

The Puppet Show: Vivien Wilson

'Can I have a party, please, please?' Julia my younger daughter asks. It's 1986 and her seventh birthday is fast approaching.

'Of course,' I reply, ignoring visions of weeping children with bleeding knees.

'How about a puppet show?' my husband suggests.

'Yes, yes, Daddy, oh please Daddy!' Julia enthusiastically runs to fetch a box of hand puppets.

'Oh no,' Kate, her elder sister, groans and disappears into her room.

As with anything creative, my husband, Laurie, takes the job seriously. From under the house, he produces a cardboard box, cuts a hole in it, makes a puppet theatre and rehearsals begin. Everyone has a part. I don't have time to practise as I'm too busy filling scooped-out oranges with green and red jelly.

'Darling,' he says. 'I need you to practise your cue. When the tawny scrawny lion says ...'

I'm not really listening. I'm concentrating on filling an orange with gelatinous crimson fluid.

'No, no, this is important.'

'Yes, yes, I know. When the elephant says, "it's dinner time", I start the music.'

'NO, NO, that's wrong! It's ...'

I can smell something burning. I dash back into the kitchen and retrieve the cake from the oven before it turns into a charred missile.

The big day arrives. Everything is ready. I've set the table under the jacaranda. Julia is beside herself with excitement. We play the usual games - pass the parcel and pin the tail on the donkey. The jellies are consumed. So too are the chocolate crackles and the fairy bread. We all sing Happy Birthday; candles are blown out and the cake consumed. Finally, it's time for the puppet show. The children giggle and nudge each other, not sure what to expect.

The show begins. It's our version of The Tawny Scrawny Lion. Julia is a rabbit and Kate an elephant, whilst Laurie plays the part of the lion. Suddenly, I can't remember my cue. The elephant says, "it's dinner time." I press "Play" and the music for The Teddy Bears Picnic begins. Laurie is turning red and frowning. I realise my error. It's too soon. I remember that the music is only supposed to come on at the finale. I peek out from the curtain; our small guests are none the wiser. They're squealing 'Again, again!' and clapping. So, we repeat the play. This time I come in on cue!