



The Halloween Party

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The time has come again...

“We need ice...and cups...oh and napkins, plates, forks, spoons...” yelled my mother from across the room. “Mom, I got it!” I yelled back for the third time. It was October 1st and we are getting ready for the annual Halloween party. The 8th annual Halloween party in fact. My mother is a huge fan of the Halloween holiday, next to Christmas, it’s her favorite. She has always gone all out when it comes to decorating for the holiday, but years ago we decided to have a Halloween party, and it’s been an annual tradition ever since. We spent months planning the first one. I think we started the ball rolling with planning in May and started shopping for decorations and supplies in July. Luckily after 7 years of doing it, the shopping and planning it gets easier each year. We still try to change things up a bit to make it better and better along with incorporating new displays, decorations and events. This year’s party was the biggest yet.

My mother’s house and property have always been the perfect setting for large family and friend get-togethers. We’ve had countless birthday parties, wedding receptions, family reunions and holiday parties. Everyone talks about the gatherings for years. When we are at a family reunion the conversation always goes to talking about the year before or five years ago or the Christmas party two years ago and so on. My mother loves it. She loves the time spent with family and the opportunity to decorate for each gathering.

The house sits on twenty acres of wooded land. In fact, you can’t even see the house from the road. You have to drive up a long dirt driveway, or what seems like an endless road, to finally get to the house. That’s after you push open the giant black iron gate at the beginning of the driveway. The driveway is lined with wild flowers and the tallest oak and maple trees I have ever seen. In autumn the drive to the house is even more beautiful with all of the colored red, yellow and orange leaves covering the grass and drive. This October was no different. There were many leaves on the ground, but still many in the trees.

The colors were everywhere and along with the fresh crisp smell of the season; it maked for a perfect time of year.

The house itself is a two story cabin that was built 15 years ago. My step-father and I basically designed and built the entire thing...with a little help from others. It has an enormous wrap around deck that goes completely around the house. In the yard is a gazebo overlooking the creek that runs through the property along with a few sheds and a chicken coop. Yes, my mother has chickens, about ten of them to be exact. They roam the yard...and think they own it. Luckily Mom has two dogs, a German Shepherd and a Chocolate Lab, to keep the chickens in check. Inside the house is amazing with an open kitchen and dining area, five rooms and three bathrooms. Plenty of space for a lot of parties.

The best one yet...

This year's Halloween party was going to be the best of the last 7 years. It seems like each year we try to amp things up with adding new features, new layouts, new games and the list goes on and on. Mom started shopping for this one in June and I think when I saw the pile of receipts I just about fainted. She always goes above and beyond for these parties...I guess that's why people are talking about them for years. We added a small corn maze this year, three more games, another food table, two more bon fire pits, and the best part was tripling the size of the haunted trail.

The haunted trail was what people talked about the most. It's basically like a typical commercial haunted house, only we do it outside on trails that extend throughout the property. Last year's was great, but this year's was more than a half mile long and we added a lot of new features. We got a few friends and family to play actors and even paid some of the local high school students

to help out in order to scare people as they walk the trail. They loved doing it and are usually calling the next day to ask when they can do it again.

This year the haunted trail included a new cemetery area that had dozens of old tombstones and a large mausoleum to walk into. Of course there were a few people in there to jump out of a coffin or two to scare everyone. We had a person, my uncle, running the trail dressed as a zombie...this kind of forced people to walk a bit slower than normal...perfect for scaring. We had a number of other zombies wandering the woods, a few werewolves and we had someone dressed as a frightening demon-like scarecrow and even a headless horseman.

For games we had the traditional and typical bobbing for apples, donuts tied to a string, and other fun stuff. This year we included a few Halloween piñatas filled with candy, Halloween Bingo, a few scavenger hunts and a bounce house for the kids. We also had a costume judging contest to see who had the best costumes. The winners won prizes.

Almost ready...

It was October 30th and everyone was busy getting everything ready for the party. We walked the haunted trail making sure the decorations were in place. We checked all of the lighting and ran through a practice for those who were acting and doing the scaring. We laid out the simulated spider webs throughout the trail, the cemetery and the house, hung the creepy spiders, wrapped the mummies, hung the dozens of replica bats, positioned the zombie body parts, laid out the rubber rats and bugs, set out the pumpkins and jack-o-lanterns and checked everything once and twice.

By the end of the day everyone was exhausted. We all had dinner together, shared drinks and toasted to a new fun party. We talked about the

last seven Halloween parties we had, how much fun they were and how much work they were. This one however was going to be the biggest and the best so far. Weeks ago we sent out the invitations and got RSVPs from just about everyone we sent them to. That meant quite a big crowd and lots of fun ahead.

We've waited all year for this...

Finally it was October 31st, Halloween had arrived...and so had the party. Mom and I woke up early to get everything ready. We walked the entire property to make sure everything was in place and ready to go. Luckily the weather was good the day before and the weather report said it was going to be great for that day as well...cloudy, slight breeze in the mid 50s. And to make it even better, there was a full moon. Perfect.

The time came for Mom and I to get dressed in our costumes. The guests would be arriving soon and we had to get ready. Mom dressed as one of her favorite characters from one of her favorite movies...Winifred Sanderson, one of the Sanderson sister witches from the movie Hocus Pocus. My sister and one of my nieces were planning to come as the other two Sanderson sisters to make the group complete. I dressed as Van Helsing the vampire and monster hunter. I love that movie; it's one of my favorites. Mom even dressed up the two dogs; the Shepherd was dressed as a vampire and the Lab was dressed as Frankenstein. They looked great, but didn't seem too thrilled with wearing costumes.

