

# Cheesed Off

Volunteering at school separates the wannabes from the upper crust

Pizza day had always been mall day for me, but this year my seven-year-old asked could I pleasee serve pizza at school like Bobby's mom. She's cool — she gives out extra slices.

I couldn't say no. He was right, it was about time I did my civic duty, and the monthly pizza day seemed an easy access point into volunteer work at his school. Heaven knows I've served enough pizza. It would be nice to get out of the house, meet some new people, make some new friends... and if my son wants me to be a pizza mom, well, enough said.

My first pizza day, I showed up late and things were already in full swing. Frenzied excitement filled the air as adrenalin-pumped moms raced from lunchroom to lunchroom, juggling plates and juice boxes, waving their arms and shouting. The pizzas had just arrived and the moms — women who probably headed up Canada's leading corporations before they decided to organize pizza day — were running them down the corridors like live organs ready for transplant.

I'd barely taken my coat off when I was told they didn't need any more help. I was just another pizza mom wannabe. As I crawled towards the exit, a mom stuck her head out a lunchroom door and shouted, "Plates! We need plates in here ASAP!" The woman she was shouting to had suddenly taken ill and was abandoning her post. Here was my golden opportunity. I bolted back to the other lunchroom, picked up some plates and ran with them. When the CEO of pizza day took them from me approvingly, I knew I was in.

For the next hour I worked quietly like Quasimodo, wiping spills, picking

up garbage, afraid a sudden movement would make them change their minds. When lunch was over, they offered me a slice. Yes!

I saw it would take months, even years, of giving out juice or cookies before working my way up the ladder. But my dream day would come when I earned my latex gloves and I could proudly serve my son extra slices.

The next pizza day I arrived bright and early — in a cat costume. It was Halloween, and there was a tension in the air you could cut with a pizza slicer. The moms were manning their stations in rented costumes, waiting for the floodgates to open. I was given the entry-level position: "B room door operations." My mission: take slips, call orders and direct lines. Seemed easy, but I was preoccupied. You see, I wanted to make sure my son got his pizza. "They wouldn't accept his pizza money after the cut-off date. Can you believe that?" I confided to some clown. "Yes!" she tersely replied. "There are too many slips with money taped on them." Oops, that's what I'd done. When the fairy princess reprimanded me for not standing close enough to the table, thereby mixing up the orders, I knew I wasn't cutting it. I was out.

I came home exhausted and shaking. I have worked on *Saturday Night Live*, a high-pressure live television show broadcast to millions of people, and it didn't come close to the pizza day I had just experienced. I reached out to an old

friend for help, an ex-pizza mom, who apparently revolutionized her school pizza day. When I told her what I'd done, her eyes glazed over like a veteran having a flashback. "You try counting the money every month, taking inventory for the drinks, the cookies. It's a logistical nightmare. The horror, the horror!"

Have I learned nothing in the 25 years since I've left school? I was again running with the wrong crowd, trying to fit my round peg into a square hole. I have to face it, I'm just not a pizza mom. And the good news is, I don't have to be. For one thing, I'm too old. I'll never have that kind of energy again. I can choose civic duties to fit my personality. Maybe the school garden committee could use me. That's more my speed, and I hear they meet at Starbucks. Unfortunately, I don't think my son will be as excited at the prospect of extra bulbs. □

Writer, teacher, actress and mom Robin Duke dukes it out at a Toronto school. For more about her, turn to *In Person*, p. 26.

