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Bring on the candy

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'I'm gonna put a raisin in my belly button and go as a cookie for Halloween.'

My late grandmother Noo Noo would say this every single Halloween without fail. My sister reminded me of this and I couldn't think of a better way to start a column about Halloween.

As far as I know, Noo Noo never really did go as a cookie. But she and a friend did go as Beavis and Butt-head one year. They drew the faces on brown paper bags, put them over their heads and went to their friends' houses for candy.

They were at least approaching 80 at the time. Oh, how I miss Noo Noo.

If you're crafty like me, Halloween's the ideal time to show off your skills. I, myself, have been working on costumes for my kids for weeks.

Four of the five are going as, get this, twins! Clever, huh? Could have them all be "Five for Fighting." Kind of fitting, but not really practical, I suppose.

I actually just realized that Halloween's less than a week away when I sat down to write this column, meant to be about a candy buy-back program offered by a local dentist. (It just takes me a while to get to the point sometimes.)

Dr. Phillip Neal's program is ideal for parents who'd rather their children not gorge on candy or who already have stolen and eaten the good stuff - anything chocolate - from their children's Halloween stashes.

Neal of Crystal Lake Dental Associates will buy the candy for \$1 a pound from noon to 4 p.m. Nov. 1 at his office, 280 B Memorial Court. Call (815) 459-2202 or go to his Web site at www.drneal.com for more information.

As part of Operation Gratitude, www.opgratitude.com, the candy will be sent in care packages to those in the U.S. military this holiday season.

The event, first hosted last year, has turned into a sort of Halloween party at the dental office with costumes, a raffle, the signing of a giant card for the troops and a visit from the Warrior's Watch Riders. A troop support group, the Riders provide motorcycle escorts for military units returning from war or deploying.

Dr. Neal expected about 300 pounds of candy last year and ended up with nearly 1,300 pounds.

Those overseas in the military "just can't get the same kind of candy, the things you grew up with," Dr. Neal said. So the packages are a nice treat.

And the program itself might actually save a tooth or two, maybe even prevent a pound or two as well.

"A lot of times that candy just hangs around and kids and adults get into it more than you probably need to," Dr. Neal said.

Still wish I hadn't eaten all those Tootsie Rolls the kids collected during the Settler's Day parade in Marengo a couple weeks back. Because a bunch of little Tootsie Rolls eventually make one giant Tootsie Roll that just sits in your stomach for hours, slowly seeping into your thighs.

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