

Is Violence Halloween's New Goblin?

What's happening to Halloween? Is it getting away from the traditional idea of tiny goblins and witches with trick-or-treat bags and moving toward an increasing violence that could end in tragedy?

That's the thought put forward by a Redford Township teacher who made a detailed study of the American holiday for her master's thesis at Wayne State University.

Actually, Mrs. Shirley Henry, mother of two daughters and now an English teacher at Northern High School in Detroit, found in her study that the festival of witches and ghosts is becoming more sharply divided into two distinct parts.

THERE'S THE EVENING of Oct. 31, which, she said, is still largely regarded as a time for little kids to go out and get goodies.

The threat of violence touches this night for "the unforgiving boy or girl," her paper points out, in the fact that "some homeowners are handing out Halloween candy and apples with harmful materials in them."

But, she says, there is also Devil's Night, Oct. 30, which, perhaps significantly, used to be called Doorbell Night. And the trend, the paper adds, seems to be to begin Devil's night tricks a week or so early.

m. m. memos

Whatever Halloween may be as mentioned elsewhere on this page, in our house it's been a time of hoss-trading.

The costumes are always fun. Even Mother is getting a bit interested this year at the prospect of sending out a replica of herself and a Frito Bandito.

The kids love the trick-or-treating, and we're all glad we live in a neighborhood where there are just the right number of houses for just the right assortment of edibles.

But the high point of the evening has come when everyone gets home from the evening's travels. Then our living room starts looking like a variety store.

Everything is spread out and counted.

"How come you have six bags of corn candy when I just have four?" someone wonders. "Why don't you give me one for a licorice stick?"

"You don't like licorice anyway," is the answer. "I want three Tootsie rolls."

"Make it two Tootsie rolls and I'll throw in the licorice stick."

"O.K., but you've got to swap me a sucker for a package of gum, too."

Then the dealing starts with me.

"I've only had six things to eat. Little ones. Can I have two more before bed?"

"How about one more?" I try.

Of course, this is a picture of Halloween's past. We're down to two traders now, and one of them is thinking a bit of turning her efforts to UNICEF. Probably next year.

Yes, Halloween is indeed changing.

Margaret Miller

"HALLOWEEN is changing," Mrs. Henry concludes, "from a traditional night of relatively harmless childhood fun and revelry to a period of several nights when childhood and adolescent behaviors are often threatening to adults and even become destructive."

"Not only does a young person see this period as a time for 'getting even' and venting his frustrations on adults whom he dislikes, but as a time when his destructive tendencies will be condoned by adults."

"The reactions to this license are varied, and often become amusing and irritating to adults, particularly when they see these same youngsters out begging on Halloween night, observing this children's holiday in the traditional, fun-filled, non-threatening manner."

MRS. HENRY'S research included detailed questionnaires distributed to fifth and sixth grade classes in the Roosevelt School in Redford Township, two taped in-depth interviews of 10 boys and girls from the area near her home and between the ages of 14 and 16, and discussions with police officers including Redford Township Chief Edwin Gleza.

She said Chief Gleza had told her that in recent years the number of complaints about destruction of property had increased, and added:

"He told me that we are being warned by citizens that unless these activities stop, they are going to take matters into their own hands."

The chief told her, Mrs. Henry states in the paper, that last year officers "disarmed six homeowners who were either in their homes or on porches with loaded guns, ready to shoot at pranksters."

Chief Gleza, questioned by THE OBSERVER, said he is indeed concerned that ultimately a Halloween shooting might result.

MRS. HENRY is preparing research on the fifth and sixth graders, asked them—among other questions—if they did things on Devil's Night that they wouldn't do at other times. Many said they did.

Her results indicated, however, that this age group generally preferred the revelry of Halloween. Some comments were "I think kids are mistaking Halloween for themselves by going out on Devil's Night," and "Devil's Night is mean, Halloween is fun."

Regarding Devil's Night, Mrs. Henry noted a "straw in the wind" from one of the teens she interviewed.

This boy, she said, noted that he had seen "parents with small children, around five or six, out on Devil's night."

"The children would go to the door, ring the bell, and run while the parent walked on," she said.

MRS. HENRY also said there was evidence that drugs may be used by some pranksters, but found no clear pattern as to how this might affect general behavior.

She noted too that people who hand out harmful "treats" seemed to be considered by those she interviewed as "being mentally ill," with "revenge against pranksters possibly a prime motive for this kind of sick behavior."

