



LOWCOUNTRY MUSINGS

October 2018

A JOURNAL THROUGH TIME

By Florence Bothwell Cosby

October



Dave Coverly ~ Cartoonist

*Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and caldron bubble.*

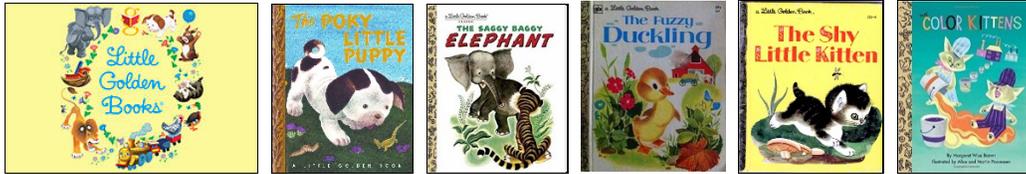
*For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.*

Then the charm is firm and good.

~ From *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

John Williams ~ *Double Trouble*, from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=611P1Vml8WM>

I have always loved books from the time I was a little girl—how they felt in my hands, the pleasure of turning each page, the colors of the illustrations, and their presence on my shelves of toys. One of my happiest early-reading memories is of the Little Golden Books. On this day, October 1st in 1942, the 12 original Little Golden Books were published as colorful, sturdy, and affordable books for children—just 25¢ each and bound in a shiny, now iconic, golden spine.



I was the proud owner of many of these children’s classics, which I read and reread when I was young, and then introduced to my own child, and my grandson as well. My absolute favorite title remains *Two Little Miners*. This one features people, rather than animals, with the fascinating life they lead working the underground coal mines. I admired that they were workers with a purpose, and that they had interesting tools with which to perform their important role in life. I was impressed by how the two characters took baths in wooden tubs to wash off the soot at the end of their workday, and then changed into clean clothes for a sit-down dinner at a fancy-laid table. “And they sat down to dinner as white and as bright as a peeled potato.” They were hardworking laborers, but gentlemen as well. But I especially liked the part when they took their lunch break. I envied their tin lunch pails, their Thermoses of what I imagined was coffee, their tempting sandwiches, but most of all the shiny red apple and the wedge of Swiss cheese. I thought they had to be the wealthiest workers on earth, to enjoy such a sumptuous meal.



Many of these same titles continue to be published today so that current and future generations may enjoy the charming adventures of these make-believe friends. *The Poky Little Puppy* remains to this day the bestselling children’s book ever, long after its successful debut 76 years ago, which is 532 years in dog years.



My new fall wreath has arrived, and I have hung it on the front gate. It is bright orange with leaves, small pumpkins, and gourds—all in plastic of course, to make it outdoor-friendly. It is large—28 inches in diameter—and full, and is an attractive harbinger of the cool, crisp seasonal weather ahead.



When we lived on James Island and Cameron was a little guy, each month Cati and I used to hang a wreath on the outside door to the kitchen, usually a motif that matched a holiday or celebration for that month. Cam loved the decorating of the house, inside and outside, with all manner of specialized décor—kitchen linens, artificial flowers, knick-knacks, etc. But he is older now—grown and flown—and so in the past year I have replaced the worn-out monthly wreaths of his childhood with just one for each of the seasons. Thus, my new fall wreath.

When I talked to Cam the other day, he said that he and Brie had decorated her house with pumpkins, scarecrows, and garlands of fall leaves, for Brie's seven-year-old brother, who squealed with the pleasure of it all, just as Cam had when he was that age. But I could tell by Cameron's voice that he was enjoying it as well, perhaps remembering the fun of seasonal decorating when he was a little kid—and which delights him still, big kid that he is.



I recently received an email from my childhood friend Linda Link—THS '60— in which she mentioned my having played the accordion when I was a kid.

We were watching a travel show about travels through Ireland and part of it was filmed in a pub where a small group was playing their instruments, one of which was an accordion. Took remembered that you played and was wondering if you still did.

I have not thought about that in decades, perhaps because it was not a happy event in my young life. But since she brought it up, I was thinking back to the brief period when I took music lessons with the accordion. My feelings at that time were ones of resentment and frustration, that I had been forced to study an instrument in the first place, and that, having to do so, I was not given the opportunity to choose the one I would learn to play.



