



TRICK OR TREAT?



It was an ordinary day. Nothing special or extraordinary--just a day--another step in the endless succession of days. There were things to do, places to be, people to talk with, plans to dream about. I wasn't really even thinking much about IT. In fact, it can be days, even weeks, in between tears now. (How nice . . . I once knew I would never stop crying.)

So, I was a bit surprised when I found myself slipping back into the past, back into the memories that I hadn't listened to in a long time.

Maybe it was the fall air. Perhaps it was the leaves rustling down the street, or maybe it was just "one of those things" . . . a moment when the door between yesterday and today is left ajar and time becomes mingled and blurred. At first, I was afraid; but gradually, I relaxed and let myself drift through the memories, caught momentarily somewhere between fantasy and reality.

It all started in the store. I only had a "few things" to pick up, but I went down that aisle anyway. I was drawn like a magnet to the rows and rows of costumes, masks and bags of candy. There were spiders and bats and ghosts and skeletons and candy corn and little round, soft-center pumpkins. There were plastic noses to try on, clown wigs to wear and magic wands to wave. There were jars of face paint and weird-colored hair spray and false teeth and "vampire blood" in a tube.



The aisles smelled like warm rubber and I remembered the kind-of-scary feeling of trying on one of those ugly face masks. I never wanted anyone to know I didn't like being inside that mask, but my friends thought it "looked wild" so I splurged my allowance and bought it. It was so long ago, but today my mind recalled that warm, rubbery smell. I slipped backward into memory this afternoon as I tried on a mask at the store . . .

The costume characters have changed a bit, but the dilemma of "who 'ya gonna be?" is still the same. I wasn't the only one wandering in those aisles today, but I was the tallest . . . the oldest . . . maybe even the loneliest. I shouldn't have gone down that aisle. I just had a "few things to get," but as I drifted over toward FANTASY LAND, I fell backward into "long ago."

By the time I got home (with the mask hidden beneath the few sensible items I really did need), I was really gone. As I hit the kitchen with a crazed look, I found the cookies; then I rummaged through the records until I found the one. After that, I hauled out the scrapbook

It was Halloween all over again, and it was the first day of school and the first day of fall, too. It was pumpkin-carving time and time to rake the leaves into huge piles--then jump into them while no one was looking. It was football time--cold nights and heavy guilts and roaring fire time--and cozy time and time when lists didn't dictate.

Once again, through the scrapbook pages, it became good time. Funny how time erases the rough edges of reality and we see less and less of the sharpness and more and more of the beauty. Our vision into the past isn't very accurate, but it is ours.



I could still feel the warm stickiness of the popcorn balls. (We aren't allowed to hand out homemade goodies these days; spinach fiber bars or coupons for fake-fat ice cream have replaced real happiness). I remembered the excitement of finding just the right pumpkin and the anguish of costume selection. My fingers could still feel the taffeta and nylon net of a lifetime of fairy princesses and royal naves.

As I ran down the aisle of "yesterday" and smelled the smells and tasted the tastes, I ate a candy pumpkin and fingered the costumes required for a life I no longer live. I "tossed in the towel," "gave up the ghost," "fell off the wagon," and tore up the "to do" list. I tossed out the rules and let myself go.

Putting on the rubbery face mask--the one with the scary face that looks a lot like me on the inside sometimes--I donned the costume. I selected my goody bag and flew through the neighborhood, searching for the children to whom I had once given treats. I kept searching the faces, looking for the one. Once, I thought I saw the face. I know I felt his breath on my cheek, and once again I became the mother counting the minutes on the clock, waiting for his safe return. It was only the PTA carnival, but he was so young, and the night was so dark!

The pages of the scrapbook carried me deep into the magic, reminding me of the adventures, the fun, the challenges. Captured on film, that life seemed so far away, almost as if it had belonged to someone else. Were those my hands holding the birthday cake while the candles melted into the frosting? Were those his friends, and those of his big sister, all dressed up in the characters of then? Who could tell? The disguises were so perfect; each one chosen to hide the identity of the person within.

Did we really live that life or was it all just a fantasy, a wish so strongly imagined that dreams became true? After all, Halloween is supposed to be a mystical night when lots of unexplained things happen. Maybe none of those memories are real; sometimes I find myself thinking that. But, the pages of the scrapbook felt real beneath my fingers, and the pictures in my heart were still there even after I closed the pages of the book. So it must have happened. You don't get memories by magic!



The first knock at the door broke the trance, and I struggled to get up off the floor, my knees creaking with the reality of age. It used to be easier to sit on the floor making costumes and building table tents and planning "Indian attacks."

The knock on the door jarred me back to now, and the bowl of treats waiting beside the door told me I had only been dreaming. There would be no familiar face at my door tonight--except in my memory. There would be no costumes to admire or characters to guess; no ooohs and aaahs to dispense along with the individually wrapped candies (made with real chocolate because Halloween deserves real goodies).

Now, there were only the sights and sounds of another night of memory-making for all the little ghosts and goblins who appeared at my door. Somewhere someone would be waiting for each one to come home safely, to inspect the "booty" and to dispense a few select pieces before bedtime. Somewhere, someone would be gathering in a few more memories to sustain them in the future.

I had had my time and so had he. Our time was forever captured in the scrapbook pages and in my heart. I could taste them anytime I needed to. It could be Halloween anytime I opened the book and wandered back into my memories. I knew I had not lost what was; it is a part of me and even after the sadness goes, the memories remain.

I traveled backward so I could remember the treats in life, not just the tricks. A good friend taught me that, and today I remembered.

Trick or treat? You decide...

