



We Can Still Save Halloween

LATELY, DURING BEDTIME, I've been telling my 6-year-old son, Joey, stories of my own childhood. Lying next to him, I close my eyes and let a memory wash over me. Out of a jumble of emotions and images, details emerge.

One night, I recount getting dressed up as Little Red Riding Hood for a Halloween party. I was all smiles until I discovered my sister applying green face paint for her witch ensemble.

At 5, I envied not only my sister's green face paint but also those pointy fingernails.



My jealousy was instant and all-consuming—and yes, totally ridiculous. Still, I cried hard enough that my mom let me use her eyebrow pencil and blush to add freckles and rosiness to my cheeks. It was thrilling.

At age 6, I spent weekends in the crook of my dad's arm, watching classic movies on VHS tapes. A few days before Halloween that year, I decided to forgo my princess costume and trick-or-treat as Charlie Chaplin instead. As I penguin walked down Manhattan's Columbus Avenue in my bowler hat, a stranger called out, "Hey, Charlie!" and I puffed with pride over my own creativity.

Then came second grade. My family had just moved to the suburbs, and October 31 sneaked up on us. As my new

classmates took cute store-bought costumes out of their backpacks before the school carnival, my mother dashed into my classroom carrying a pile of her old clothes and pushing the stroller I'd used as an infant. Ten minutes later, I emerged from the restroom as "Mama Clown." I had circles of red lipstick on my cheeks, wore her polka-dot blouse as a dress, and pushed a Raggedy Ann doll in the infamous pram. When I saw the confused looks on the other kids' faces, I thought to myself, "I can laugh or cry right now." I chose laughter. Most of the time, I still do.

I tell Joey about the feeling of belonging that came from joining a group costume just a year later. Two friends and I went to a rummage sale and bought white shirts and costume jewelry and made swords out of tinfoil. On Halloween, we rolled up our khaki pants, and presto: We were the Three Musketeers.

And one day when my boys are older, I'll tell them about the melancholy Halloweens of middle school—when I outgrew dressing up and put on a brave face as friendships faded and the invitation to the final trick-or-treat failed to come. It led to a lightning bolt of self-awareness: Maybe another child would have liked to be the fourth or fifth musketeer back in third grade. Too often, we don't really see ourselves until it's too late.

The other day, during my morning doomscroll, I came across a Harris poll predicting what Halloween may look like this year: Just 27 percent of U.S. adults planned to take their kids trick-or-treating. The article bemoaned the



I used to try to coordinate our costumes, but it's more fun to pick our own.

impact on the candy industry, but my mind went straight to the loss for our kids. This holiday is so much more than a sugar rush. The candy, creativity, and cliques are the stuff of our kids' strongest memories and some of life's most indelible lessons.

That's why this month's *Parents* delivers the intel you need to make Halloween happen, even as you practice social distancing. You'll find safe spins on door-to-door personality, social skills, and Skittles obsession flourish (page 26), plus sweets (page 85), pumpkins (page 94), and costumes (page 30).

The year 2020 has felt like one big trick. This October, let's give our kids one big treat: a happy (or hilarious, or inventive, or cringe-worthy) Halloween, in spite of everything.

Julia



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