For some reason, my mother wanted me to play the accordion. My brother was taking saxophone lessons, and my cousin the trumpet, and so I was to tag along and take lessons as well. I would have preferred the drums, especially the ones showcased in the music-store window wrapped in a sparkling green-glitter finish, which I am sure was its primary lure for me. My first accordion was a red student-sized one, which was rented from the music store. My teacher was wonderful—kind and patient with a gentle voice and manner. When I had mastered the basics, my mother bought me a full-size accordion of my own in a white pearly finish. I remember us traveling into Manhattan to purchase the instrument, then dragging it home on the Ferry. I say *dragging* because it was heavy and cumbersome and did nothing but add to my resentment at having to not only play the damn thing, but to own it as well.

I was obligated to practice my instrument for 30 minutes each day, alone in my room, which is of course what one does when practicing—plays alone. One particular day, a summer Saturday as I recall, my friend Linda's father was working in his yard next door to us while I was practicing, with the windows open because it was a warm day. When I had finished, I eagerly left the house to find Linda to get on with our play day. Mr. Link called me as I ran through his yard to their back door. He stopped his work,

smiled, and told me how much he had enjoyed listening to me practice. He went on to hum the tune he liked best, one called *The Cuckoo* in my book, and to express his pleasure that I was learning an instrument. I remember that brief encounter with striking clarity, at how kind and sweet he was to me, to single me out to convey his appreciation of my efforts. Mr. Link was like that, and I will always remember him for taking the time to pay attention to me, to my endeavors, and to make it all seem right—then as well as now.



The other day was National Name Your Car Day. I think that is so funny, that there would be enough people interested in making it a special day. So, how does one celebrate—take your car out for some special fuel, give it an extra coating of a product at the car wash, or invite your friends over for a cookout and a keg and have them line up their cars at the curb for a play date? Absurd, I know, perhaps even stupid, but fun nonetheless.



Nellie 2



Or Dat



Cosmo



Dude Mobile



Big Red



James Brown



Lucille



My mother had only three cars in her entire life, but she named them all “Nellie”. I have no idea why, but she referred to her car by its name, as if it were a member of the family. David has always been a car namer, and usually with laugh-out-loud names. When he received the registration papers for his orange Datsun, the abbreviation for the color and make was entered as “Or Dat.” And so that is what he called that car. For his Nissan Stanza, he called it the Cosby Mobile, and thus the name “Cosmo.” Then came the Toyota Camry wagon, which became the “Dude Mobile” for the many years he owned it. It was Cameron’s first car with Pop, and he loved the name, and the fact that a car even had a name. When the time came for Cameron to have a car of his own, he was quick to name his red Dodge Avenger “Big Red.”

Now with our new car, the Kia SOUL, David readily named it “James Brown” after the King of Soul singer. Cati has named hers “Lucille” after B. B. King’s guitar. And so, the tradition continues, with a nod to our cars’ special day.



October 5 is Walk to School Day, an annual invitation for kids to have their families and neighbors forego a ride to school and walk instead. I don’t know how this affects bus-riding kids in my neighborhood, because we live far enough away from the elementary, middle, and high schools that walking to school really isn’t a safe option, especially with the traffic of a major road or two to cross between here and there. I think it is a great idea, but perhaps not applicable to all students.

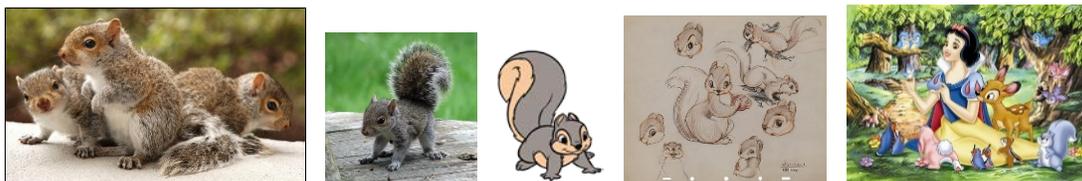


When I was a kid we lived about half a mile from our school Public School #8—which we called PS 8—on a straight shot up Oakdale Street with very little traffic. We used the sidewalk, but more often we walked directly in the street, strung out in groups and pretty much taking up all the space allotted by a two-lane road, creating a one-way flow of pedestrians *up* before school, and a reverse flow *down* at afternoon dismissal. Those of us on Robinson Avenue were the farthest away, and we all gathered in the morning to make the leisurely journey together. First stop was at my friend Linda’s house around the corner at 190 Oakdale Street. That was our official starting point, with a view of the road ahead, then up a gentle hill, ending at the school playground. With us as well were the kids who attended St. Clare’s Catholic School a block or so beyond our school. They were all dressed in their school uniforms, while the public-school kids wore their “school clothes,” casual dresses for girls and slacks and a sport shirt for boys.

