Welcome once again to the Town Crier’s annual “Spooky Stories” Contest. The following are reader-submitted tales designed to chill and thrill. Entries we couldn’t run in the paper due to lack of space are posted here. This year’s entries include some terrific tales of terror, so there’s tremendous competition for the three prizes (to be determined) we’re offering this year. As usual, we invite readers to select their favorite stories. The story with the most votes wins first place, the No. 2 vote-getter takes second and so on. Tell us which story is your favorite by emailing bruceb@latc.com. We’ll announce winners and prizes in a future issue.

A Clatter of Skeletons
By Andrew Pejack

We’ve all played the game, young and old alike. What do you call them? A dazzle of zebras. A troop of monkeys. A murder of crows. But what do you call ten, or even ten thousand, skeletons? Ten thousand to be sure. What do you call them? Perhaps a word so horrific, it is well that those who witnessed it can no longer speak.

I know of it only from a scrap of yellowed newspaper, found at a garage sale not far from Loyola School. The date was preserved quite clearly at the top. Oct. 31, 1916, nearly 100 years ago to the day. The headlines told dark tales of not Halloween and her ghouls, but rather of the war in Europe, The Great War, as it was known. The fragile paper held a paragraph after paragraph that told of the thousands of lives lost in the Battle of the Somme, in small towns with quaint names: Guillemont, Flers-Courcelette, Maricourt. Names that gave no hint of their blood-soaked cobbles and fields.

Only on the second page did the story appear about Los Altos, and the large War Cemetery that lay on the edge of town, a cemetery that filled to capacity far too quickly. The granite memorial statue was planned but never built. Not unimaginable, considering those furious days of late 1916. As I read further, I could scarcely believe that this whisper-thin paper could hold such words of terror. These thousands of forgotten soldiers had climbed upward, clavering and churning their way through a dozen feet of hard-packed dirt, inch by inch, pebble by pebble, until they emerged as if one, their white bones reflecting the moonlight sky.

Doors were barred, shutters bolted, and candles hissed, until the mass of clanking bones made its way into the hills, perhaps urged on by the sinking moon, the call of the sea. Bones made its way into the hills, perhaps urged on by the sinking moon, the call of the sea. Bones made its way into the hills, perhaps urged on by the sinking moon, the call of the sea. Bones made its way into the hills, perhaps urged on by the sinking moon, the call of the sea. Bones made its way into the hills, perhaps urged on by the sinking moon, the call of the sea. Bones made its way into the hills, perhaps urged on by the sinking moon, the call of the sea.

The Haunted House
By Lauren Barg

On Halloween night, the three witches hopped on Stone BOOK Drive, there were scary neighbors across the street from us who designed their house to be like a haunted house just for Halloween! People went through the house on Halloween night when they were trick-or-treating. Right when you entered the haunted house, a skeleton popped out of nowhere. There were shadows of ghosts, too.

On that Halloween night, a girl named Lauren found that her candy was missing when she got home. She thought her mom ate all of the candy, but her mom said she did not eat it. Then she asked her dad and brother if they ate the candy and they all said they did not eat it. So Lauren and her mom went back to the haunted house and knocked on the door, but nobody answered. Lauren noticed that a window was open and there was a light near the window, so she asked her mom if she could go in the house. But her mom said no. But Lauren went in the house anyway, so her mom had to follow her in. Just then they felt wind going through the house. Is that a ghost? asked Lauren. She was pointing at a white shadow. I think so! said her mom. Mom, I need to figure out what is going on in this house! CRASH!

What was that? asked Lauren. I have never heard that “crash” before, her mom said. Could I go upstairs and look? asked Lauren. Yes, you can go upstairs, but you better be careful, said her mom. I will go with you! Lauren and her mom were walking upstairs and the stairs made weird noises. When they got upstairs, it was dark, so they flicked the light switch and the light went on and off, on and off, then all the lights turned on. They saw that a chandelier fell and crashed into a million pieces! Then Lauren and her mom went downstairs and trash was everywhere! Then they saw candles floating in the air! Just then they heard screams. Lauren and her mom left the house and never came back.