Candles in the jack-o-lanterns and torches around the property were lit, the fog machine was started, spooky lights turned on, the blood looking punch was made, tasty treats and food set out, the bon fires were stocked with wood and the eerie music was turned on. The people we hired and the help arrived in time to get on their costumes and makeup. They helped to get the festivities in order and ready to go.

The guests arrive...

I took my post at the front drive iron gate and welcomed the guests as they drove in. Mom waited at the house to greet them there. Although it was still a bit light out, the driveway was lined with lit torches. You could see all of the tree leaf colors and all of the spooky decorations including the different sized and carved pumpkins lining the entire drive. There were little gremlins climbing all over the trees, a few ghosts swinging back and forth above the drive and huge spiders hanging all over. Cars and trucks started rolling in right away. I said hello to everyone and handed out a map of the haunted trail and a listing of the nightly events.

Everyone was dressed in costume and many of them were spectacular. All of the adults were dressed up, the teens and the little kids. It was amazing to see so many different characters. I saw a monkey, a Viking, three ghosts, two zombies, a mummy, Batman, Superman, a caveman and cavewoman, SpongeBob, an alien, a rock star, and the list goes on and on. I even saw one kid dressed as a giant Lego block. There were too many to count. Mom was busy greeting everyone and taking lots and lots of photos...and she loved every second of it. I don't remember her smile ever being so big. She was hugging everyone and commenting on their costumes. Her costume was a huge hit especially once my sister and niece showed up and they were together. People were begging for photo opportunities with all three of them. It was great.

Getting the party started...

The majority of the invited guests had arrived. Vehicles were parked, the dogs were meandering about, as well as the chickens, and photo flashes filled

the outside. People were checking out all of the decorations, looking at the games, smelling the food and talking about each other's costumes.

Mom and I stood on the front porch and gathered everyone around. We welcomed everyone to the party, went over what we would be doing for the night and pointed out all of the attractions. You could hear everyone whispering about what they were going to do first. The party officially started.

The crowd of people spilt up to get started on the night's celebration. Some went to the corn maze, some started to ravage the food tables and others started playing the games. We usually don't start the haunted trail until later on...that way, it is very dark and everyone goes through the main attraction at once. Besides we wanted to save the best for last. Even though everyone was having a great time I could still hear them talking about the haunted trail and how they couldn't wait to go through it.

Hours went by and the party was a huge success. Everything went according to plan and everyone was having a blast. The kids were bouncing in the bounce house and running around with chocolate covered faces. People were bobbing for apples, smashing the piñatas, eating drinking and having a ball. It was indeed the best party so far.

Finally...The Haunted Trail...

It was that time of the night where everyone was getting quite anxious about going through the main attraction. People were having a great time, but they couldn't stand it any longer, they had to go through the trail. Mom and I gathered all of the trail actors and got them into their scary costumes. They took their places among the trail and once we got the lights on, torches lit and scary noises playing, we were ready.

My uncle and I were the trail guides. He was dressed as a zombie taking people slowly through. We took groups of 3-5 people by torch light to make it better for all involved. The people waiting at the start of the trail could hear those who went before them screaming and yelling. The bloodcurdling shrieks could be heard everywhere by everyone. You could see the worried look in their eyes before they even started. The adults seemed to be more scared than the kids.

The haunted trail was a huge success. People who had gone through it once wanted to through again and again. They still screamed even when they knew what was coming. Some people went through four to five times before the party ended.

Well, like all good things, the party had to come to an end at some point....

It was about one o'clock in the morning. Yawns started to travel through the crowd of people still left. Some of the kids were already sleeping on the living room floor, exhausted from the hours of fun and scare. Guests started to gather their things; prizes won from playing the games and left-over food, candy and treats. Sugar filled kids around the yard were being herded and sleeping kids were being scooped up and loaded into cars. Chatter filled the air as everyone was saying good-bye and talking about how great the party was.

As good party hosts Mom and I stood near the driveway saying our good-byes and telling everyone that we can't wait until next year's party. Guests thanked us and told us about what they considered to be the best part of the night. Just about everyone commented on the food that looked gross and hideous, but tasted delicious. They commented on the decorations and the new games and attractions. One element that kept coming up to both Mom and I

was the haunted trail, but more specifically the attraction near the corner of the back woods.

Guest continued to comment on how realistic it was, even more so than any of the other scary parts of the haunted trail. They said how life-like it was and yet so creepy and scary. After a few people were telling us about this great attraction, Mom and I were a bit confused. We didn't remember setting up anything on the corner of the back woods. My aunt was one of the last guests to leave. She helped us clean up a bit and also started talking about the back woods. She described the scary scarecrow chasing her through the trail and past the corner of the back woods. As she made her way through the rest of the trail towards the end, she talked about seeing a witch.

She said the witch was standing off of the trail about 30 feet into the woods. She had a large metal pot sitting above a small fire. She said the witch looked just like the witches on movies and television; black cape, large black pointy hat, greenish skin tone, long gray hair with a broom by her side. She was standing next to the metal pot, just staring at people as they walked by. She didn't say anything or come at you to scare you. She just stood there, staring.

My aunt said thanks again and walked off to her car. Mom and I looked at each other for a moment in silence. We both had a confused and strange look on our face. Suddenly it hit us at the same time. You could see our face expressions change from confused to shocked and scared. We then said out loud at the same time, "but...we never hired anyone to be a witch".

The End!

