**By Ann Wright Rossouw**

*What would my new friends think if I walked out on the movie?*

Starting high school was scary. I felt lost in a massive student body, the big campus, and new classes. I tried to keep somewhat invisible so that I wouldn't embarrass myself.

Slowly I adjusted to my new situation. I got involved in the theater department and made some great friends. By October, I was invited to a birthday party for one of the older, popular boys in our theater group.

I was ecstatic! It was a costume party, and I spent hours putting together an Egyptian dress. The night of the party, my heart was pounding as I walked into the house and saw all my new theater friends in fantastic costumes. Many of them were juniors and seniors, and I still couldn't believe that they had invited me.

About an hour into the party, our host pulled out a movie and excitedly called all of us to go into the other room to watch it. My stomach clenched when I saw the movie's case. It was not a movie I wanted to see. Ever!

We all herded into the next room. I tucked myself into a corner of a couch and felt sick. My mind raced over what I should do. Everyone in the room seemed so excited to watch the film. They were my theater group. They were my new friends. I didn't want to ostracize myself so soon after finally feeling included.

As the title of the movie flickered onto the screen, I knew what I had to do. Without saying a word, I stood up from the couch and walked quietly to the kitchen and stood there in the dark for a minute. Then I turned on the light and considered my options.

I knew the movie would go on for about two hours. Should I call my mom to come get me? Should I wait around in the kitchen for two hours? I had no idea, but the sick feeling in my stomach had lessened, and I was surprised that I no longer felt afraid.

As I stood there in the kitchen trying to figure out what to do, the door from the other room opened and a pretty, popular junior girl walked through. She smiled sheepishly at me and then confessed, "I really didn't want to see that movie, but I didn't want to be the only one who left. When I saw you leave and you didn't come back, I wondered if you felt the same way."

I nodded, and we both laughed. We hadn't said more than two sentences before the door opened and another girl came through.

"Did you want to see that movie?" she whispered timidly.

"No," we both admitted to her.

# CHAIN

Over the course of the next five minutes, people kept walking through the door, confessing that they didn't actually want to see that movie. When at last our host came through the door, he announced, "I've turned off the movie. Does anyone want to play a game?"

Later that night, I thought about what had happened. Would we all have sat there watching that awful movie if no one had moved? How would I have felt now if I had stayed? I was struck by the thought that *no one* had really wanted to see the movie, but everyone had been too afraid to leave. I was surprised that I wasn't alone in wanting to do the right thing.

That thought gave me a new courage that later helped me make many other decisions before high school was over. Sometimes my decisions left me standing alone. But far more often, my decisions created a chain reaction of good choices by people around me, just like it did at that birthday party. *NE*

# REACTION