The next day they got their newspaper and there was an article about the haunted house they went to, and it said the people that lived in the haunted house moved!

Bowl of Treats
By John Allan

The house looked very much like the other houses this Halloween. Carved jack-o-lanterns glowed on the porch, and a not-too-scary witch hung from the wall. They rang the doorbell, and a nice-looking lady appeared with a medium-sized bowl of candy. “Trick or treat!” shouted the children. The bowl was put forward, and the first kid reached in for a piece of candy.

They saw him reach in farther and farther, and then watched in disbelief as he was pulled into the bowl and disappeared from sight. Everyone’s eyes got wide and for a moment they could not breathe or scream. This could not be happening!!

Just as they were able to catch their breaths and start to scream, the kid reappeared, coming up from the bowl, and smiling. Then he was standing next to them and holding the piece of candy he had reached for.

“That was really cool!” he said. “You should all try it and see what I saw.”

The bravest of the other kids did reach into the bowl, and she also was pulled in, only to reappear a moment later with a big grin. One by one all the other kids had to try it now. Every one of them returned with a smile and a piece of candy. Each looked at the others, with a look of knowing a secret among them.

Later they would tell their parents about this. The parents would all listen and smile, but they did not believe them. The kids did not care. The kids also told no one what was in the bottom of the bowl.

Three Happp Witches
By Mrs. Templeton (Tinae Sherer)

Once upon a time there were three sisters who were witches. They lived in a cave surrounded only by mountains. There they cast spells and practiced magic.

One day the oldest sister said, “Halloween is coming. It is time for us to fly to the valley and practice our magic on children.”

The youngest sister cried, “We cannot fly to the valley. The Ogre who lives in the mountains will grab us out of the sky and eat us up.”

“Don’t worry,” spoke the middle sister. “We are smart witches and he will not bother us.”

On Halloween night, the three witches hopped on their broomsticks and flew toward the valley. But the air was thick with fog and it wasn’t long before they got separated.

The youngest sister suddenly felt a prickly claw grab her and drag her to the ground.

“Who’s that flying over my mountain?” shouted the Ogrec. “I’m going to gobble you up.”

“It’s only me, a small witch. My older sister is coming and she’s bigger than I am.”

“Hmmm, maybe I’ll wait for her then,” growled the Ogre.

Soon afterward, the middle witch was pulled down by the Ogre.

“Who’s that flying over my mountain?” he roared. “I’m going to gobble you up.”

“It’s only me, a middle-sized witch. My older sister is coming and she’s much bigger than I am.”

“Hmmm, maybe I’ll wait for her then,” growled the Ogrec as he set the second witch free.

Finally, the oldest sister was yanked down to face the Ogre.

“Who’s that flying over my mountain?” he bellowed. “I’m going to gobble you up.”

“I’m the oldest and strongest witch and you will be stopped once and for all.”

She chanted a spell: “Tongue of toad and fins of fish, you will now do as I wish. As gentle as a breeze and as white as the snow – a mouse you will become the size of your head.”

The Ogrec was reduced to nothing more than a field mouse and was never seen again.

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The Haunted House

By Caroline Yu
Second grade, Bullis Charter School

I was so excited that this year I got to go trick-or-treating alone, because usually I go with my little sister, Salina.

Before I left the house, my mom warned me: “Be careful this year! Do not get candy from the tree house and go to the haunted house to eat it, otherwise a ghost would come out! Last year, a boy did that and he was never seen again.”

But I didn’t care because I don’t believe in legends. So I dared to go.

I ran out the door, went to my neighbor’s tree house, then got some candy. Then I looked for a haunted house. When I saw one, I rang the doorbell and yelled, “Trick-or-treat!”

Then, I felt hungry, so I reached into my pocket and ate a Tootsie Roll, like the boy did last year. I heard some strange noises, then a door opened. Before I could see who it was, I heard the person yelling.

