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DISCOVERING HALLOWE'EN

In England, in the first five years of her life, my daughter Clare never heard tell of Hallowe'en. Even in my own childhood it had been no more to me than a word read in old stories, a non-event. I knew that in olden times, when church holy days were the only holidays for most people, All Saints' Day, on November 1st, used to be called All Hallows, and the evening before that day was therefore Hallowe'en. Doubtless children away back then got up to mischief and imagined ghosts rising from tombs, witches swooping around on broomsticks, and eerie noises emanating from spirits who could find no rest. But at the time our family emigrated to North America, in the fall of 1963, October 31st promised us only one important event, Clare's sixth birthday.

For our daughter, all was strangeness and excitement as we made the Atlantic crossing on the S.S. Queen Elizabeth, passed close to the Statue of Liberty before docking in the city of sky-scrapers, and were met on the quay by friends who drove us to the town and Country Motel in a pretty New Jersey town. There we were to stay a week or so, until our furniture arrived and we could move to a rented house on Chestnut Street.

"By next year there'll be school friends at your birthday party, but this year I'm afraid you'll only have Daddy and me," I told Clare.

"But I can't go to school in another country," she wailed. "I don't speak properly yet." For she had soon realized that everywhere we went the people spoke with accents very different from ours.

The birthday dawned sunny and warm, brightened further by greetings from England. But we feared Clare's big day might have to be one of benign neglect, for Fate had decreed it also to be Moving Day! However, the motel manager, Mr. Kobie - a good friend of Clare's, who let her switch on the lights outside the motel diner each night - came up with a wonderful plan. He and his wife spirited Clare away, mid morning, to spend the day at their house, with their children.

In the late afternoon an excited six-year-old was returned to us at Chestnut Street, full of a great discovery. "We played outside on their own swings and a slide - it's called a jungle gym. Then we had a lovely lunch and there was a birthday cake with candles, for me! After that we played dressing-up games, and then we went to all the houses along their street and rang the doorbells. It's called *Trick-or-Treat*."

And look!" She showed us a hollow plastic pumpkin with a handle, big as a soccer ball and full of candy-bars, rosy apples, and little boxes of raisins. "I had a witch's hat on. Ginny was a ghost, and Bobby was Mickey Mouse, and . . . and . . . this was our *trick* for the people who came to the doors, and they gave us *all these treats!* It's called Hallowe'en, and it's going to happen *every year on my birthday!*"

This Hallowe'en story was written for us by
UNA O'CALLAGHAN

Una is a member of a group of creative writers under the direction of Nora Savage. The "Memoirs" writing group meets at the Georgetown Seniors Centre. For more information please contact the Georgetown Senior Centre at 877-6444 or Acton's Senior Centre at 853-5951.

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