

WHAT? NO TREATS?

By Martha Tolles

It was Halloween but our children had bad coughs. “We’ll miss all the treats,” our son, Steve, complained. I looked at their disappointed faces, his anyway, as he sprawled on the couch in his pirate costume, his mask cast aside. His younger sister, Cindy, didn’t really know what was happening. It was going to be her first time out for trick or treating. Her grandma had sent her a princess outfit, very attractive, but when I tried to put it on her she screamed. Then I realized the costume was the same orange color that was on the hot packs they had applied to her legs when she was in the hospital in hopes of preventing paralysis. It had been heartbreaking to have our little girl come down with polio but luckily, it was a mild case. The very next winter the Salk vaccine became available to everyone’s joy.

But what to do about tonight? My husband walked in the door just then and I explained the problem to him while I quickly served him his dinner. “So you think they should stay in?” he asked.

“Yes, they both have fevers too.” Oh, what to do? Suddenly I had an idea. “I know. I’ll go out to a few houses for them while you finish your dinner.”

“You’ll just explain they’re sick?” .

“Yeah, Mom, bring home a lot,” Steve sat up straight on the couch and managed a grin before he coughed again.

“Well, I could explain,” I paused, thinking, “Or, I know, I’ll dress up a bit like everybody else. Let’s see, I’ve already got on jeans. Roy, could I borrow one of your plaid shirts? And,” I snatched up the pirate mask. “I’ll wear this.” I held it before my face for a minute. “I’ll borrow your cap, Steve, to hide my hair.’

“Ha ha,” Steve and Roy both laughed. “You’ll get more that way maybe.” But Cindy cried so I slid off the mask and picked her up off the couch and soothed her.

A short time later there I was out knocking on doors and I truly did not look like a mom. So I was part of changing my identity like everybody else. The custom of trying to look like something else, hiding in an outfit for a different identity. It started in the eighth century when people, Druids, religious leaders, donned animal, or monster clothing so they wouldn’t be kidnapped or bothered by fairies or other spirits. It was a time when ancestors might be trying to re-appear and the Druids wanted to be on hand and honor them. Off and on over the centuries the custom was followed in different manners. Sometimes people went to the homes of the rich and performed in a small way if the homeowners opened their doors and handed out nuts and fruits. For quite a while mischief was part of the deal. No treats could lead to trouble. I remembered my brother told me when we lived in the country that some kids he knew had put a cow on someone’s front porch when there were no treats to be had.

But now here I was out on the street with groups of ghosts and goblins and witches swooping past me as they filled their treat bags. So I got into the mood and knocked on several doors and managed to swoop up two candy bars at each bowl. Finally, at the last house, my next door neighbor who answered the door offered me a large chocolate bar but had to step back to the bowl of goodies when I brazenly asked for two and I heard him say to his wife nearby....”Some new big guy in the neighborhood.” Oh, ha ha, I grinned behind my mask, happy I was managing so successfully to hide my identity. But I decided not to reveal who I was, a little embarrassed I had demanded not one but two candy bars. I hurried

home with my stash where I knew I would get a warm welcome. And I could be a mom once more....and with treats! On the way I nibbled on a chocolate bar, thinking maybe I deserved it.