

HALLOWEEN IN THE 1960S

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By Paula Dunn

I may be old, but I'm glad I was born when I was. Growing up in the 1960s meant I was a kid when Halloween was still primarily geared toward kids. Back then, the holiday was mostly about going trick-or-treating — accent on the “treat.”

Oh, there were a few tricks, but they seem rather tame compared to the shenanigans of earlier years.

Sometimes someone's car horn would get stuck, and when I walked to school the day after Halloween, I often saw windows that had been soaped, and sidewalks that were smeared with pumpkin guts and/or littered with dried corn. That was it.

I'd rather clean off a window or sidewalk than to have to set an outhouse upright again!

(I never was completely sure what the dried corn was for. I'm just assuming it was thrown at people's windows to startle them.)

No, in the '60s, we weren't that interested in mischief. Mostly, we were all about seeing how much candy we could score — jawbreakers; all kinds of junior candy bars like Milky Ways, Snickers, and 3 Musketeers; candy cigarettes (yes, believe it or not;) Bazooka bubble gum; Tootsie Rolls; Lifesavers . . . the list goes on and on.

Sometimes we'd also come home with apples or homemade goodies such as popcorn balls or cookies. I remember my mother passing out pumpkin cookies in little, individual waxed paper bags one Halloween.

My cousin, the Dancing Librarian, noted that some people tended to hand out the same thing every year, so you knew which home to visit if you had a yen for that specific treat.

We didn't have set times for trick-or-treating. You might have seen kids in costume going door-to-door any evening around Halloween and trick-or-treating lasted longer — usually until 9 p.m.

Trick-or-treating was safer in my day. Nobody thought twice about sending older kids out to walk the neighborhood without adult supervision.

We never worried about candy that had been tampered with or finding razor blades in apples, and the idea that you might ring a doorbell and have someone greet you by waving a gun in your face never occurred to us.

There were no commercial "Haunted Houses" except the one at the Children's Museum in Indianapolis and it was nothing like the bloody, gory places you can visit now. It was just a spooky good time.

People also didn't decorate their homes as if they were competing in a Christmas lighting contest. You might have seen some Indian corn or bittersweet, but jack-o-lanterns were the main decoration. (Pumpkins cost less than a dollar then!)

Although store-bought costumes and plastic masks were around, homemade costumes were the rule, not the exception, and some of those were really creative.

The Dancing Librarian likes to tell about the time she took her youngest brother trick-or-treating. Their other siblings had taken off, leaving "B" (oh yeah, like I'm going to give you his real name — he'd probably kill me) home alone except for his big sister.

The DL was a teenager at the time and the notion of escorting a seven- or eight-year-old around the neighborhood to beg for candy wasn't very appealing to her, but she took pity on him . . . after a fashion.

B needed a costume and somehow the DL managed to talk him into dressing like comedian Red Skelton's "Junior, the Mean Widdle Kid" character, complete with short pants, knee socks, straw hat and a big bow around his neck. She went as his nanny.

It was really cold that night and B, with his bare knees, nearly froze. His discomfort was soon forgotten, however, after they returned home and he not only got to enjoy the candy he'd collected, the DL gave him most of hers.

Happy Halloween!

- Paula Dunn's From Time to Thyme column appears on Wednesdays in The Times. Contact her at younggardenerfriend@gmail.com