Concluding, Mrs. Henry stated:

"It would appear to me that Halloween is changing because our society is changing."

"I can only report, not interpret, what I have seen and heard. If this data which I have compiled can be of use to anyone in the sciences and humanities who wishes to consider the implications of these new and rather unsettling aspects of a heretofore carefree children's holiday, I shall be satisfied that I have done more than merely report on a changing tradition."

"Halloween is changing because our society is changing."

MRS. HENRY considers her research with the teens through the taped interview system more valid than the part done by questionnaire with the younger children.

"Talking is better because you learn to recognize tones of voice and expressions and attitudes which are hard to write in questions," she explained.

She selected the youths from the same general neighborhood and noted their backgrounds in her paper. Her conclusions here indicated that this group

considered trick-or-treat begging to be in the domain of younger kids and Devil's Night the time for teens.

Specifically, her conclusions noted:

"They are more often boys than girls who travel in groups and have a tendency to show off for each other while playing pranks."

"There seems to be a hierarchy of pranks ranging from doorbell ringing to destructive window breaking."

"Many youngsters feel this Devil's Night period is a time when they can get even with people they do not like. Generally bad-tempered homeowners and those who will give chase are more apt to be the targets."

"The pranksters want attention and enjoy being chased but not being caught."



HARMLESS PRANK or destructive behavior? (Observer photo by Vince Wittek)

Spotlight on Women

Get It In Writing, Advises Psychologist Haim Ginott

By MARGARET MILLER
Women's Editor

Get it in writing, says Dr. Haim Ginott, and as a parent you're on the way to solving many baffling confrontations with your children.

In his lecture that opened the Livonia Town Hall Wednesday, the famed child psychologist and writer mentioned several situations in which the pen is mightier than the tongue-lashing.

For instance, when brothers and sisters quarrel:

"Tell them both you want to hear all about it—in writing," he told one of the biggest Town Hall audiences in recent years.

"If they continue their accusations against each other, suggest they put that in the report too. Tell them to elucidate, clarify all points, make personal recommendations."

"Of course, this is optional. But if they do it, they learn to write reports. If they don't, they disappear, and you're out of the middle."

THE WRITTEN word also was suggested for a child complaining. "Thank you for calling it to my attention—I'll write it down," or for the teen who objects to homework—"Why don't you write your teacher a letter and explain how overworked you are."

And parents can write notes of appreciation too, he said.

"You can leave your child a note saying you noticed how gentle he was when he walked the dog," he explained, "though it may be the first time in weeks he's walked the dog at all."

THE AUTHOR of "Between Parent and Child" and "Between Parent and Teen-Ager" also had a recipe for handling squabbling siblings too young to take pen in hand.

"Repeat each complaint verbatim," he said. "Like this: 'Mother, Debbie hit me.' 'Wendy, Debbie says you hit her.'"

"She called me a cheater," "Debbie, Wendy says you called her a cheater." "Well, she did cheat." "Wendy, Debbie says you did cheat."

After a while, Dr. Ginott said, they get so disgusted they decide to talk to each other, and mother is out of the middle again.

THE SPEAKER told the women who nearly filled the Terrace Theater and jammed 250-strong into the Mayflower Meeting House for a celebrity luncheon that he gave up teaching in Israel early in his career "because I couldn't discover any connection between what I was teaching and what the children were learning."

He said his principal suggested he go back to school.

"And after I went to New York Teachers' College, I realized it was hopeless," he added. "At college, they wanted us to believe children came to school with a terrific

thirst for knowledge. I knew better—they came to make my life miserable. They succeeded."

So, he related, he became a child psychologist, and admitted success in that field to the fact that he talks with children in a manner different from that of other adults they encounter.

"WHEN I TALK to a child," he said, "I don't treat him as a friend. I expect an enemy because he's a child. The interesting thing about parent-child relationships is that we are their friends and they don't know it, and they are our enemies and we don't know it."

"Why do you think children and grandparents get along so well?"

Dr. Ginott said that "just as royal children are treated as royalty from the very start, in a democracy children should be treated as human beings right from the start."

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BETWEEN PARENT AND PSYCHOLOGIST — Mrs. Sue Landes of the Livonia Town Hall committee has Dr. Haim Ginott sign a program for her teen son George during a chat at the celebrity luncheon. (Observer photo by Vince Wittek)