

Columnists

Halloween costuming becomes all consuming

By Esther Baird

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BEVERLY, MASS. -

“OK girls,” I said recently while our whole family was in the car, “Let’s discuss this year’s Halloween costumes!”

“Let’s be cheerleaders again!” our 4-year-old daughter said.

“No honey, we don’t repeat costumes. Plus I’m not sure Daddy wants you to wear the Eagles cheerleading outfits again. Ever.”

My husband declined to speak about the possible 2007 Halloween Costume Jinxing of the Philadelphia Eagles.

Our daughter pressed on.

“OK then . . . hmmm, I know! Manatees!”

“Tees!” our 1-year-old echoed.

“No,” I said firmly. “No more grey blobby costumes.”

My daughter had been an elephant when she was 2 and had shuffled around looking like a shapeless grey cloud the entire evening.

My daughter continued to list out large, complicated mammals, while I stared out the window thinking of simplicity and ease.

Simplicity and ease — perhaps a paramecium?

And then I had it: Butterflies. What could be easier? We’d buy some pre-made wings and headband antennae, throw the girls in some body suits, perhaps toss some glitter at them and be done.

“What about butterflies?” I said charging my voice with enthusiasm. “Beautiful, sparkly, fluttering butterflies!!”

“Yes! Let’s be matching butterflies!” My daughter bought into it with full 4-year-old excitement. “Bah-flies!” our toddler agreed.

I sighed with relief — a quick trip to Target and we’d be done.

Turns out pre-made wings and antennae headbands are not so easy to come by — especially if you aren’t willing to go to the official Halloween costume stores in the malls. And I’m not. I get that Halloween is specifically about spookiness and scary things, but it’s also a children’s holiday — at least before 7 p.m. There is nothing appropriate or child-like about Freddy Krueger and Texas Chainsaw Massacre mannequins, or bloody-neck stumps and fake, severed limbs. Please. I’m not parading my daughters past the Amityville horror show for preschoolers just to browse the overpriced children’s costumes. I decided to make them myself.

So there!

Sooo indeed. As I type this I find myself surrounded by colored felt squares, pipe cleaners, poster board, and glitter glue in every color and consistency. Let’s be clear: I am not a craft mom. I don’t scrapbook. I don’t own a hot glue gun. And the only sewing machine my girls have ever seen is the miniature plastic one that came with my 1970’s Fisher Price A-frame people house.

Before turning our dining room into costume central I looked online. There are some crafty, creative moms out there who love whipping up costumes. They posted photos of their happy, little children in dazzling butterfly get-ups that they threw together between knitting sweaters for the whole neighborhood

and macrameing entire sets of furniture. With just a bit of paint — that apparently didn't end up on their walls and table, some decoupage, a reverse stitch here and sequined battery operated set of twinkle lights there, they produced lovely, lovely butterflies.

Well. I see your reversed stitch and I raise you 30 yards of double-sided Velcro. That's right. Here at Casa Baird we have recently discovered the remarkable versatility and power of Velcro. You give me two objects that need to be stuck together — say felt fabric spots to glitter poster board — and I'll give you some Velcro that can do the job. Who needs to sew when there is such a handy attachment system with just the peel of a sticky backing? Peel. Stick. Go. Done.

And while our butterfly costumes are veering slightly into the world of Dr. Seuss meets E.T., we are enjoying ourselves and all the things we can now stick, and un-stick, to. Plus there are tubes and tubes of glitter glue to be applied, all sorts of scissor work and shape cutting to be done, pipe cleaners to be slowly and carefully twisted together, and copious amounts of trying on the new purple long johns that will make up the butterfly bodysuit.

Any volunteers?

Oh yes. You. The 4-year-old daughter hyperventilating in the front? Certainly, you may do all of the above. Is that silence from the dining room I hear? Is that the concentration of 100 sparkle gems being glued onto felt spots? Wonderful. And when you are done there are 800 pipe cleaners to be twisted just so, wings to be decorated, pom poms to be placed and . . .

We're inventing as we go. It's not simple and it's not easy. But who wants to be a paramecium anyway?

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