



# Parenting With Unbaked Cookies

What parent hasn't had the horrifying experience of a child telling you late at night that they need three dozen homemade cookies to take to school in the morning?

With five kids, I can tell you it has happened to me more than once. Fortunately, I had the recipe for unbaked cookies early on in my career as a mother. Those tasty, easy to make little gems were perhaps the best parenting tip I ever got.

In those days, I was the first mother in our neighborhood to discover unbaked cookies, thanks to a savvy out-of-state friend who passed the recipe along. They were the perfect solution to the Midnight Call For Next Day Cookies. Although they looked like something your dog would want to roll in, the kids loved them, at least the kids who liked fudge. Plus, they were homemade, and I could whip them up in no time. They also have both oatmeal and peanut butter in them, so they must be nutritious. Right?

If only there had been such a satisfactory solution for other child-rearing nightmares, like Projects Due The Next Day, or Halloween costumes for the school parade. I blame my mother for my obsession with trying to make the most creative Halloween costume in the parade. When I was a kid, every year I'd ask her what costume I should wear treat-or-treating, and after acting like she was searching the depths of her imagination, she'd always give me the same answer: "Why don't you go as 'Hard Times'?"

The "hard times" look in those days was a lot like what fashionable kids today wear: Baggy jeans with holes in the knees, a plaid flannel shirt with an elbow exposed, a dirty cap, and a few smudges on the face with shoe polish or burnt cork. The finishing touch (if we got fancy) was a big red handkerchief filled with rags and tied to the end of a stick.

We could find the entire costume within minutes by rummaging

through Dad's or an older brother's old work clothes and Mom's ragbag. Mom didn't need to drag out the sewing machine or spray paint anything. She never touched the scissors except to cut the trouser legs to the proper length. She didn't spend a penny on a mask or a wig. Plenty of kids I knew went trick-or-treating in Hard Times costumes, which was second in popularity only to the paper grocery bag-over-the-head mask. Actually, some parents back then did amazingly creative things with those old grocery sacks. In that neighborhood of hard working, blue collar parents with multiple children, Halloween costumes were an after-thought. If you had a store-bought costume, it was assumed that either your dad was in management at the paper mill, or you had a doting, childless aunt.

One Halloween after I had outgrown trick-or-treating, I was invited to a costume party and was stumped as to what to wear. Once again, Mom acted like she was giving it serious thought. She hummed and hawed and scratched her head. Finally, as though divinely inspired, she said, "I know! Why don't you go as Hard Times."

I shook my head. "I want something really different for this party," I told her. "You know, something that requires a imagination."

"Go as a ghost," was her answer.

I should have followed my mother's lead when my kids came along. Instead, I poured all my energy and a lot of time into making my oldest child's first Halloween costume. He was in Kindergarten. There would be a parade, and prizes for the best costumes. We were on an Army base in Japan, but I managed to find material for a beautiful black satin cape lined in red. He would go as a vampire.

Artificial nails were glued on gloves for his hands. White makeup, eye shadow, and an eyebrow pencil gave him as ghoulish a look as possible for a sturdy five year old with cheeks like a pocket gopher. Store-bought plastic fangs were his teeth. During a dress rehearsal at home we decided the costume needed a hat: a top hat. I'd have to make one. It took until 3 AM the night before the parade, but after the third failed attempt, the hat finally turned out splendid. It was, however, fragile, being made from cardboard and construction paper. I figured that he could wear his costume to school, and I would carry the hat and put it on him just as the parade began. I was bursting with pride!

There is no doubt in my mind that he would have won first place that day... if he had worn the gloves with long nails, instead of stuffing them in his hip pocket along with the plastic fangs. As for that beautiful top hat that I'd spent hours making, he took it off as soon as my back was turned. By the time he marched pass me and the other onlookers, it had been squashed under his arm like an old baseball mitt. It took all of my powers of self-control to keep from yelping with pain. He is an artist and teacher of art today.