Halloween Memories

By Connie Morrow

Whatever happened to Halloween as I knew it growing up in the 1950s? Ah, yes! My dad would rake leaves into big piles that we would promptly jump into, scattering them everywhere.

Then he would do something unheard of today: He would burn the leaves. I still remember that wonderful smell in the frosty air. Little sparks and embers from the leaves would fly high into the sky.

Outdoor playtime was limited to the time before dinner as the days grew shorter. After homework was done, we either watched television (three stations then and no remote) or read comic books. My favorites were *Archie*, *Sugar and Spike* (the precursor to *Rugrats*) and *Little Lulu*. I ate hard, sour, fresh-picked apples while I immersed myself in the antics of my comic book friends.

My mom would decorate the house with all kinds of scary Halloween decorations. There were black cats, smiling jack-o'-lanterns and flying bats.

The week before the big day, our parents took us out to pick out our pumpkin. Sometimes we got more than one of the huge orange gourds. Mom or Dad would carve it and let us think we were helping. The truth was, we weren't allowed to play with knives.

After the pumpkin was carved, we would put the seeds on a cookie sheet with a little oil and salt and let them roast very slowly in the oven. This was a special treat reserved for the days leading up to Halloween.

Our pumpkin always had a real candle inside. Sometimes we had to cut an extra hole in the back so the candle would stay lit. To this day, the smell of a burning pumpkin lid brings back memories of my childhood.

Weeks of planning went into our Halloween costumes. The costumes at the store were usually divided into two price ranges, the cheaper being characters such as ghosts or witches. The most expensive costume was the bridal dress. Oh, how I wanted that costume! It was white lace and so pretty. (I still remember the name on the boxes: "BEN COOPER.") But I usually ended up being a ghost, witch or gypsy.

The costume for a gypsy was quite simple. You needed a long, flowing skirt, a bandana to wear around the head, a peasant blouse and, of course, big hoop earrings.

My mother had the best gypsy earrings in the world. They were silver and they screwed on. Those screws really hurt my ears, but they looked so cool!

Above: Me in 1957. Below: I am pictured with my parents, Barb and Ian Strombell.

The smell of the makeup that we used is still etched in my brain, too. Every time one of the kids gets that kind of makeup today, the smell fills my head with vivid memories. I believe that it was

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Ben Nye makeup and they still make it today. The masks that came with the costumes were great. But I had allergies and sinus problems as a child, and my nose would run the whole time I had one on. It got kind of soggy with that mask on my face!

People in our neighborhood were very generous with their treats. Back in the 1950s, we weren't afraid to go into someone's house and have cider and doughnuts. One family even gave us homemade popcorn balls.

The treats were amazing: candy, apples, potato chips, even money. We were treated very well. And the treating wasn't just one night; it was three! We had "Beggars Night" on Oct. 30th, Halloween on the 31st, and what the kids called "Garbage Night" on the first of November.

There was no need to X-ray our candy. We could eat it as we walked down the street to the next house. Until I reached the ripe old age of 10, Mom or Dad would go out with us. When Dad took us, he would drive the car to each house and watch us as we made our way through the neighborhood. It seemed like everybody was out on the streets those nights!

Being in western New York state, we were never sure what kind of weather would greet us on Halloween night. Some years it was Indian summer; other years, we had to wear our snowsuits under our costumes.

Our school also celebrated Halloween. At class parties we were served cookies made by the moms, and that old standby, Hawaiian Punch.

We were allowed to wear our costumes to school on the day of the party. It seemed like everyone on the school bus had a costume except the bus driver.

Some years I had a party on one of the nights of Halloween. Once we decorated our hallway as a haunted house. There was a bowl of grapes that we called "eyeballs" and another bowl of cooked spaghetti that served as "brains." Strings hung from the ceiling served as makeshift cobwebs. My friends loved it!

I wish that the kids of today could have some of the fun we had. Things were simpler and a little safer. I have all these wonderful memories, so at least I can tell the younger generations about Halloween in the Good Old Days. ❖

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