As we made our way up Oakdale Street, we collected other classmates along the way—those who lived directly on Oakdale Street, such as Joan, Elaine, and Marilyn, as well as others who entered the road from side streets, such as Richie, Freddie, and Carol. By the time we arrived at our destination we were quite a crowd. At that point Oakdale Street ended and we funneled ourselves into the crosswalk supervised by a crossing guard and entered the back of the schoolyard to congregate before the first arrival bell rang. So, walking to school was the norm for us, regardless of the weather—rain, sleet, or snow—our manner of transportation remained the same—our healthy legs and feet—making every day a fun and friendly “Walk to School” day.



We have three young squirrels living in the trees behind the bird-feeding area in our backyard. They are pretty much inseparable, at times huddled so close to each other that they seem as one, not yet ready to venture alone into the world. They spend their day as most squirrels do, foraging for food among the scraps thrown off the feeders by the birds. Sometimes David scatters a few handfuls of mixed seed in the platform feeder just for the squirrels. They also spend a great deal of time playing—chasing each other up and down the trees as if they are engaged in a robust game of tag. Our backyard squirrels have the bushiest tails, perhaps because they are not yet worn to skimpiness as happens with the adults.



But what we like most about our squirrel trio is that they are so adorably cute. They remind us of the animated Disney squirrels in feature-length films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*—happy little fluffy guys hanging out and having fun.



Cati told me the other day about an article she had read extolling the deliciousness of the Yankee Sloppy Joe sandwich—also known as the New Jersey Sloppy Joe. The Millburn Diner where we used to live in Jersey was cited as serving one of the best in the area. We know that to be true, as we have eaten these spectacular sandwiches on many occasions. Although folks down here think of a sloppy Joe as tomato-based meat sauce on a burger bun, Cati often puts the Yankee Sloppy Joe on her restaurant menu as a daily special, and a culinary surprise to local eaters.

She recently had a craving for a Millburn Diner Sloppy Joe, so much so that she made a comment to that effect on Facebook, and within less than an hour, a friend from her high school years who still lives in the area posted a photo of that very same sandwich, which she had just ordered to-go, because Cati's post had reminded her that she hadn't had this delicious luncheon treat in a while. Lucky her—only a few minutes travel time away from sandwich euphoria.



The Yankee Sloppy Joe is made with three thin slices of deli rye bread, filled with one layer of meat—either ham, turkey, or roast beef—and the next layer of Swiss cheese. Each layer is slathered with thousand island dressing and topped with gobs of coleslaw. The resulting sandwich is thick and drippy, two of its best features. The completed sandwich is cut into three sections, then served with a pickle and chips. OMG! It tastes like nothing else in the world. During the time we spent in the northeast, it was common fare at luncheons and parties, with each of the three meat fillings served as single segments stacked on a platter. I have sampled them all, but my favorite remains the ham variety.

We miss the Millburn Diner, but continue to make their signature Yankee Sloppy Joe here at home—in fact, we are having this sandwich treat tonight for our dinner, with ham and homemade coleslaw and the essential pickle and chips sides. It isn't even noon yet, and I cannot wait until dinner and the renowned taste of Jersey's Millburn Diner—the Yankee Sloppy Joe.



Cati got a text today from her cousin Tom with a message for her to call him, which she did right away. Tom lives in Connecticut and they have not seen each other for nearly 20 years, although they have sporadically communicated via Facebook. He asked her if she knew of a really nice restaurant in Columbia and anyone who might like to join him there for dinner—tongue-in-cheek humor to invite her to meet him and his new wife at an upscale restaurant for dinner when they were passing through the area. Cati, always ready with an immediate joke back, replied—*Yeah, there's a Burger King up the street and I'll check in the parking lot to see if anyone's interested.* Laugh-a-minute Cosby.



