

Commentary

Halloween, Our Easiest Holiday



In the late 1990s there was an organized effort to ban trick-or-treating through model local ordinances along with an appeal for people to stop celebrating Halloween which some felt was irreligious. We felt that the actual event had become something significant and completely secular as well as important to most people, especially children.

Lately there's been some concern and even legal proposed sanctions on how we celebrate Halloween including restricting trick or treating.

That's just plain wrong. To many adults, Halloween is more of an "event" as opposed to a real holiday. But to kids, Halloween is just south of Christmas. It's the only holiday or occasion we have that, to almost everyone, has no serious religious or patriotic overtones. On Halloween, there were no battles fought, nor pharaohs drowned, nor signs from the heavens. It doesn't celebrate anything particularly remarkable and, in fact, unless you're neurotically focused on oblique 15th century European historic trivia, there's no meaning at all, other than itself. Halloween, as we celebrate it, represents, "Halloween."

It's a day when little kids can work out their fantasies and can be taken seriously by big people. For their part, adults can get pleasantly shaken down by little people who will turn themselves inside out for a miniature tootsie roll.

There's no complex buying and matching of presents and no cumbersome traditional dinners, no forced gathering of relatives. It's just a combination of role reversal and outright simple demonstrations of strangers being kind to kids. Most significantly, the kids get to live out pleasant fantasies...to say nothing of getting a meal consisting of 100% dessert.

There's been a litany for years about how, around Christmas or New Year's, people get morbid, depressed and despondent. I've never heard of "Halloween Depression." Everyone just seems plain happy as kids get permission to have their imaginations taken seriously. One year, my three-year-old son went as a rabbit, my six-year-old daughter was a princess. Based on our neighborhood traditions, I might have become just a bit tipsy by the end of the evening. In our neighborhood, the adults sometimes get treats too.

That night one of the men in the neighborhood, a rather formal attorney, put on a black cape, dyed his gray hair black, powdered his face, put on rouge, jammed fangs in his mouth and jumped out from behind a bush to scare us. Any other night I would have naturally called the police, but on Halloween it's nearly normal behavior, at least for my neighborhood. "Do you know who I am?" he growled. "A politician!" I said. But the kids squared me away and introduced me to the good Count Dracula. So the Count and I, along with Yoda, Darth Vader, a white rabbit, a little princess and two Spidermen wandered out into the night to rustle up some free treats on the easiest holiday of the year.

Happy Halloween!

