

Halloween Has Passed, None Too Soon

Halloween occurs only once per year, thank God (or the Great Pumpkin).

I'm one of those people who – If I had my way – would turn out all the lights, pull down the window shades and hunker down in front of the TV until the danger has passed. Kind of a modern pagan Passover.

More like a reverse Passover. Instead of marking our door so the plague will pass us by, we decorate it and the rest of our house to make sure the plague is attracted to us. Obviously, this is not my call.

I blame LuAnn. In the days before October 31, she and her indentured servant (me) spend hours stringing extension cords, hanging illuminated strings of spiders and pumpkin heads, carving Jack 'O Lanterns and stockpiling treats. With something illuminated in almost every window as well, at dusk on Halloween our house glows radioactive orange. I'm pretty sure it can be seen by the naked eye from the International Space Station.

Until Megan and Brian moved in next door some years ago, we were the acknowledged neighborhood kings of Halloween. Those two actually have kids and are arguably more invested in this holiday than is LuAnn, if that's possible. Both Brian and I were out decorating on Halloween Eve when I caught his eye as he was trying to get his fog machine operating without tripping over the skeletons, tombstones, lights and spider webbing that obscured his lawn and shrubbery. He said, "This is a lot of work for a two-hour event."

Largely due to our efforts - voluntary or otherwise - our neighborhood (Morningside/7th Ave. in IC) is somewhat well known for being Trick or Treat friendly. It's not unusual to see minivans from who knows where pull up and disgorge their costumed contents. LuAnn claims over 90 visitors came to our door this year, including adults who she counted along with the kids because she makes most of them take treats as well.

When dusk comes, LuAnn dresses in her witch costume, cackles with glee and lurks near our front door waiting for the doorbell to ring. She gushes with

genuine delight over the children's costumes, chats up the parents, takes photographs and generally overdoses on the whole event.

I, on the other hand, had previously combed the Internet for something – anything – else to do that evening, so long as it occurred elsewhere. My resolve was such that I'm pretty sure I'd have paid good money to see Muppets Live on Ice Meet Frankenstein, if that had been my only choice.

Fortunately, this year I stumbled across someone named Kamasi Washington at the Englert, for the unusually high price of almost \$50. Student prices were only \$20, but I was pretty sure I'd never pass for that. Perversely, I evidently didn't look old enough to buy a beer there without showing ID either.

Kamasi was a serendipitous find, because it turned out his band plays improvisational jazz with hip-hop, classical and R&B influences that the nearly sold-out crowd and I really enjoyed. Who knew. Iowa City has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to live entertainment, which is often free and doesn't take much effort to unearth. By the way, "General Admission" is code for "Mosh Pit," so I was very happy to be in the balcony.

Anyway, I returned home around 11 p.m. to find LuAnn the Witch asleep on the couch with all the lights and decorations still ablaze. The next afternoon (Nov. 1) I glumly removed all the trappings I had so carefully installed just days before. I found myself listening to Christmas songs which began airing that same day on Sirius XM satellite radio, as if to torture me about my next looming Sisyphean decorative task.

As major holidays go, Halloween ranks second only to Christmas for LuAnn, and those decorations will start going up any time now. At least I get more bang for my begrudging buck with that holiday's multitudinous strings of lights and hundreds of feet of evergreen roping, which often can stay up until February. When they become a fire hazard.

Now that elections are over, Writers Group member Dave Parsons is grateful to have back his favorite TV commercials for pharmaceuticals treating medical conditions he's afraid he might have.

