

Bill Rea ? Halloween is upon us

Today, or more accurately, tonight is Halloween.

As of this writing, I don't yet know how it's all going to play out. You see, I'm getting a bit of jump on things, and I started writing this piece last Thursday morning while I was waiting for the meeting or Peel Regional council to start.

I hope I don't have to work tonight (so does my wife). There will be a lot of kids coming to our door, and she doesn't like doing solos in such situations. And with all the kids who will be out on the street, I'd just as soon not have to drive if I can possibly avoid it.

So while there's some question on how things are going to go through the evening, I should point out that preparations in our household started some weeks ago (we're also starting to get ready to host Christmas dinner).

Since I'm not a parent, I am not qualified to comment on the problems involved with getting kids ready for the big evening. I have a nephew and niece who still take part in the festivities, and I expect we'll be seeing them during the course of the evening.

The main preparations involve trying to anticipate how many trick-or-treaters we're likely to get at our door, and then making sure we are ready.

As is the case in so many parts of life, location plays a big role in the planning.

My wife and I live in an urban area, similar to the situation in which I pretended to grow up. That means kids in our area have a certain variety in the houses to which they can get, meaning they'll have enough goodies to last at least a week. Beth, on the other hand, spent her formative years living on a farm, and she has told me she was very limited in the number of homes available to her. The aforementioned nephew and niece live on that same farm, but their dad has the wit to transport them to a neighbourhood where the pickings are a bit more plentiful, which explains why I suspect we'll be seeing them. Never underestimate the value of aunts and uncles.

The subdivision in which we live was brand new when we moved in, so it took a couple of years for things to settle down to the point where we could predict how many kids we'd get at our door. There was one year when we ran out after less than an hour. So the next year, we doubled our expectations, and got hardly any kids. Also, since we were buying treats in such bulk, we paid close attention to the price tags and less to the actual quality. That was a big mistake, since someone had to eat the vast amounts of left overs that were left over.

Now we get decent stuff, regardless of the cost, concentrating mainly on stuff I like (don't worry, Beth gets a say in this too).

The task of acquiring these treats actually started just after Labour Day ? no sense in waiting until the last minute. We also spread things out over the several weeks in the hopes of smoothing out the impact on our grocery budget (buying this stuff in quality is costly too).

So one week in advance, just about everything is in readiness.

Unlike when I was a kid, we are not in the habit of getting a pumpkin for Halloween. Good thing too. My artistic skills are seriously lacking, and I'm not sure Beth would let me handle the knife to carve it. I guess pumpkins are still popular, considering how many of them you see in stores and markets. I've just never bothered with it.

There was a time, early in our household days, when I considered getting us a pumpkin. There was always one at our house for Halloween when I was a kid. My mother allowed my dad to play with knives, and the man was something of an artist (although I don't think he ever completely appreciated that). He was also a little innovative. Rather than looking scary, the face on our jack-o-lanterns always looked a little perplexed.

More important, when my friends and I were on our trick-or-treating rounds, a pumpkin on the porch was a sign the house was open for business.

Over the years, we have found that just leaving the porch light on is enough. And we just turn it off when we run out, or when it's obvious the little kids have finished their rounds for the night. I have a bit of a problem handing out candy to bigger kids, especially boys who look like they could use a shave.

Although bumming free candy is a little annoying, I saw worse from some bigger kids when I was doing my rounds many years ago. One fellow, who had long outgrown shelling out, but who was still young enough to be mischievous, celebrated one Halloween night by draining some gas from the tank of his motorcycle, pouring it into the street and throwing a match into it. It wasn't a large amount, and the fire was relatively small, and it was far enough away from my house that my parents didn't find out about it until years later. But that is not recommended behaviour.

There was year when a gang of three rotten kids stole my bag. I ran after them for a bit, then gave up and tearfully ran home, spilling out my tale of woe to my folks. My dad told me to get in the car, and Mom told my older brother Michael to go with us (I don't think he wanted to). We drove around the neighbourhood in a search that common sense told us was probably hopeless. We went rather

far afield. A couple of miles from the scene of the crime, we saw a group of three kids in the distance, and I guess on a hunch, Dad drove in that direction. I recognized the trio with no trouble. The kids looked in the car and recognized me. The three robbers took off, and Michael bolted from the car like the high school halfback he was at the time, with me on his heels. Dad later said he remembered parking the car, then starting to explain the plan of action to his offspring, he suddenly realized he was on his own. He later said he was impressed at the way we got all three of the culprits back to the car, using tactics that would probably get us criminally charged today. I hope tonight goes on without kids having to collect memories like that