“Ella! I told you not to go there!” I noticed that it was actually my mom yelling at me.

“Whooooooo! Whoooooo!” She made a ghost sound, and we both laughed.

“Say ‘Boo!’” Mom said. I felt happy and safe.

Mom was right. I heard terrible stories about children getting kidnapped or lost. We got some more candy then went home. It was a fun Halloween night.

The Return

By Alyssa Manche

Peanut Butter, Nolan’s yellow Labrador, awoke to his dreaded smell, chocolate. He followed his nose up to Nolan’s room where instead of Nolan sleeping in his bed, there was a Snickers bar. Nolan had fallen asleep in his Snickers costume, and was now found as a large lump of oversized chocolate and caramel.

“Eww, eww, get this disgusting thingy away from me!” Peanut Butter thought. “Maybe I should just hide it from myself and go back to sleep.”

Peanut Butter grabbed the Snickers bar and shoved it through the mail slot so that he wouldn’t have to smell it anymore. Suddenly, Peanut Butter noticed a figure standing behind him.

“Hey P.B., whatcha doing downstairs?” Elon, Nolan’s brother, asked P.B. “I smell chocolate. What did you find?”

“Bark, woof, howooowl!” P.B. scratched the white door and jumped up and down. “Down, boy. Are you trying to tell me something?” “Bark!”

“Let me check outside.” Elon opened the door and saw his least favorite candy, a Snickers bar. He picked up the bar and examined it. Something told him to eat it even though he hated Snickers bars.

As he took a bite, he felt a tingling feeling. Then a thought hit Elon: “Where is Nolan?” Elon and P.B. ran up the stairs and rushed into Nolan’s room. “Nolan? Where are you?”

Elon pushed the covers off the bed and found nothing. Elon was so scared that he was sweating now. Then he opened the window and called out, “Nolan, Nolan!”

Then he saw it—the scarecrow with the strange pumpkin head in the yard of House 1155—the creepy, mysterious, forbidden house on the block. With his brother gone, he had the courage to go to that house if that’s what would bring Nolan back. Suddenly, his feet took over. In no time, he was at the scarecrow.

“Chop it down!” his mind told him.

“P.B.! You love pumpkin! Eat away!” Elon called. P.B. started tearing through the head and five minutes later, all that was left was the body.

“Good job, boy!” Elon scratched him behind his ears. Then, almost magically, the Snickers bar started swirling around in the most amazing colors that Elon had ever seen.

Then as soon as the magic had started, it stopped. Nolan appeared in front of Elon’s face.

“Nolan! You’re back!”

“Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I am.”

The Mysterious Tunnel

By Victoria Yu
Sixth grade, Bullis Charter School

Mom, of course Bailey can’t come trick-or-treating with us!” I heard my older sister Payton vociferate. I tucked at the corner of my pearl necklace, gazing longingly out the window at the little trick-or-treaters skipping down the road. I hated being talked about as if I was invisible.

“OK, fine. I’ll pay you if you take her,” Mom sighed, burying her stringy brown hair in her hands. Payton smiled victoriously and grabbed my arm.

“Come on, Bailey,” she said palatably.

As the front door opened, a blast of warm air hit me. Payton leisurely sashayed over to a group of her friends. As we walked farther, I felt an urge for water. I waited for a gap in their conversation, but there were no spaces. Exasperated and dehydrated, I interrupted their conversation.

“Payton, I’m thirsty.”

When she didn’t answer and continued her conversation, I grew impatient. Finally, when I couldn’t bear it anymore, I furiously yelled, “I’m thirsty!” and yanked her dress.

Payton’s angel wings swung wildly as she staggered forward. She turned toward me, her eyes glowing with anger. She quickly eyed something, and before I could follow her gaze, I was pushed into an open drain.

Before I could realize what just happened, I started to fall. I looked below me, but it seemed as if there was no ground.

