

Opinion

The diversity in Halloween

Well, that didn't take long. Just as soon as the Halloween decorations came down, the Christmas decorations go up.

Halloween, perhaps the favorite holiday of American children (Christmas morning notwithstanding) is finally over. The Farmer's Almanac says 90 million pounds of chocolate are sold Halloween week, and more than \$3 billion is spent on costumes (some of you are nodding your heads).



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And, without sounding like the nasty Oogie Boogie (from the *Nightmare Before Christmas*), I will not miss the sad, deflated figures of witches and spider webs that lay dormant during the day, only to come alive as night approaches. Having said that, I know they will (soon?) be replaced by deflated Frosty's, Santa's and the inevitable red-nosed Rudolph.

In a golf course subdivision that prides itself on its craftsman-style homes, you might

have thought you were strolling through a graveyard the size of downtown Braselton.

While the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays usually lead the way in decorations, there was no shortage of 13-foot Jack Skeletons, nasty skeleton dogs, grave markers, dolls on porch swings and balloon spiders scattered across the otherwise neatly cut Bermuda lawns and edged driveways.

An amalgamation of Truman's World, Pleasantville and Bedford Falls, this Hoschton neighborhood became the "Town of Halloween" ("...this is Halloween, everybody yell and scream").

Yes, like many of you who enjoyed a night of trick or treating, we sat outside on our steps (pulling up barbecue stained camping chairs from the last little league game) where we could get closer to the little trick or treaters.

Such is the turn of the seasons in modern suburbia, but there was another interesting phenomenon occurring on our well-endowed streets on Halloween night.

On a night when we all celebrate the children in us (yes, some made that last-minute trip to Costco, so they could buy discounted fog machines and rear screen projectors showing artificial flames inside the house), there was the joy of a different kind on the streets of this community.

Diversity came to a neighborhood that could really use it—and it came in the form of little Mario and Luigi's, Angels, Spidermen, Ninja's, Dinosaurs, Lions and Clowns.

But it's not just about the diversity of costumes I'm talking about. It's the kids who were wearing them.

Halloween in Hoschton brought with it a remarkable assimilation of cultures and customs.

We welcomed little people representing nearly every ethnic minority in America.

We had little Hispanic goblins, Asian Skeletons, African American Angels and Indian Dracula's (and every other kid smiling behind those masks). We had kids in wheelchairs whose siblings were climbing the porch steps to the front door on their behalf and other little ones in strollers, all of them armed with plastic pumpkins or Kroger sacks. The older ones, both residents and visitors, usually had pillow cases (hoping for a big haul).

It's the night when parents and kids alike get to dress up and be whomever they want to be—and where streets become a reflection of what Hometown U.S.A. might look like in a perfect world.

These kids were all smiles, as their parents waited patiently on the sidewalks or followed alongside the little ones in their cars. Our neighborhood became a miniature United Nations, with all sorts of short little trick or treaters, some being pulled in wagons and others on the backs of trucks, giggling and watching the candy being dropped into their bags.

But there was one thing they all had in common: they were all full of smiles, and each group of kids was as polite as the one before them.

No, in case you were wondering, these families didn't live in our neighborhood. Many could have come from neighboring apartments or mobile homes in the area. These parents don't have any trick or treat options where they live.

But their kids are just like every other kid: they love Halloween.

In a world so splintered with hate and violence—the rich irony of a perfectly peaceful (and happy) melting pot of children and parents did not go unnoticed.

I suppose that sports, entertainment, public schools, sports bars and shopping malls also qualify as American melting pots, but there is nothing like the thrill of Halloween night, where parents remember their own childhood and the children, no longer identified by their color or their accent, all participate in a custom that so beautifully brings together the fabric of this country.

It's a three-hour break from the tragedies in Israel, Gaza and Lewiston, Maine.

While our hearts are never far from grieving for these tragedies, let's be thankful that we can still take temporary refuge in this uniquely American institution that, inexplicably, brings out the best in us.

David R. Altman lives with his wife, Lisa on a dark street in Hoschton where residents are trading in Halloween decorations for Christmas lights. He is the author of two books of poetry and a former Georgia Author of the Year nominee.