

## For One Day

Grownups debate the merits of Halloween celebrations, questioning the appropriateness of exposing children to frightening images that often accompany this holiday. But if you're a kid, the allure of Halloween has little to do with the scary stuff.

Halloween is perhaps children's favorite holiday, second only to the gift-bonanza that Christmas has become. Halloween is made for kids, offering in one short day the combination of two of life's greatest pleasures.

In the first place, on Halloween, everyone gets to pretend to be somebody else. Rock star wannabe's don spiky wigs. Little ones who dream of growing up to be firemen wear big heavy coats, boots and helmets. Children fresh from their own pediatrician appointments get to put on lab coats and wear stethoscopes around their necks.

When else can we get away with such pretense? And yet, on Halloween, this charade is not only permitted, but encouraged. Parents and children plot together for weeks about what the child will "be" for Halloween. They gather props and costumes as the child's excitement builds. Planning this deceit, they wonders if their friends will recognize them.

What a delicious thing, to get to be someone else for one day. And speaking of "delicious" brings me to the other really wonderful thing about Halloween: candy. An array and amount of candy unimaginable to even the most ardent sweet tooth.

Imagine the child's perspective on this opportunity: You approach a house, ring the doorbell, say three words, and receive a Snickers bar in return. Young children can't believe their good fortune.

I know: Candy is unhealthy, sugar harms teeth, and childhood obesity is on the rise. But those things are caused by the accumulated negative effects of daily behavior. Along comes Halloween to smash those nutrition lessons we teach all year long. October 31 is a once-a-year candy extravaganza, that one day when tradition determines that Candy is King. Enjoying this festival food is part of the uproarious fun of Halloween.

Families choose how to manage the loot. Some parents say, "*Eat what you want tonight. Tomorrow it goes in the trash.*" Others decree, "*Two pieces tonight, and one a day until it's gone*" (or until Mom conveniently buries the candy bag in the garbage.) But on Trick-or-Treat night, candy is ok. More than that, candy is the point. And if kids have a nutritious dinner before they start out for the evening's rounds, they'll probably survive the sugar influx.

I agree that the scary images we associate with Halloween are frightening and unnecessary. But the joy of pretending and reveling in candy is the stuff of happy childhood memories. I say bring on the costumes and the Coconut Joys.