

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

Four decades and more ago, during my idyllic childhood, Halloween was a community event. Along with the other neighborhood youngsters, my sisters and I would dress in outlandish costumes and head out into the chill autumn twilight to knock on doors, seeking candy on the one night of the year our parents put very few controls on just how much we ate. It was always a fun time and I have nothing but good memories of the event.

The Halloween of my youth and that of today are the same, but different. For example, I was usually a clown. This year, however, clowns are too scary. Instead kids are being dressed as political candidates or other comic book villains.

We trick-or-treated in full darkness beneath an often clouded moon augmented by a handful of dim porchlights. Now most parents want their children done before the sun slips below the horizon, so door knocking may begin in the mid-afternoon and is usually complete before a late supper.

While there are still neighborhoods where little caravans of costumed youngsters race from house to house to collect their spoils, these days many trick-or-treaters go to mall parking lots or other designated safe zones. It no longer seems ideal to send unaccompanied minors up dark pathways to stranger's homes to receive some kind of sweet. We prefer having a stranger handing chocolates out of their trunk in a parking lot instead.

The treats have changed a lot too. While it is estimated that Americans spent 2.6 Billion dollars on candy last year, my bag was often filled with home grown or homemade sweets. Apples harvested from backyard trees and brightly-colored candied popcorn balls were popular. There weren't so many varieties of fun size packages of candy, so we treasured the little boxes of Dots or Junior Mints and the handful of Tootsie Rolls which came alongside cellophane-wrapped fudge or chocolate chip cookies.

Examining my kids' collection of confections last year, I found that they each had scored almost a hundred distinct miniature treats with very few duplications in brand or flavor. And absolutely nothing homemade or unwrapped. That ship has sailed, pushed out to sea by fifty years of urban legends about poisoned cupcakes or drug-laced brownies. In spite of the lack of

credible evidence that there has ever been an occurrence of this sort, the idea is out there, so we must be cautious.

That's not to say there is nothing to worry about. Every year since the early 80s there have been confirmed reports of pins or needles being inserted into candies in an effort to cause some kind of Halloween harm. Usually no more than one or two, and none seem to have required any medical attention, but check your kids' candy just in case. And while you're at it, turn it into a teaching moment about not doing things that might hurt others. Then teach them about taxes by collecting 36% of whatever they've brought home.

I hope you have a good time out there tonight. Be safe. If you're walking, be visible. If you're driving, be careful. And if you're giving out full-sized Charleston Chews, be my neighbor.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort with today's KINS Community Comment.