

## School & Scares

The winds have taken the leaves from the trees, the frost lingers a little longer every morning and every day is a little shorter.

Our days are also a little more routine now that school is fully underway. This is actually a blessing as the beginning of the school year brought about a fair amount of chaos in our household.

Emilio began the year in Grade 2 still with Mascha as his teacher and is enjoying the new challenges that the higher grade brings.

Luca has moved from Nursery to Junior Kindergarten and seems to be shaping the place to his liking too.

Mascha too is doing well as she resumes her role in front of the class. This is a far cry from the summer where, for a while, we were not sure that Mascha would be going back to teach this year.

The pace over the summer was hectic and the pressure from parents and the school was non-stop over the warm months.

I think we all learned our lesson in that the Christmas break and the March break are far more relaxing as everyone takes those moments off.

The summer is more for preparation for the next year and as we have told a few of you, it really was too stressful. Me? Well I'm up to the usual crazy things that keep me busy - with one exception which I'm not ready to divulge yet. Nothing important at all - no life or career changes, rather a hobby to keep me busy in my "spare time."

Like I said, I may mention the details a little later, but for now I'll keep it secret.

We just finished Halloween last weekend and the boys just love it.

For those of you who are not from this part of the world, Halloween is October 31, the day before All Saints Day.

The origins of the Pagan event date back quite a long time and some people believe it is truly a night where the lines between the living and the dead become blurred.

What it has turned into however is a sugar-induced ritual where all the children get dressed as something (usually scary) and wander around the neighbourhood knocking on doors and yelling "trick or treat!"

The idea being that you give them a treat or they will play a trick on you. At least that's how it used to be. Nowadays they knock on your door, hold open their loot bag an expect you to throw something in - and smartly too because they have many houses to visit to get as much stuff as possible. Sometimes you don't even get a trick or treat.

Another interesting observation is that the

definition of "child" seems to be quite stretched and it's not uncommon to see older teenagers knocking on your door yelling trick or treat in their still-breaking voices. It's also quite clear that some of them come from far and wide to the "better neighbourhood" to get better stuff!

The boys love it though and we have taken to alternating staying home to receive the wandering ghouls or going out for our own bounty every other year.

When we do go out, it is usually only to 3 or 4 people that we know to keep it becoming too overwhelming. Even though we only visit a few houses, the boys still make out like bandits and we now leave the majority of the plunder for the "Good Witch" to come and trade for something more meaningful. This year she came and took much of the candy and left behind a lovely book on fairies.

In the old days, people would hand out apples or oranges and home-made baked

goods, but then (in the U.S. I believe) people started finding needles in their apples and razor blades in their cookies and so now, unless it's from someone you know, you are not supposed to accept anything that does not come in a hermetically sealed, shrink-wrapped, bullet proof wrapper.

The candy manufacturers love this time of year since they make out to the tune of about 5 billion dollars!

This year the boys went out dressed as a cheetah and a leopard.

The costumes were made by Karien's mother in Holland. Karien is Luca's Godmother so this was a really special treat for us. It's probably the last time Emilio will wear this kind of costume anyway as he is getting to the age where he is thinking more of pirates and monsters and Star Wars.

Luca still loves it though and hopefully we have a few more years with him in a cute suit before he too wants to walk around with a pretend axe stuck in his head.

One of the pleasures of this Halloween season was that we were invited to a farm just north of the city by one of Emilio's school mates. His name is Brandon and he and Emilio hit it off quite well so we were invited to a party that his parents throw every year. Some 30 odd children and their parents come to play in the barn and all of the kids and even some adults are fully decked out in their costumes. They do go to a lot of trouble and this year they built a maze from straw bales in the barn and all the kids had a blast trying to find their way through.



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Luca gets ready to pounce while Emilio takes a cat-nap just prior to going out for Halloween "trick or treating." The costumes were made in Holland by the mother of Luca's Godmother.

## Another Year

We celebrated Emilio's 8th birthday this past Saturday. As usual, we had 2 parties - the morning one for his friends and the afternoon one for family.

Our tradition is to usually invite the number of children that is equal to the age the child is turning. This year though, we strayed a little from the norm and Emilio got to invite 11 children instead of 8. The weather has been no mild (way above freezing on Saturday) that we thought we would be fine with everyone outside.

As usual, you cannot invite that number of children without having some sort of organized activity to keep them occupied and out of trouble. This year we decided to make bows and arrows!

Now, as is typical in our house, we cannot just make "normal" bows and arrows, we have to make supercharged, industrial strength weapons of mass destruction. I had been looking



for reasonable wood from which to make the bows but couldn't find anything suitable and no one knew where I could get my hands on English Yew, so I turned to the modern materials version and made the bows out of fiberglass. Emilio and I first made handles from wood and then I found some fence post "stretchers" at the local Home Depot that were perfect for bows. At just over a meter tall and about 6mm by 12mm, they were very springy and relatively inexpensive so I picked up 13 of them and took them home.

We pre-made the bows by

gluing the handle to the fiberglass bow and drilled holes at either end for the string. We did not string them though as that was part of the "making bows" portion of the planned activities.

For the arrows I got 13 dowel rods and cut them in half so that each child had 2 arrows. I got some wooden beads for the end to make them safer, and was going to work out a way to put feathers on the back end, but gave up on that idea pretty quickly because it would take too long and was too complicated for seven and eight year-old hands.

When all the kids arrived on Saturday we set about gluing the bead on the end of the arrow, I cut a little groove in the other end of the arrow for the string to fit in (as well as my finger a few times) and then the children had to paint their arrows to make them unique. A few decided to make them completely red "as if they had been shot through someone."

Next we strung the bows and then we went out into the backyard to shoot them.

It was amazing! The kids had such a blast! I set up an old log as a target and each child took turns at trying to shoot the log.

Many of them had never shot a bow and arrow before so it took longer for some than for others.

As is the custom here, every child gets to take home a "loot bag" of goodies they got at the party, and this year they got to take home their own bow and arrow that they made themselves.

It was a great success and Emilio really enjoyed the day.



It was hard to keep random sword fights from breaking out as the children sanded the shafts of their arrows



Luca only needed a little help to get the hang of it



Some excellent form from the archery line



Most of the children who were invited to the party are actually pupils in Mascha's class so they all behaved in front of the teacher



Emilio's birthday cake was a "honigkuchen" that we lived up with an orange-chocolate icing. There was not much left when all was said and done