Tom is the younger son of my cousin Bob, who grew up with us on Robinson Avenue. As adults, our families continued to spend many holidays and celebrations together when we lived in New Jersey and

they were in Connecticut. We have not been together as a family since 1995, at a party for Cati's high school graduation in the Drings' backyard.

I am so pleased that Cati and Tom will have a chance to meet up again and to renew their family ties, now as adults with grown children of their own. The generations move on.



And speaking of family ties...

I have enjoyed sewing and stitchery craft projects since I was a young girl. My mother gave me a simple cross-stitch sampler when I was in 2nd grade, and I have been sewing and stitching ever since.



One of my favorite projects was a throw-pillow cover I crafted as a gift for David nearly 50 years ago. I collected neckties from the men in my family, including one my mother had saved from my father, who had died when I was in high school. Others were from David, of course, my brother Jack, Uncle Bob, and cousin Bobby. I collected seventeen ties altogether from them, mostly conservative stripes, but some patterned ones as well. To fit the size of the pillow, I cut each tie apart, removing the linings and most of their length, while retaining the basic necktie shape. Each tie piece was then hand stitched with a decorative embroidery stitch—called the herringbone stitch—to a piece of burgundy velvet that would form the pillow cover, one tie piece overlapping the edge of the next as I worked my way around the circle. The round shape of the pillow is reflected in the circular center piece that finishes the pinwheel design. *Voilà!* The Family Ties.



I recently read an article about a poll conducted asking the question: *Are you still in touch with your best friend from childhood?* The results of the survey found that 22% of adults in my age group replied: *Yes.* At about the same time, my online banking service informed me that it was time to update my Security Questions, one of which was: *Who was your best friend from childhood?* That was easy: *Linda.*

Linda Link and I grew up living next door to each other, from the time we were about three-or-four-years-old until my mother sold our house in 1965. By then, however, Linda was married to Took, and I was away to graduate school. But we have stayed in touch all these decades, mostly sharing birthday and holiday greetings via cards and now emails. One year when David and I traveled from Santa Barbara to visit my mother for Christmas, we invited Linda and Took to visit us at my mother's apartment in Grasmere. Another time when I was visiting my mother in New Jersey during the summer, she and I made a "sentimental journey" to Staten Island, and to Robinson Avenue where we dropped in to see

Linda and her family, including her parents. By then, Linda and Took had bought my Aunt Madeline and Uncle Bob's house down the street from where we grew up. The last time I saw Linda was at our THS mini high-school reunion at the Staten Island Hotel in December 2002. As always, we picked up where we left off as friends, as if the intervening years had been swept away.



When we were growing up, Linda and I never missed sharing holiday gatherings, birthday celebrations, church functions, school events, and frequent sleep-overs, usually with a group of our school classmates or neighborhood kids. Our parents, too, were best friends and so our younger years were as part of a close and tightly-knit neighborhood connection. Linda and I were pretty much inseparable during those years from pre-kindergarten until high school graduation, sharing a magical childhood that remains in vivid memory.

October 14 is my friend Linda's 76th birthday.

♪♪ Happy Birthday dear Linda. Happy Birthday to you. ♪♪



Black Poetry Day celebrates the contributions of African Americans to the world of poetry. Jupiter Hammon was the first published black poet in the United States (1761), born into slavery on Long Island on this day, October 17 in 1711. Although never emancipated, he was, however, provided with an education and the opportunity to write. His primary theme was religion, often with a double language—a minority rhetorical devise, as in this poem where the word “salvation” refers to the deliverance from slavery as well as from sin. *From “An Evening Thought” - 1760.*



*Dear Jesus, give thy Spirit now,
Thy Grace to every Nation,
That han't the Lord to whom we bow,
The Author of Salvation.*



One of my favorite African-American writers is Langston Hughes, best known as an influential leader of the Harlem Renaissance in New York City during the 1920s. One of the prominent underlying themes in his poetry is the idea of equality, rights, and opportunity which was dreamed of by all Americans, but

was systematically denied to African Americans. Hughes's poetry expresses his frustration to achieve these goals and his call for social activism to attain the *American Dream* for those of his race. "Dreams" -1932.



*Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.*

*Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.*

~

Another of my favorite African-American authors is Maya Angelou. Although a well-known and award-winning autobiographer, she is best known for her poetry, which garnered her awards as well. I have enjoyed Maya Angelou's writing for many years but was particularly moved by the poem she wrote and recited for then-President Clinton's first inauguration. I had remembered decades before when Robert Frost was the first poet to participate in a presidential inauguration, reading a poem he had written for John F. Kennedy for that auspicious occasion. And so, I was impressed when—for only the second time in history—another president would choose a poet to be honored at a major ceremony of national importance, a poet who was not only a woman but also an African American. The theme of her poem emphasized unity within diversity, and the challenge of all Americans to embrace change and responsibility. From "Here on the Pulse of This New Day" - 1993.



*Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes,
And into your brother's face,
Your country,
And say simply
Very simply
With hope—
Good morning.*

∞

One of the daily Post & Courier online newspaper survey questions last night was *Do you have a favorite piece of art?* Well, I have many favorite art works, but for some reason, the first image that popped into my head when I read the question was John McCrady's *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. What makes this so unusual a choice is that I have seen it only once, and at a museum I have visited only once, back in 1967. But it has resurfaced in my thoughts and in conversations with David every now and then over the decades, so it remains fresh in my memory.



Painted in 1937, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* is part of the permanent collection at the St. Louis Art Museum in Missouri. David and I were on our move from Louisville to California and had stopped in St. Louis to visit with a college friend of mine. While in that city, we visited the Art Museum as part of our joint interest in museum viewing. This painting attracted our attention because of its attention to fine detail, somber yet vibrant color, and intriguing subject matter. An open door of a small cabin shows a family gathered around a dying relative, paying their last respects to him. We know that his death is imminent, because a chariot of angels is descending upon the roof of the humble abode. The angels are pointing down to the nearly departed, blowing their trumpets of welcome into heaven, and warding off the opposing devil who would also like to lay claim to his soul. The artist is African American, as is the family in the cabin, and the descending angels. As well as depicting the passing from this life into a heavenly one, the painting also symbolizes the Underground Railroad and its journey from slavery to freedom.

The haunting mood of the painting *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* projects the same impact of the Negro Spiritual whose name it bears. We learned this song in Miss Undritz's 8th grade music class at PS 8 and sang it at our graduation ceremony. It is a moving song, both in melody and lyrics. Much like the painting, it pops into my head every now and then—a powerful and eloquent message both in words and images.

*Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home,
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.*

*I looked over Jordan, and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home?
A band of angels coming after me,
Coming for to carry me home.*

Johnny Cash~

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9Y_GLT4_9I

Yikes! I have been so preoccupied with poetry and art lately that I missed National Bologna Day, which was yesterday. I cannot imagine letting that one slip by, especially since I put that deli offering on my grocery list this morning. The product originated in Bologna, Italy and is spelled that way, but I have always heard it pronounced “boloney.” It is one of the more popular lunch meats, perhaps because it is available at several levels of quality and price.



In Santa Barbara, we bought pre-packaged Oscar Mayer bologna, made with a combination of chicken, pork, and beef. It fit comfortably into our student budget for brown-bag sandwiches. These days, more than 50 years later, we treat ourselves to the deli-counter cut-to-order kind, such as Boar’s Head beef bologna, or olive loaf, which is what we bought today.

Occasionally we dress up our bologna sandwiches with cheese, Dijon mustard, lettuce, and tomato on toast or a bun, but usually it is the standard version of a couple of slices of the product with yellow mustard, on ordinary bread. Either way, you cannot beat a bologna sandwich as the ultimate lunch-time comfort food.

‘Cause Os-car May-er has a way with B-O-L-O-G-N-A!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmPRHJd3uHI>



Halloween was a big deal when I was growing up—in my town, at my school, and in my neighborhood. Our town had a small village about a block or so long, and another half-block around the corner, with about 20 or 30 different kinds of commercial businesses—long before malls collected all the stores into one grand contained and covered structure. For us, every shop you could possibly need was available on those nearby streets, within walking distance of home. The shops were small and family-owned, identified by the owner’s name as well as by the product they purveyed—Trunz’s Meat Store, Larsen’s Jeweler, Geller’s 5¢ and 10¢ Store, Harry’s Department Store, Whitman’s Candies & Gifts, and so on. We knew all the owners and they knew all of us.