“Help!” I screamed, writhing around in midair as my voice bounced off the tight walls. Fear rushed through my mind as I plummeted farther into the earth. I noticed that the walls were lined with multicolored shelves. A variety of items rested on the wooden shelves. As I fell deeper into the earth, I eerily noticed that the items were all ones that I’ve lost or gave away. I looked beneath me. The ground was in sight! I realized startlingly, I quickly scanned the shelves for something I could take with me, and settled on a rubber-band bracelet. I snatched it and slipped it over my wrist a second before I hit the ground.

“Good morning, Bailey! Happy Halloween!” My mother’s voice rang as I writhed around in my bed, the events of last night haunting me. Great, it was just a horrible dream.

As I yawned, something fell off my wrist. I picked it up, and gasped with horror as my fingers grasped the rubber-band bracelet.

Trick or Eat

By Scott Klusaw

“How many peanut butter cups did ya get?”

“Two. Trade ya for your licorice.”

“Deal!” John said to Mike as they swapped. They’d been working on their plan to get the most candy for the whole month. They slung their pillow sacks over their shoulders and raced to the next house.

“There! That one has a light!” Mike said, pulling down his skull mask.

John followed, adjusting his vampire cape that flowed behind him. They ran up the steps, hit the doorbell and quickly claimed their prize. Full-sized Snickers! They peeled down the steps and gave each other a high-five.

“Where should we go next?” John asked.

“Well, the next street was mostly raisins and fruit.”

Let’s skip that one and try Maple Street.

John nodded and the two were off. Suddenly, they spotted a boy they hadn’t seen before. He walked slowly down the street, staring at the sidewalk. His mom must’ve been really good at makeup, because his face was all weird and green.

“My, oh my! Do you see that kid?”

“Yeah. Why doesn’t he have a candy bag? Do ya think someone took his?”

“Hey, Mike. Do you see that kid?”

“Hey, dude. Did someone take your candy?” Mike asked.

The boy only moaned. John knew that if his candy was taken from him, it would ruin the whole month. They slung their pillow sacks over their shoulders and raced to the next house.

“Hey P.B, whatcha doing downstairs?” Elon, Nolan’s brother, asked P.B. “I smell chocolate. What did you find?”

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Then as soon as the magic had started, it stopped. Nolan appeared in front of Elon’s face.

“Nolan! You’re back!”

“Oh, yes. Oh yes, I am.”
The boys put their arms around their new friend and pushed him forward. The new boy moaned louder with every step as they moved to the porch. They rang the doorbell and waited.

The door opened and an older lady took a step outside to greet the boys. “BAAAAAAAAAAIIINS!” the new boy yelled.

The woman screamed at the top of her lungs, threw her entire bowl of candy toward them, and ran inside. Mike and John looked to their new friend in shock before saying in unison, “You’re going trick-or-treating with us every year!”

**Fun for All Ages**

By Laura Allan

Sara stared down into her mostly empty candy bag and let out a sigh. She’d gone to as many houses as she could, she’d smiled her brightest, and said “trick-or-treat!” as festively as she could. But her haul had been so much better last year!

With a scowl, she placed the bag on the curb beside her and tried to straighten her Tinker Bell costume. It was the same one she’d worn last year, but it felt smaller this time. Maybe her mom was right and she was getting bigger after all.

In fact, maybe she was growing out more than just her costume.

She’d never thought she could outgrow Halloween, but at 10 years old, something felt different. Maybe it was the costume, maybe the candy, but no matter how she looked at it, this just wasn’t the same anymore.

Sara had just about made up her mind to go home when she heard a soft murmur. She looked up to see a little boy wearing a ninja costume sitting on the curb across from her. He looked just about as miserable as her, but he was younger, and she could see tears streaming down his face. Curious, she stood up, hoisted her candy, and went over to him.

“Why are you crying?” she asked the little boy.

He sniffed and looked up at her mournfully.

