

## "WHEN HALLOWEEN WAS A TREAT"

It wasn't until about eight years ago that I became aware of the controversy that is threatening many of our traditional holidays and celebrations. There is a faction of our society that is for one reason or another, finding fault with (and some even go as far as to condemn us for) participating in these holidays and celebrations.

I was particularly shocked to learn that Halloween has been somehow construed by these groups of people as being a "pagan" celebration. They believe that the original celebration of Halloween began sometime around 500 BC. Supposedly, in those days on October 31<sup>st</sup>, the spirit of the dead would walk upon the earth. If you are like me, you may find it hard to comprehend that today's celebration is remotely connected to what was celebrated some 2500 years ago. Anytime we set aside a day of sharing and giving to our children seems to me to be a time that should be welcomed by all people, of any race, religion, or creed.

Today we open our doors and do more than give goodies to our children, we also teach them the act of generosity by our kindnesses. There was a simpler and less affluent time in our old neighborhood when our neighbors treated us kids to candy, pennies, nickels, and if you were really lucky, even dimes. For many kids in those days it was the only time all year that they experienced these generous offerings.

### **FRIDAY October 31, Circa 1956**

A few weeks ago I bought an ugly mask at Dick Creans. I have no idea of the likeness of the mask. I figure it is just an ugly face, until Uncle Al explains to me that it is the face of Quasimoto, The Hunch Back of Notre Dame. This gives him an opportunity to be creative. He takes an old Norfolk jacket from the top rack in his tailor shop that has been hanging there since as long as I can remember and puts it on me. He

stuffs an old throw pillow under the shoulder of the jacket, ties a rope around my waist and puts the mask over my face. "Now you are Quasimoto! He demonstrates to me how to walk hunched over with my one arm hanging down almost touching the ground. Aunt Martha hands me an old shopping bag with handles and says, "Be careful and be home at 9 o'clock!"

There they are Joey Rulli, a sailor, Nicky Marcellino as Frankenstein; Michael Miluzzo dressed as Dracula and Roger Serpico, Zorro, all waiting for me to go house to house. "Let's start at the Perillo's house and work our way down Judson Street," says Roger.

After a few houses we meet Ernie DiBenedetto dressed as a Hobo and Eddie Lynch, a Train Conductor. Ernie shouts, "Yo guys go to Arons Aunt Grace and Uncle Sam's house, they are giving out dimes." We quickly race down the street and collect a dime each. Jimmie Himes and his sister are not in costume, but are giving out candy from their porch. They both laugh at the way we all look. Jennie Guidotti gives each of us a Three Musketeers bar which I begin to eat immediately as we walk from house to house.

We walk around to 24<sup>th</sup> Street and team up with Sheila and Joanne Cutillo, both dressed as football players. After visiting the Gallo's, Petruzelli's, Trigiananni, Mateo's, Perrone's, Santore's, Peditto's and Picarello's Pharmacy, it is time for a break. We all sit down on Dr. Madonna's steps and begin to enjoy some of our goodies. Nicky says "Oh man a Mallo Cup!" He puts the entire cup into his mouth and rolls his eyes as he devours it within seconds. Sheila is enjoying a Tootsie Pop and I unsuccessfully negotiate with her to trade her a few Tootsie Pops for a Welch's Fudge Bar. So many kids are passing us while en route. Joey says, "We better get going or there will be nothing left for us. We continue up 24<sup>th</sup> Street

stopping at the Gulino's what a treat! Joe is passing out a bag filled with watermelon slices to every kid.

We stop at almost every house on the 3000 block and make our turn on Clearfield Street. There is a long line of kids outside Meli's Bakery, so we get in line. Eventually we all collect our jelly donut and place them in our bag and save them for later. We stop at Marion and Loretta Zoccolli's house and go catty-corner down Judson Street making sure we don't miss a house. When we get to Rogers house, his mom Nancy gives us each a bottle of soda to drink and a paper bag of mixed candy.

Everything is going great, then we knock on Al Porto's door and his wife Rose opens the door. One of us says, "Trick or Treat" and in a flash this very grotesque looking creature pops out from behind the door. The creature shouts, "Close the door I want to eat them!" We all barely make it out of the house before the door closes and we run down the street like a bat-out-of-hell. When we get to the corner we can hear Al laughing as he shouts, "You guys are chicken! I'm only playing with you!" My heart is pounding and Mike says, "We should of known that Al would play a trick on us!" We decide to sit down on Joey's step and eat our jelly donuts and drink the sodas that Roger's Mom gave us. We all eat the donuts very slowly, because they are so fresh and delicious. I look across the street into Uncle Al's tailor shop and I see my brother Anthony talking to Uncle Al. Out of nowhere come Mario Amici dressed in a black cassock and a priest collar with his cousin Antoinette Ciafrini dressed as a nun. They tell us that practically every store on 22<sup>nd</sup> Street is giving nickels to all the kids. We all immediately make our way to 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. I turn around as I am running and I see my brother come walking out of Uncle Al's tailor shop dressed as an Army Officer! Thanks to Uncle Al and his collection of unclaimed clothing! Happy Halloween!!!!!!!!!!