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Trick, treat or vote

*Aieeee! The parallels between the political season
and the Halloween season are frightening*

by Lee Lynch

Is there a reason our national elections are scheduled right after Halloween?

The parallels are astounding. Take trick or treating: So many politicians are just overgrown trick-or-treaters with wide-open goody bags and lots of tricks up their sleeves. Or take costumes: Originality is not a political strong point. Dark suits, skirts on women, and enough makeup on both genders to put a queen to shame.

Campaign parties, Halloween parties—everyone dresses up. All Hallows Eve is the beginning of a new year for some; election night is the early warning system for the new government year. Skeletons in the closet, headless spokesmen, soulless ghouls seem to be everywhere this season.

I admit to feeling jaded. Of course I'll vote—for the candidate who'll choose decent Supreme Court justices. As Lover's bumper sticker reads: "Democracy Is Not a Spectator Sport." But I do find it hard to live someplace where losing is a way of life.

All over the Northwest people known as Orange County Republicans have been moving in for decades. Maybe these are basically good people. Their relocation, however, is a phenomenon that evokes—at least for this diehard liberal—the kinds of fears that Halloween bestirs in kids scared of cobwebbed attics and creaking coffins.

Bob Dole doesn't scare me half so much as these local pumpkinheads. They're as sneaky as grave robbers and as brazen as poltergeists. They draw people with the tricks we've grown used to: warning of homosexual recruitment, linking teenage pregnancy and sex-education conspiracies, using feminism as proof that the world needs saving and only Real Men can save it.

Once these leaders stir up fears, candidates emerge from shadowy vapors. The first time one runs for, say, mayor, or city council, voters laugh. It's obvious that she or he is a front for the radicals. But these folks are persistent. They'll get on school boards, take on an unwanted responsibility in an established party, grab publicity. Often, they act like anarchists, battering incumbents year-round, equating the status quo with graft and conspiracy. They push radical initiatives such as requiring every household to own a gun while they oppose more taxes for law enforcement.

You get to know the kids who come to your door year after year. Their fangs look more benign, the princesses grow into their disguises. Name recognition is an insidious process. If a political bloodsucker runs often enough, loses often enough, voters slowly get used to their posturing and crackpot schemes. An eerie transition takes place. One election we wake up and find that the aspiring ghoul is being treated like a legitimate candidate. Her or his connection to say,

advocating an AIDS concentration camp, is forgotten.

Oh, and their masks! They disdain immigrant rights, but make sure their close retinue includes immigrants. They fled communities with high concentrations of people of color, but manage to have a few very visible non-white loyalists. They're anti-tax but demand services, pro-gun but anti-crime. They have militia connections, want to make and use a lot of bombs and advocate killing off the criminals. At least around here, they always claim their perverse values to be Christian. Some of their followers don't even let their kids play Halloween because of its pagan roots.

Now that Bo Gritz is too busy getting arrested to run for president again, these local pumpkinheads decorate their lawns with Dole/Kemp signs. That makes Dole scary.

And speaking of masks, Dole advocated a convention of inclusiveness and moderation (sometimes), but I read in the *Times* that his wife gives speeches spreading her evangelical faith. That's scary too, if you believe in separation of church and state.

Recently Andrew Ferguson, a former Bush speech writer, was quoted in *New York Magazine* as saying, "Having a sleazeball for president isn't such a big deal."

Hey, guy, I hope you're not in a glass house come Halloween.

Millions of us know exactly how difficult it was coming of age in the jumble of 20th century thinking: from obligatory religious observance to seeking enlightenment through drugs, from the carnage of the A-bomb to anti-war activism. Who among us would look squeaky clean in the scrutiny of the old guard? Despite some major disappointments, I think the president has done an amazing job and taken some courageous gambles—only to be tripped up by the legacy of corporate power brokering that is the reality of our government.

On the other hand, Dole looks to me like a guy who'd do anything for the presidency, including rewarding the creepy people around here who campaign by fear and demonization.

This year store Halloween displays are full of Clinton and Dole masks. I'm not sure why anyone would want to dress up as a candidate. Who would get more treats on Halloween night?

Election Day is a different matter. We're sophisticated enough this year to know there aren't many treats in store for anyone these days, but unless we vote, we risk getting tricked—big time.

Lee Lynch is co-editor with Akia Woods of *Off the Rag*, *Lesbians Writing on Menopause*, due out this fall from New Victoria publishers.

