

Rediscovering the red between the orange and green

By Brock Weir

Gourds are a particularly forgiving medium.

With an unanticipated pumpkin thrust in my general direction on Sunday afternoon, I had to quickly come up with a game plan.

I thought I polished off the bulk of my Halloween preparations in good time on Thursday night after getting home from the office when I tackled a pumpkin purchased earlier that day. Keeping things simple and taking inspiration from a nearly-forgotten film in the Hammer Horror catalogue, I started with an evocative character's strikingly-shaped eyepatch and carved the traditional jack-o-lantern in accordance with however the eye-patch turned out.

Aside from miscalculating the angle on which I should have carved the pumpkin lid, necessitating a skewer poked from one side of the pumpkin through the other in an attempt to keep its chapeau in place, it was a reasonable success and I settled comfortably into the idea that things were done.

Another miscalculation was the fact the weekend would be spent with a couple for whom Halloween is an everyday celebration, not strictly limited to our traditional spooky season.

Their lawn was already festooned with just about everything to instill the creepy spirit into everyone going by upon our arrival on Friday night ? but it seems the vision wasn't quite ready for prime time.

Tweaks were made throughout the weekend and just when I thought everything was in place, then came the unexpected pumpkin carving.

Not wanting to retread old ground, I attempted a new freehand design on a specific theme ? which was an unqualified disaster. Thankfully, as far as mediums go, pumpkins are, as mentioned above, a forgiving art medium and a few deft turns of the knife transformed my error into something generically pleasing to the eye.

Out we went to find the perfect place for each pumpkin on the already packed lawn, somewhere amid the other jack-o-lanterns, figures representing many of the creepiest Halloween movie villains, and even a rickety wagon transformed into a smoke-spewing skeleton-driven hearse.

It was hard not to get caught up in the Halloween spirit, and this was only driven home further when it was pointed out, and rightly so, that for kids with only a few festivals under their belt, Halloween 2021 would likely be one of, if not the one they will look back on with the most fondness.

After all, it has been a long 19 months. For the most part, they missed out on last year's trick-or-treating and, in my highly unscientific poll of strolling the neighbourhood and seeing what was what, neighbours were making up for the lost time of Halloween 2020 and went all out with huge and vivid displays on their front lawns to entice trick-or-treaters.

It was a long evening with certainly no shortage of kids and teens coming by for their goodies. Yet, by the time a kid of about seven or eight stopped to take a look at this particularly festive display and let out an 'I'm SO done!?' as he turned on his heel to go onto the next house, the sentiment was more or less shared around the driveway and a night was essentially called.

As I write this on Monday, November, 1, this would be a time in an ordinary year to say, 'Now what??'

It wasn't all that long ago when store owners had the good taste to wait until Halloween was well and truly behind us before hauling

out any leftover Christmas stock and reshelving it alongside bright and shiny new red and green baubles.

Those days, as anyone who has entered a big box store over the last week or two knows, are long over as inflatable Santas were competing with straw-filled scarecrows for customers' attention long before Halloween was nigh.

November is often seen as an in-between month, and I am sometimes guilty of feeling this way. By the time November rolls around, the bloat of Halloween is just starting to pass and people begin counting the days until Christmas bloat ? or, at the very least, counting down the days on your calendar until you're finished work or school to enjoy the season in peace.

But it isn't clear sailing right through to the winter holiday.

Not unlike the kids who were out celebrating Halloween with extra zeal on Sunday night, many doing so for the first time since October 31, 2019, veterans, volunteers and supporters will be out over the next week raising money for veterans through a final push for poppy sales.

It will be the first time since November of 2019 that these individuals who have been able to hit the streets with their iconic symbol of Remembrance, which celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, at nearly full-capacity.

There might be a sense that this is a chance to make up for lost time after many opportunities to collect much-needed funds for veterans and their families were put on the backburner.

Rightly so, and who can blame them? While much of the world was also put on pause, the same cannot be said for members of our military who not only kept up with training but also unexpectedly found themselves on the frontlines of a global pandemic, being deployed to specific institutional hotspots overwhelmed by the virus and everything that went along with it.

Veterans living with the horrors of historic and more recent conflicts have only had their struggles exacerbated by the isolation, uncertainty and recovery that has become part and parcel of our collective fight against an invisible enemy.

Let's slow our collective march towards the holiday season by pausing this week to do our part to make the community a sea of red poppies ahead of Thursday's Remembrance Day commemorations.

The support it generates is desperately needed today and deserves its own time in the spotlight.

Before we look ahead, let's take a moment to reflect and make this Remembrance Day as much of a return to normal as possible.

The work of Canadian Forces members, unlike the work of that one sassy trick-or-treater on Sunday night, is never truly done.