

For my daughter's first school parade, I decided to turn her into a pumpkin. Not an easy task when you're starting with a skinny kid, a ball of wire, and only a vague idea of what you're doing. In hindsight, I should have left the spaces open between the vertical wires, which I'd wrapped with orange crepe paper... Or I should have used more pieces of vertical wire in shaping the body of the pumpkin. I also should have taken calculus and physics in school. I had made a "pumpkin shell" out of silky orange fabric. The problem was that the wires had been spaced too far apart, so the material drooped, giving the costume the look of a rotting pumpkin falling in on itself.

To remedy the problem, I stuffed it with every roll of toilet paper we had in the house, including a box or two of Kleenex. She was adorable! I made a little green felt hat that looked like a pumpkin stem to put on her head. The opening for her legs was just big enough to allow her to take nice little steps, the opening for her head was roomy but not so big that the costume would slip off her narrow shoulders. Everything was perfect... until the parade started.

She'd gone about 50 steps when the toilet paper started slipping out the bottom of the pumpkin. She wasn't aware of what was happening, until a couple of boys behind her started pointing and laughing. I pushed my way through the audience of parents, some of whom were pretending that they didn't know me, and rushed to help her. By the time I reached her she'd lost about half a roll of toilet paper on the ground and 2 inches in circumference. The more paper she lost, the faster it came out. I finally gave up on trying to stuff it back up inside the pumpkin shell. I pulled her out of the parade, and over to a trash bin, where I threw the remaining stuffing.

"If anyone asks what you are, tell them you're a summer squash," I said as I pushed her back into the parade.

Needless to say, we both went home deflated. She soon forgot about the whole incident, but I would have cried... if there had been even one piece of tissue left in the house with which to wipe my eyes or blow my nose. She is a nurse of oncology today.

With all this experience, I would surely be successful with my third child's costume. He would be a robot. What could go wrong there? After asking at every retail store in town, I found all the right shaped cardboard boxes for his head and body, including four sturdy cylinder-shaped containers that would slip over his arms and legs. Two ends cut off an empty paper towel roll and glued over eye holes in the head allowed him to see just fine. It took two cans of silver spray paint and a blister on my right index finger, but the costume was great. To make it perfect, I inserted a light bulb in the top of the box that went over his head. We were delighted with

the results. I skipped the parade anyway. When he came home that afternoon in tears, the two older kids explained what happened.

Oh yes, his costume had been a hit. So much so that he was swarmed by the other students, even those in higher grades. They wanted to know how it was put together and where he got it. While asking such questions their favorite thing was to try and get the bulb to light up by slapping it with their open hand. If they weren't banging his scalp with the metal screw-in tip of the light bulb they were poking their fingers through the paper towel roll "eyes" to verify he was actually looking through those two holes. Finally, in a defensive move, he ripped off the cardboard "arms" so he could punch the next person who put a finger in his eye or jammed the bulb into his head.

We had tested the costume at home for size and comfort, but didn't take into consideration how much more difficult it would be walking stiff-legged the entire distance around the school track, as opposed to simply walking around the dining room table. Being unable to turn his head was also a problem. He became terrified that he would be trampled during the parade by the numerous kids streaming passed him as he hobbled along on those unbendable legs. Finally, he got a sympathetic classmate in a store-bought Superman costume to help him take the "legs" off about a third of the way around the parade field. The next thing to go was the head, so kids would stop hitting the light bulb and jamming it into his head. Today he is an international businessman.

By the time my fourth and then my fifth kids' Halloween parades came around, I had a handle on things. I was able to calmly look both of them straight in the eye and said "Hum, let me think. What would be a good costume...ahhh I know! You can go as a hobo!"

I let that sink in for a minute or two then added, "Or we can go to the Newberry Five and Dime and buy a real scary mask and I'll make you unbaked cookies to take to the class party."

They opted for Newberry's and those unbaked cookies every time. Today, he (number 4) owns his own HVAC company and she (number 5) is the health benefits manager for a large private business.

There is little doubt in my mind that the primary reason I escaped motherhood with my sanity intact, and my children survived my parenting, is because I stopped trying to out-think my mother, and I made good use of the recipe for unbaked cookies during my kids' formative years.

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