty fast. After Wayne Gretzky was finished showing off he asked the girls if they’d like to go see the arena. “I’ll show you some of my moves and then test your stick handling skills.” Then he looked at me in the rearview mirror.

“It’s getting kind of late for you though isn’t it kiddo? Aren’t your parents going to be worried?”

“No, I told them that I was sleeping over at Justin’s house so I can come to the arena too. If you want to swing by my house though, I could sneak in and grab my skates.”

Wayne Gretzky just stared at me for a few seconds in the mirror. I thought he would be impressed that I had skates but he didn’t look very happy.

“No, that won’t be necessary; I think I can find some for you. Lombardi has pretty small feet.”

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The arena was awesome. I’ve been to NHL arenas before, but I hadn’t seen the places that Wayne Gretzky showed us. We saw the dressing rooms, the media booths, the press conference rooms, his huge office, and the gym. He found me some brand new skates and I got to lace up in the Phoenix Coyotes’ home dressing room. Since he didn’t have enough skates for all the girls so he showed the sauna to them. I sang the Hockey Night in Canada theme song to myself as I marched on to the ice.

Skating around on that ice was awesome, the lights were really bright. I could easily imagine myself playing in game 7 for the Stanley Cup. After about half an hour Wayne Gretzky joined me on the ice.

He was incredible. He gave me tons of tips. He was really patient too. I can see why the Phoenix Coyotes wanted him as their coach.

While he was driving me back to Justin’s he told me that he would give me season tickets for the next season if I promised to tell everyone that I saw him refueling his Shelby GT50 and I ran to say hi. He didn’t want anyone to know that he was buying booze for minors. Obviously I accepted his proposal.

I couldn’t wait to tell Justin all about my night. When I got back in his house he was really excited to see me!

“Budddddyyyy!!!” He yelled, and then he jumped at me and gave me a big hug. “We didn’t know where you went! We’re so happy that you’re okay!!”

I think he was a little drunk because he wasn’t walking straight and he kept slurring his words but was nice to hear that he was worried. We went to bed shortly

after. He fell asleep right away but I was still wide awake, I didn't want to forget any part of that night.

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The next day I saw Justin at the basketball court. He looked pretty sick but he claimed he was fine. We didn't really talk much. At one point I sat back and I felt the beautiful sun heating my skin and I realized that Phoenix wasn't all that bad. I had made some incredible friends and I was living in a city that actually had an NHL hockey team.