

# The Backyard Slumber Party

Written by [Tom Fowler](#)

Erik's friends began showing up for the backyard sleepover late in the afternoon. It was spring break and unseasonably warm – perfect weather for spending the night outside.

Martin, Justin, Trevor and Stephen had been Erik's best friends since grade school. They took turns spending the night in each other's homes and, during the spring and summer months, would often engage in these all night camp outs. Tonight, the first sleepover of the year would be in Erik Taylor's backyard.

While Erik's mother, Jenee Taylor, grilled hamburgers for the boys on the huge commercial grill beneath the covered patio, Erik began to feel nervous. He was hosting tonight's party, and he would also be the one to solve a mystery perpetrated by his friends. After dark, one of his friends would pull a practical joke on him. Tomorrow morning, he would have to figure out what the joke was and who had been the prankster.

But, for now, the friends enjoyed hamburgers and soft drinks. Erik, a skilled guitar player, serenaded his guests with favorite ballads until darkness overtook the backyard. After visiting under the moonlight until midnight, the boys began to think about breaking up for the night.

Each boy had his own pup tent in the Taylor backyard. The tents were arranged as a backfield formation on a football team using the old split T offense. Erik's tent was in front, perhaps 20 feet in front of the patio. The remaining four tents were set up in a straight line in back of him, the top of the "T," out of his line of sight and

approximately 20 feet back. As the boys prepared to call it a night, Erik reviewed the rules of the game for them.

“We’ve been doing this long enough that I shouldn’t have to review the rules, but I will anyway. After we say goodnight, each of you may leave your tent once before sunrise. I may observe what you do from my tent, but I may not leave it.” Erik paused for a moment and then continued, “As you know, our backyard is very dark. There is a faint night light on the patio and there is just enough light from the streetlamp in front of our next door neighbor’s house to be able to see movement back here. It is up to me to stay alert and be able to figure out tomorrow morning what the stunt is and who did it.”

The boys grinned, said goodnight to each other and headed towards their respective tents.

About an hour later, Erik heard an almost inaudible noise. He looked out the flap of his tent and saw one of his friends softly open the patio door to go inside, probably to use the restroom. He could not tell who it was; his clothing was as dark as the night. However, even in the dim light he noticed his shoes were lighter than the rest of his clothing. A few minutes later, the patio door opened and the dark-clothed friend was careful to return to his tent by walking in the shadows of the stockade fence surrounding the Taylor backyard. Once he had stepped in back of Erik’s tent and line of sight, there was no way to tell who it was.

Less than an hour later, Erik heard another faint noise. This time, he saw a figure step out of the shadows and onto the patio. Even though this person appeared to be wearing a white pullover shirt, he could not tell who it was because of the darkness. He did see a silhouette of a person pouring a glass of water from the

picnic table and drinking it. Again, the mystery person escaped to the shadows and got behind Erik before he could identify him.

Later on, around 3:00 a.m. Erik heard a faint rustling noise coming from the patio. He had dozed off and barely caught it in time. Looking out the tent flap, he saw a shadowy movement on the patio but could not determine who it was or what the figure was doing. Erik thought that, whoever it was, he was good: disciplined with quiet patience. Had he not been expecting a prank, he would never have suspected anyone in the group was up and about, much less moving around on the patio. He was sure though, that it was this unidentified friend who was pulling the prank. This prankster was away, hidden in the shadows, far longer than any of the others. Finally, Erik saw the grayish black outline of his friend creeping along the fence back to his tent.

Erik knew there would be one more disturbance before daylight. Sure enough, around 4:00 a.m. Erik heard the now familiar slight rustle of a pup tent flap. As the last night-walker came dimly into view, he saw that he kept within the fence shadows as the others had, but went towards the fence gate, opened it and exited the backyard. A few minutes later, the gate reopened and the unknown chum re-entered the backyard, returning to his tent as the others had. Erik thought he saw the brief glint of a pair of eyeglasses on this person's forehead.

As Erik knew all four of his friends had taken turns outside of their respective tents, he now relaxed and decided to get a couple of hours sleep before breakfast. Around 8:00 a.m., Jenee fixed pancakes for the boys on the outside grill. It had not taken Erik long to figure out what the prank was. His guitar was missing from its stand on the patio. Now, all he had to do was figure out who took it.

There was not much discussion during breakfast. The boys were tired and hungry. It gave Erik time to think through what he had seen – and not seen – during the long dark night. Biting into a piece of bacon, he noticed that Martin was wearing a new pair of athletic shoes. Grass stains had spoiled their pristine newness and added a green tinge to the bright white leather.

He also considered it odd that Stephen wore a sweat suit this morning even though it was already warm. It was not just any sweat suit. It was very expensive nylon with matching pants, a windbreaker and white shirt, all sporting the maker's logo.

His mind was racing now. Erik knew that Trevor and Stephen wore contact lenses and Justin wore glasses.

As the boys finished breakfast, Erik seriously considered the situation. Think, Erik, think, he said to himself, as he knew his friends would shortly be eager for him to guess which one of them took his guitar. Erik considered what he knew about his friends, hoping he would think of something to help him solve the mystery. He recalled that Trevor was a duck hunter, used to long periods of minimal movement and silence when stalking his prey.

As he studied his friend's faces, it came to him. Without waiting for his mother to leave them, he said, "I know which one of you took my guitar."

#### THE SUSPECTS:

- Justin Scott
- Martin Simmons
- Stephen Kennelly

- Trevor Sutherland