

KIM STOCK

Halloween has religious roots

Trick or treat. It's the time of the year when leaves fall. The pumpkins are carved and ready to be lit. Ghosts and goblins will be waiting on your doorstep with pillow sacks full of candy. 'Tis the time to be filled with the Halloween spirit.



When we know why a certain day is a holiday, our knowledge brings more meaning to our actions. ... The Celtic superstitions about Samhain are the reason we celebrate Halloween today.

Merry Halloween! Every Christmas season, somebody writes a column about the true meaning of the holiday. This has become a tradition similar to age-old customs such as decorating an evergreen tree. A reminder of the true meaning of Dec. 25 and eggnog go hand in hand.

This day also was the Celtic New Year.

What about the true meaning of Halloween? Many children, myself included, were misled to believe that Linus from the Peanuts gang knew the answer. We wanted to believe the real meaning of Halloween was indeed that the Great Pumpkin visited children in pumpkin patches.

On Oct. 31, the Celtic priests, called Druids, held a ceremony to honor Samhain's triumph over the sun god. The Druids sacrificed and burned animals, crops and people in a huge bonfire. During this celebration the people wore costumes made of animal heads and skins to ward off any evil spirits.

honed the souls of the dead. The souls of those who had died the year before were especially honored. Thus, Oct. 31 became known as All Hallows' Eve, or Halloween.

Most know the story about Jesus lying in a manger, but we still are ignorant about why on Oct. 31 people are allowed to dress up in silly costumes and grab for wet apples with their teeth.

The Celtic people feared Oct. 31 because they believed evil spirits lurked everywhere. They believed if they kept fires in their homes, evil spirits would leave them alone.

Jack-o'-lanterns came about from an Old Irish legend. The legend is about a stingy man named Jack. He was forced to wander the earth after he died because of all the sins he had committed in his life. Jack was searching for a resting place.

Halloween began more than 2,000 years ago with the Celts in Ireland and France. To explain the change of the warm summer season to a cold and bitter winter, the Celts made up a fable.

Samhain was believed to have conjured up dead people on this day and turn them into other forms, especially cats.

The devil offered Jack a piece of burning coal. Jack stuffed the coal into a turnip, creating a lantern to help him light his way. Irish children used to carve smiling faces in turnips on Halloween night to scare witches away. When the Irish came to America, they replaced carved turnips with pumpkins.

The Celts believed in a sun god who would shine on their crops and cause them to grow. Each year, the sun god was attacked and held prisoner for six months by Samhain, the god of the dead. While the sun god was held prisoner, Samhain caused the days to become darker and colder.

When the Romans conquered Britain and France, they added their own festivals. The Romans had autumn festivals called Feralia and Pomona Day. Feralia was to honor the dead. On Pomona Day, thanks was given for a good harvest by spreading out apples and nuts. This is where the custom of bobbing for apples comes from.

Holidays come and go. Often we celebrate these days because of mindless tradition. When we know why a certain day is a holiday, our knowledge brings more meaning to our actions. Today, we may not believe in Samhain like the Celts, but the Celtic superstitions about Samhain are the reason we celebrate Halloween today.

The Celts held festivals for the sun god and Samhain on Nov. 1.

The festival of the dead gradually was incorporated into Christian ritual by the Catholic Church. On Nov. 1, a festival known as All Hallows, or All Saints' Day,

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E. HUGHES SHANKS

Teachers, parents cooperate

This past summer, my 14-year-old nephew Michael came to visit for three weeks, and he's been here ever since. My wife and I figured, "Why not?"



What we "expect" is that any child will be challenged to reach for higher goals. We consider ourselves partners of the school system in this effort.

We've worked hard raising another teen-ager, 16-year-old Rhea, since last winter. Things have been going well for him, so why not try the same with Michael?

again, I want to make sure I'm getting my money's worth ... so that's why you're going," I said.

was all we might be able to expect.

We've concentrated a lot of effort in developing a good relationship with the public school system. We feel our relationship, especially with his teachers, is important. In the short time we've been involved with the school system, we have seen some remarkable things done with Rhea.

Michael seems to understand the value of money more than most teen-agers. I was pretty sure the property-tax angle convinced him this was extremely important. So, I quit while I was ahead.

I wanted to scream! What we "expect" is that any child will be challenged to reach for higher goals. We consider ourselves partners of the school system in this effort. During one rough period, we went to Rhea's school every day, helping to ensure that both the school's needs and Rhea's needs were met.

Michael and I recently attended parent-teacher conferences. On the way there he asked, "Why do I have to go?"

We've hoped school officials always would see our efforts as an earnest commitment toward helping them educate. Perhaps most school officials find it unusual, if not hard to believe, that as parents we would give ourselves to them.

Several weeks ago, I sent a note to Michael's teachers stating that "C's and D's are unacceptable ..." In retrospect, the word "unacceptable" may have given some teachers the wrong impression. But I also stated that "I have time to help Michael" with his schoolwork.

"I need you to help me understand what your teachers need from you."

Rhea is in high school, and Michael is in the eighth grade. We figured that what worked for Rhea as a ninth-grader would work for Michael now. But Michael is in a different school, so we are trying to develop a relationship with a new school. Unfortunately, our zealously may have backfired.

Just as we had done for Rhea, we were letting the school know that they had our help. While meeting with Michael's teachers, I reiterated that the school system had our complete support. I repeated "C's and D's are unacceptable."

I could tell by the look on his face that he didn't believe me, so I tried again.

I think at least one of Michael's teachers thinks that because we've said "C's and D's are unacceptable" at home, we are hard disciplinarian types who whack their kids on the heads for getting low grades.

As they described his progress, I was pleased to hear mostly good things. If his grade was a C, I asked specifically what help they wanted from us to raise it above that level.

"I want you to see how I operate. You and I need to work together," I said. He seemed to be kind of listening, so I kept talking.

One teacher actually warned me not to punish Michael for low grades. I thought: What a bizarre concept. We wouldn't do that. Low grades have natural consequences that take their own course. This same teacher also implied that a C

This is something we will do no matter how high our property taxes go up.

"We need to make sure your teachers have what they need in order to help you. We expect them to bring out your best efforts."

"We need your input. What you have to say is very important. We need you there to tell us what you want," I said.

Any time you tell a teen-ager something about getting what they want, they'll listen. But I still wasn't sure if he was OK with going, so I tried one more thing.

I explained how property taxes paid for the school district and that as they rose, so did my expectations of the school system.

"... And since taxes went up

Shanks is a graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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