

Growing Up In Gaithersburg

Harvest and Halloween

By Marien Helz



mixture of nostalgia for the past summer and an anticipation for the big holidays to come.

The first of those holidays is, of course, Halloween which is more than anything else an event for new parents. It gives them a chance to dress up their babies and toddlers in doll clothes of various kinds and imagine them years ahead in various stations in life. The children generally accept this with puzzlement and wonder. Then as they grow to elementary school age, they start to get into this holiday themselves.



When my brother was in elementary school, he had not quite gotten the parameters of the trick or treating deal and was playing in his costume a day or two after Halloween. He and a neighbor boy thought that it would be a good idea to replenish their dwindling supply of candy and decided to go trick or treating again. Several doors down, there was a family with the grown son in his early twenties still living at home. The two boys knocked on the door and demanded "trick or treat" at which the young man told them that if they didn't get out of there, he would get his gun and shoot them. The boys ran to their homes terrified. In his fright, my brother had to let my mother know what happened. She laughed and said, "He's not going to shoot you," but my brother had learned all about keeping trick or treating to the designated day.

A year or so later some of the boys in my brother's class told him about a trick they had played. There was a house on Brooks Avenue on the way to the elementary school that had stone steps beside their front porch stairs, and on the platforms, they had beautiful large ceramic vases. The boys laughed about how they had knocked down and broken the vases.

Even though I was only in the primary grades, I felt that it was a terrible shame that beautiful things had



been broken for nothing.

Since that time, we've heard of cities burning in Halloween "fun," and people putting razor blades in apples given to trick or treaters. A few years ago, there was an item in the local paper about a boy who had been encountered by youths from a neighboring community who pushed him about and took his candy. He ended up with a broken arm. That's a pretty high price to pay for candy.

As a result of all the dangers, I've felt that when kids were too old to be accompanied by their parents, they were too old to go trick or treating. For my children, eight grade was the end of it. I think that my daughter, the eldest by four years, felt a little left out by that until she went to Franklin and Marshall College and learned that in Lancaster, it was against the law for anyone over thirteen to trick or treat.

She compensated the first year that she didn't go by making a costume for her younger brother. She made the scariest costume she could think of. He wore poster boards with calculations on them. He was a math test.

