

I LOVE HALLOWEEN. SORT OF. by Kim Mooney

Well, OK, I love dressing up and I'm particular about what candy I'm willing to trade, but there's something that really bothers me about it. It's lost almost all of the original meaning of how we remember or interact with our dead ancestors and spirits. It's morphed into a commercial night (or month) in which ghouls come crawling out of the graves, bats suck our blood, ghosts come wailing down on us, and caricatures of monsters (who often look like very, very sick people) are everywhere. It makes death across the board look frightening, grotesque and evil. Without personal experiences and gentle depictions to counteract that, this whole production becomes an obstacle to becoming more comfortable with this precious and important part of life.

So look up some of the powerful traditions around the world at this time of year when, as the Celts say, 'the veils are very thin between the worlds.' Most of us are familiar with the Mexican Day of the Dead where offrendas (altars) covered with photos and favorite foods and objects, honor the dead person. The cemeteries are filled with families spending the night, decorating candle-covered graves and catching their ancestors up on what the family's been doing.

There are other lovely traditions around the world that can also inspire you to celebrate your ancestors with joy and appreciation. Spend some time with your kids Googling All Saints Day, the Christian counterpart to Day of the Dead. Find out what Jack did that started the jack o' lantern tradition. Learn why we started wearing costumes in the first place. Did you know that part of our custom of feeding children candy comes from an ancient belief that the children were the ancestors in new bodies and that it was a good idea to keep them well fed and well cared for?

Bring back the important practice of remembering where we came from, with humans all over the world doing the same thing. Create your own family rituals. It can be incredibly meaningful to make a small offrenda of your own, light a candle, and tell stories about grandma and grandpa. Then suit the kids up in their costumes and take them out to trick or treat (do you know why we do that?) And have them save me some Tootsie Rolls.