



**Ned Hickson**

# Scariest part of Halloween? Finding a costume for your kids

For some of you, Halloween is an exciting time that allows you to bond with your child by making their Halloween-costume dream come true.

For the rest of us, it was a time when we crossed our fingers and prayed that our child's "Halloween costume dream" was hanging on a rack somewhere at Walmart.

Because if it wasn't, we'd have to make something, and therefore put our child's emotional health at risk by creating a costume that could

potentially scar them for life. After more than 30 years, I still remember my mother carefully wrapping me in layer after layer of tissue in order to turn me into a frightening replica of The Mummy — and how it took less than five minutes for a light drizzle to turn me into the considerably LESS frightening Soggy Toilet Paper Man.

Things weren't much better the following year, when I dressed-up as a pirate and missed out on all of the good candy after spending 45 minutes with my plastic hook stuck in the car door.

By the time I hit the streets all that was left were *Sweet Tarts* and half-opened rolls of breath mints.

However, as Count Dracula, I knew it was going to be MY year. Aside from maybe swallowing my own fangs, there wasn't much that could go wrong. I remember leaping from the porch and sprinting into the night with my long cape flapping behind me. I remember the sound of my polished shoes clattering across the pavement, and the eerie, greenish tinge of my glow-in-the-dark teeth — particularly as they flew out of my mouth after my cape caught on the neighbors' fence.

Granted, these situations weren't entirely about design flaw. In fact, I'm willing to accept the small role my own flawed coordination skills

might've played in all this. However, that only adds to the pressure of coming up with a costume that can be safe, functional and, if necessary, used as a stretcher.

Back when my son was still young enough that he had no plans for what he wanted to be for Halloween, we were both fortunate. Not only because it made my job easier as a parent, but also because there's still a good chance he'll never remember freaking out after the cardboard robot costume I made him cut off the circulation to his arms, rendering them unresponsive for a full two minutes.

This was discovered on our third stop of the night,

when he tried to lift up his plastic jack-o-lantern for candy and, instead, fell head-first through the screen door. That same year, my daughter, who liked to put her own spin on things, remained undecided until the last minute. In previous years, she had been a ghost dog, a cowgirl-fairy type of thing and the Grim Reaper.

Being that her big fascinations at the time were dinosaurs and mushrooms, I was envisioning a fossilized portobello mushroom.

Not exactly something you'll find on the rack at Walmart.

Trust me, I checked.

In the end, she settled for being a football player zom-

bie. Which was fine. Until she tackled someone through the screen door. Fortunately, I no longer have to worry about these things. That's because my teenagers now have reputations to maintain! Which means it's their turn to worry.

Not about what costume they're going to wear — but how much I'm going to embarrass them with mine.

Lord knows I've had plenty of practice...

*Ned is a syndicated columnist with News Media Corporation. His book, Humor at the Speed of Life, is available online at Port Hole Publications, Amazon Books and Barnes & Noble.*

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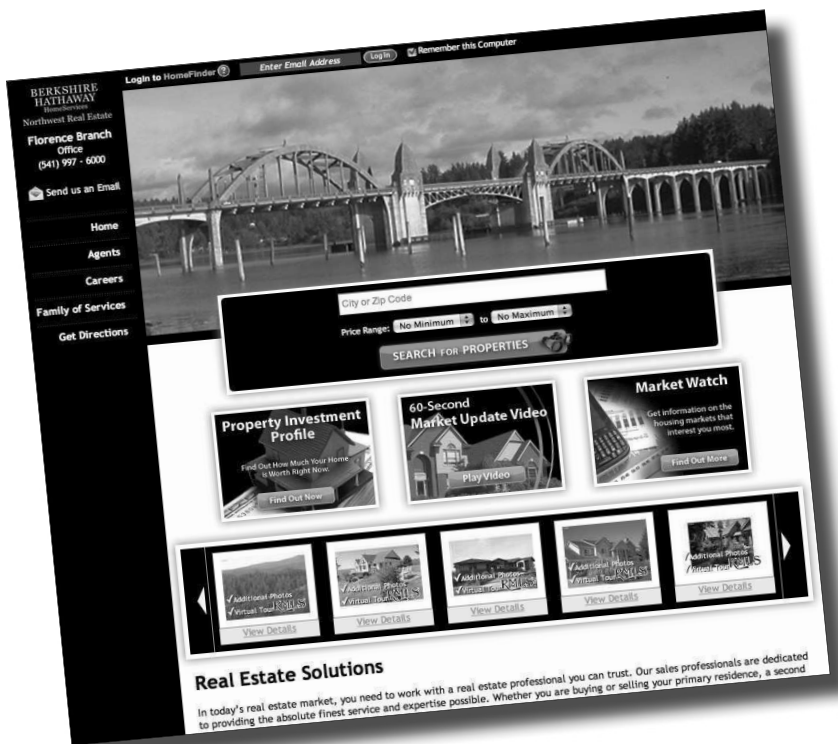
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