

Trick or treats just ain't what they used to be

by Henry Verden

Since I was a small child, Halloween has been one of my favorite holidays. Anybody who has seen my house around that time of year will have no trouble believing that statement. Oscar Wilde said that nothing succeeds like excess and I have taken that to heart with my decorations, both exterior and interior. I've never gotten over the excitement that surrounds October 31st.

When I was a kid, we would all be vibrating in place for weeks before Halloween arrived because Halloween was, and still is, a major kids' holiday. Like Christmas and Easter, the reason was greed. At Christmas you got presents. At Easter, you got presents and candy. But at Halloween, you got candy, pure unadulterated candy and lots of it.

My parents would have to hold me by the collar until they felt it was dark enough to be respectable. My friends and I would then hit the streets like Vikings hunting for plunder.

We would do a huge loop to the west, stop back at our houses long enough to dump that load and then repeat the process to the east. We would stay out until adults would start yelling at us that it was too late and to get off the streets.

What wonderful things we got: full-sized candy bars, Smarties®, Old Fashioned Country Store Taffy® (the 4 x12-inch monster packs), candy necklaces, Pixie Sticks®, licorice, Bazooka Joe® bubble gum by the fistfull, Chuckles®, candy cigarettes, Nik-L-Nips®, Chiclets®, Good & Plenty®, wax lips, root beer barrels, Saf-T-Pops®, big Tootsie Rolls®, bubble gum cigars, and more.

We also got stuff that would have parents calling the police to report you if you handed them out today because only someone up to no good would give them to a child. Things made by loving hands. Things like brownies, cookies, hand-dipped caramel apples, fudge, and lopsided popcorn balls wrapped in wax paper. We also got fruit like apples and oranges that were both loved for their flavor and hated because they were invariably tossed into your bag right on top of that giant fresh-baked chocolate chip cookie Mrs. Erickson up the street had just given you.

When you got home, it was time to subdivide the booty. Everything was sorted into piles for favorites (the first to be eaten), the O.K.s (second string edibles), gum, rejects (the dregs of the candy universe you wouldn't eat on a bet), and inspectables (mostly the homemade stuff,





that your parents had to look at because even back then razor blade stories ran rampant).

All that has changed. Today nobody would ever dream of handing out anything homemade. If you did, it would go straight into the hazardous waste container as soon as it hit the tabletop for sorting. Aside from the possibility of foreign objects or substances being stuck into whatever it is, *E. coli*, salmonella, and all those other things with unpronounceable Latin names could be lurking around.

Sorting has been simplified as well. Now there are only three categories: will eat (good things you like), won't eat (bad things you don't like), and inedible (nonfood items). In recent years there has been a dramatic rise in the last category as more and more people move away from consumables. Pencils, note pads, plastic rings, temporary tattoos, mini super balls, and glow-in-the-dark plastic skeletons are turning up in trick or treat bags more and more often. By far the most insidious and misguided handout is toothbrushes. Do these people have any earthly concept of what Halloween is all about? Where did they come from, Latvia? Handing out toothbrushes at Halloween is like handing out Viking jerseys at a Packer game. It's the wrong thing in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Variety is the reason sorting has been simplified. There isn't any. For the most part, everybody hands out the same half dozen or so candies because everyone is buying the same monster megabags at the local super mart. I'm as guilty as the next guy. It's just too easy to grab that five-pound bag of Smarties®/Tootsie Roll®/Bottle Caps®/Nerds® or Reeses®/Nestle Crunch®/Kit-Kat® mixes that are piled up at the front of the store like the barricades in a production of *Les Miserables*.

I long for the old days when there were genuine surprises hidden in a trick or treat bag and when quantity also meant variety. I miss the opportunity to sit down with my kids to help them go through their Halloween swag because there are just too many different treats to go through alone. Most of all, I miss being able to glean off the best goodies for myself like my dad did with me. Those were the days.

Wisconsin is a state that loves food. We celebrate it at every opportunity. Here are food festivals and celebrations occurring in October and November. *Happy road trip and good eating at the end of your journey!*

NOVEMBER 16-18

Holiday Folk Fair International

Milwaukee, WI

(414) 225-6225 or (800) FAIR-INTL

www.folkfair.org

This not-to-be-missed event is one of the largest ethnic festivals in the United States. A world of cultures and customs can be experienced, felt, listened to, and best of all, tasted. Time-honored recipes, artifacts, ethnic music, and spirited folk dances along with workshops, language classes, and great international shopping from around the world.



HOLIDAY
FOLKFAIR
INTERNATIONAL



OCTOBER 5-7

Bayfield Apple Festival

Bayfield, WI

www.bayfield.org/visitor/applefestival.asp

Ranked as one of the top ten autumn festivals in the United States, the Bayfield Apple Festival features 46 orchards, the Big Top Chautauqua, food booths, a Venetian boat parade, and much more.



OCTOBER 19-21

Tater Fest

Rice Lake, WI

(800) 523-6318

www.innline.com/ricelakeweb

A celebration of all things potato, the Tater Fest features a tater feed, classic car show, run/walk, antique show, a Kids Fest, pancake breakfast, and other activities.



OCTOBER 5-6

DOZYNKI Harvest Fest

Stevens Point, WI

(715) 343-5356

www.spacvb.com/eventsoctober.html

This event fills downtown Stevens Point with narrated historic hayrides, a farmers market, Polish crafts and demonstrations, arts and crafts vendors, pumpkin painting, food, refreshments and entertainment, and a traditional Polish dinner.



NOVEMBER 2-4

Taste of the Holidays

Lake Geneva, WI

(262) 245-6598

www.lakegenewawi.com

Sample amazing specialty appetizers and delicious dinner and dessert wines, plus enjoy a Victorian tea and tour at Taste of the Holidays. You'll also find holiday fashions and gifts, decor ideas, and you can create beautiful holiday ornaments. Resort and hotel special weekend rates available. Located throughout Lake Geneva's retail shops and restaurants.



OCTOBER 6-7

Cheesefest

Schullsburg, WI

(866) 304-7229

www.shullsburgwisconsin.org/index.html

Schullsburg celebrates the 10th year of Cheesefest with events all day long on historic Water Street. Be sure to catch the cheese sculptures, arts and crafts, hayrides, live music, and a curd-eating contest.



NOVEMBER 17

Wollersheim Winery Ruby Nouveau Tasting

Prairie du Sac, WI

(800) 847-9463

www.wollersheim.com

Taste the first release of the 2007 Ruby Nouveau wine in the winery great room along with Wisconsin cheeses. The Ruby Nouveau is an estate-grown dry red with enticing fresh flavors and a zesty finish.

Tell us where to go! We don't know about all the fests out there so if you know of one you think we should include, drop us a line at info@bountifulcupboard.com.