“My big brother said he’s too old for Halloween and went home,” he said as he wiped his nose. “Now I’m alone, and it’s no fun anymore.”

Sara shook her head. She had a brother too and knew how difficult they could be.

“Well that’s no good,” she said. “Why don’t I go with you instead? I’ve already hit all the houses, but I’ll go again.”

The little ninja lit up.

“You will?”

She nodded and then reached out to hold the little boy’s hand. He took it, and together the two began visiting each and every house on the street. Before long, Sara was having more fun than she could have ever imagined.

Between houses, the little boy reached up and tugged on her hand.

“Hey,” he said. “Can you really be too old for Halloween?”

Sara thought about it a moment, then smiled down at him.

“You know, I don’t think you can.”

**Double Trouble**

By Kelly Yang

Sixth Grade

I heard a rustle in the leaves. Could it be him, after all this time searching? A figure stepped out of the shadows, and I saw by the full moon’s bright light that it was a girl. She was placing small bits of what appeared to be food on the ground. I hesitated. ... I had seen this girl before in these woods. Should I let her know I was here?

For the last few months, I’ve been sneaking out at night in search of the huge silver dog with green eyes. He always seemed to appear on moon-lit nights when the dense woods by my house seemed less terrifying. I’d seen this girl, too. It felt awkward letting her know I’d seen her. Suddenly, I felt a cold hand on my shoulder.

“Um, hello? What are you doing out here?” demanded an agitated voice. It was her—the girl!

“Oh, hi there, ... I’m Cynthia, and I was just going for a walk. I didn’t mean to be spying on you,” I stammered.

“It’s OK. Relax. I’ve seen you here before. I’m asking again, what are you doing here?” she barked. She had startled green eyes, and I noticed a flicker of anger.

“I’m looking for someone, or someTHING, rather. A dog, if you must know. Sometimes this dog comes to my house at night,” I admitted to her. For some reason, I felt the need to come clean. Her eyes became dark, and she looked down.

“Does this dog look like a wolf?” she inquired a bit desperately.

“Yes, it does! Do you know this dog?” I asked excitedly, hopeful she might know where I could find him.

“Yes, I mean, no. I don’t know what you’re talking about. You’d better go home. It’s not safe here in these woods!” she admonished and scurried off. Just then, clouds glided over the moon so she seemed to vanish into the night.

Exhausted, I headed home like the girl had commanded. However, I couldn’t sleep so I started googling for news about Jason, a boy from my grade who mysteriously disappeared over a year ago. I noticed an old article about his family. The girl from the woods was in the article’s photo—she was Jason’s twin sister! She went to a different school, which was why I didn’t know her. She had identical eyes to Jason, eyes which sadly, I knew well by now.


**A Bony Surprise**

By Talinn Hatti

Grade 4

Hello! Every year during the fall, when it’s not so warm anymore, someone helps me sit on the front porch. I see different colored leaves and kids having fun outside. I don’t have any friends, so I feel pretty bored. And at night, I get cold.

This year, I decided to go in search of some warm clothes. One night, I bravely stepped out of my porch and walked a few blocks down the street. I came across a store filled with people who looked just like me. Inside, I found a nice pair of red trousers, a blue shirt, a striped tie, a warm jacket, a black hat and boots.

On my way out, I spotted a shelf full of bags filled with stuff in bright wrappers. From my porch, I had often seen kids collect and devour these things they called candy. So I opened a bag and tried a few myself. Ten minutes later, I had finished three whole bags. Proudly, I walked out of the store toward my porch.

But I couldn’t make it very far because I felt sick. I sat down on the street. A nice man picked me up and brought me to a tall building with a white cross on it. There, another man in a white coat asked me what was wrong and took me to a black room with a big machine. He told me to stand on a blue dot on the floor and took a photo of me. He must love my clothes, I thought to myself.

A few seconds later, the man in the white coat ran out of the room screaming, “That man in the room is empty inside! He’s nothing but bones! A skeleton has come to visit us for Halloween!!!”