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Halloween: No child's been left behind, only tricks
By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, VA.—The road I live on has only two children. Both are in high school and would be offended by being called children. They no longer make the rounds on Halloween.

Most of the roads in my county are similar: not many kids.

Two generations back, families came like donuts—by the dozen. A two-child family was the exception.

Today, the costs of having farm kids often exceed their benefits.

My wife, Melissa, refuses to admit that the Halloweens of her present are no more than feint imitations of those in her past when she and hundreds of others swarmed her suburban block collecting full-size chocolate bars.

She still insists on buying Halloween give-outs by the gross despite never having entertained more than five visitors in any two of the last 26 years. Her theory is: Have it, and maybe they will come.

It's feels as if we're waiting for the ghosts of children past.

One cost of not having farm kids around here is that Halloween turns into a gluttonous vigil next to Melissa's overflowing candy volcano.

Since I am the Alpha male in our empty nest, the job of correcting our bowl-runneth-over problem lands in my lap. Actually, it settles a bit higher.

Eating your own Halloween candy is certainly more efficient than dragging a pillow case around for five hours in the cold darkness and hoping to avoid the big kids in the alley who acted as if they had a right to foreclose on my equity even though I was not in their debt. Two of them now work in derivatives, and the third peddles video poker to the oppressed.

I always carve a large pumpkin and put it on a stepladder next to the window of our blacked-out upstairs bedroom. From the road, the candle-lighted head looks plenty scary. This is my way of building character in our local youth.

Melissa takes a different approach. She wants to fill pillow cases. So she decorates our farmhouse with flashing orange-and-black signs: "STOP HERE. WE HAVE CANDY. WE LIKE CHILDREN. WE ARE NOT SATANISTS. WE WELCOME MASKED VISITORS. OUR CANDY IS

INDIVIDUALLY WRAPPED IN HERMETICALLY SEALED PORTIONS. I HAVE HIDDEN MY HUSBAND'S WATER PISTOL AND ALSO PUT HIM BACK A GRADE."

I plan my usual tricks. For the little ones, I count their fingers on one hand, always coming up with six. For the sophisticates of eight, I tell them their shoelaces are untied. And for the once-in-a-blue-moon punk teenager, I put on a Pat Boone vinyl.

Once a night, a loaded car will creep into our driveway.

Melissa bum-rushes her spousal jack-o'-lantern into the back bedroom with Sophie and Lucy, our two yellow Labs, whose combined IQ has never topped three, even spotting them two for poor reading comprehension. "No barking," she warns, looking at me.

Before the first "Trick or..." is mumbled, Melissa is stuffing their sacks and peppering them with questions. She'll ask the smallest one in a pirate costume, "What are you supposed to be, sugar pie?"

"HE'S DUMBO, THE FLYIN' ELEPHANT," I yell from my banishment.

The kid's bottom lip quivers. "I'm...Captain Hook," he says in his baddest soprano.

"And you're the meanest ol' pirate I've ever seen," Melissa says. "I about died when I saw you coming. You scared me to death. Now, here are some special treats just for Captain Hook, and you tell your Momma when you get back to the car that I'll bring her that recipe to church this Sunday."

The last thing any seven-year-old swashbuckler wants is to be cross-examined about his make-believe identity by the county prosecutor who calls him, "sugar pie."

The Captain drags a treasure chest three times his body weight back to the mother ship, a Hyundai Sonata.

Word, I think, has gotten around about us.

Halloween started in the Irish and British countryside several thousand years back as Samhain, a Celtic celebration of the harvest and New Year on October 31st.

Halloween also cherry-picked some aspects of the Celtic festival of the dead during which the departed could mosey back over the border between the there and the here. To protect themselves from evil spirits, the Celts donned

Bernie Madoff costumes. This disguise also keeps federal regulators from messing around with you.

Trick-or-treating started in the 1930s. By the early 50s, Baby Boomers roamed in packs, extorting each other's parents for the candy that mothers wouldn't give to their own children. My whole generation grew up soliciting treats that turned out to be dental tricks. No wonder we need to floss.

Halloween survives as a weird mish-mash that's lost its roots but retains its broomsticks. The pagan stuff is now so trivialized by commerce that we hang plastic skeletons from our porches because...well, because they're for sale.

And yet, Halloween constantly inspires. Our economy, for example, appears to be run by Wall Street Boomers who have mastered the art of shaking down treats from whoever occupies the White House by threatening tricks...like failing.

So here's notice. If the girls and boys from Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan Chase show up in Blue Grass with empty sacks on Halloween, I'm going to get my water pistol and squirt 'em good.

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