Every Halloween the Great Kills merchants’ association held a window painting contest for the kids in the two local schools—PS 8 and St. Clare’s. The holiday began several weeks in advance with each entrant assigned a window to decorate with a season-themed scene of their choice. We were given a couple of weeks to complete the project, after school and on weekends. During that time, the sidewalks were crowded with the hopeful artists, busy spreading their drop cloths, painting supplies, and step stools. Passersby never complained, as they were folks we knew and who were enjoying the stages of our decorating spree. The first step was to sketch out a rough drawing of your picture and submit it to the owner of your window for approval of content. We would then transfer it to the glass surface, using the edge of a bar of white soap as a pencil. The next step was to fill in the drawing with colors—usually tempera paints purchased at the local stationery store, and which later would be easy to remove. The final step was to fill in the background space with a solid color for sky, nighttime, or scary swaths and sign our names at the bottom of the glass. The judging took place the day before Halloween, and ribbons were awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd places, plus an Honorable Mention or two.



My friend Linda and I always entered together, and even won a prize one year. But our most daunting attempt was the year we were assigned the window of Brower’s Hardware—unquestionably the largest window in the village. We had a scene in mind, but which we now had to expand to fit the enormous space, so we enlisted the aid of two additional girlfriends to double the labor force. To our dismay, we also discovered that we would require twice the amount of paint, for twice the dip into our collective allowances. We barely had time to finish our scene before the day of judging arrived, and in fact had to forego painting in the background as we had just plain run out of time, paint, money, and energy. That was probably our last effort at the Halloween window-painting contest—not because we were discouraged or defeated, but because we had graduated out of our local school and moved on to high school, and so were no longer eligible. But for many years it had been a much-anticipated seasonal engagement that drew us into the strong sense of community we enjoyed as kids.



At PS 8, on Halloween day we were encouraged to wear a costume to school when we returned after lunch. We then decorated our own goodie bags from a grocery sack and enjoyed a party the last hour of the day. We were given candy treats by our teachers, and our moms sent in baked goods and soft drinks. On the way home, we would trick-or-treat up and down the streets where we knew the kids and the families. Most moms did not work, so there was someone to answer the doors during the afternoon. We did not say “Trick-or-treat” as kids do today; in fact, I never heard that phrase until I was grown and lived elsewhere. We would say, “Anything for Halloween?” in a loud children’s sing-song voice, collecting our loot—candy as well as pennies or small toys—in the sack we had made at school earlier in the day. We saved our own block for later.



In the evening after dark, we would often change into a different, more elaborate costume than the one we had worn to school. This posed no problem, as we concocted our own costumes from garments and accessories we already had on hand around the house. Commercial costumes were not purchased for the occasion, although I do remember my mother buying me a witch’s hat one year, at a novelty store on the other side of the Island. I was quite thrilled, as this represented an extravagant departure from the norm. Another year I dressed as a gypsy, with a long, flowing skirt, colorful scarves, and gaudy jewelry—all from my mother’s closet and dresser drawers. That was the fun of costuming back then, the creating and fashioning of a dress-up idea from your own imagination.

My mother—the event planner—arranged the Halloween festivities. We saved our own neighborhood trick-or-treating for the evening, when our moms had special treats just for us. We made the rounds of

the dozen or so houses on our block, then gathered at one family's house for a party. Each year, my mother alerted moms as to who was next in line to host the kids' party. It was usually held in their basement which was decorated with streamers and a variety of Halloween images. All the parents participated, to set up and assist in the games and activities we played—ducking for apples, donuts hanging on strings, ring toss for treats, and coloring jack o' lantern pictures and puzzles. My favorite was the ducking for apples. A galvanized metal tub was filled with water and the apples floated on top. I was not fearful of getting wet and knew the strategy of ducking my head all the way to the bottom to gain leverage on the apple before giving it a hearty chomp. I always emerged dripping water, but with the sought-for apple firmly clenched between my teeth—thus winning the prize for that attraction. One of the neighbor girls two doors down from us still remembers finding a toy cowgirl in her goodie bag, and my mother telling her that it was a sign that when she grew up, she, too, would be a cowgirl. When everyone had made the rounds of all the games, we were served appropriate refreshments—usually cider, cupcakes, and yet more candy...

The most popular Halloween candy in each state.



<https://www.candystore.com/blog/facts-trivia/halloween-candy-map-popular/>



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👉 Please check back next month for the *November* entry to this *Journal through Time*.