

Guising: disguising oneself in fancy dress, often with a mask.
By Geoff Wood

It seems safe to say that our Hallowe'en tradition goes back to pre-Christian times when, as the longer nights of November approached, people sensed that all the ghosts and spooks that populated the darker regions of the world emerged to haunt the daylights out of us. That being the case, why not anticipate their scary arrival by dressing ourselves up as spooks and demons and even profit by it by demanding handouts from the residents of the neighborhood? We did as kids, the streets teeming with masked vampires and the like - other less scary costumes might be seen. My very first, when I was but five years old, was a Krazy Kat outfit. On a higher theological level you could say, disguising ourselves as we did, we were performing a collective exorcism, forcing the spooks out of their hiding and thereby setting us up for the arrival of All Saints day – as a positive event despite the growing darkness.

And so it is that time of year for scary stories as well – and I must say I greatly admired our high school drama team's production one November long ago of Edgar Alan Poe's thriller: "The Tell-Tale Heart". If I may borrow from something I wrote long ago: The main character couldn't stand the presence of an old man who shared his house. *"One of his eyes," he complains, "resembled that of a vulture . . . Whenever it fell on me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees I made up my mind to rid myself of the eye forever."* So he did away with the old fellow, took up the floorboards, deposited the corpse and *"replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye - not even his - could have detected anything wrong."*

No sooner had he finished the task than three policemen knocked at his door responding to a neighbor's report of a scream during the night. "I bade them search - search well," . . . Except that, while he conversed with the police, a low, dull, quick sound began to pulsate throughout the room. This is where our special effects crew riveted the audience's attention. From a low, barely perceptible thump, thump, thump, thump to an ever-louder THUMP, THUMP, THUMP, THUMP the buried heart crescendo-ed throughout the theatre - while the main character became increasingly mad! "O God! what could I do? I foamed - I raved - I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise continually increased. I felt that I must scream!"

It makes me wonder whether Poe had a deeper intent than just entertaining people. He wrote several such stories. There was "The Cask of Amontillado" in which Montresor invites Fortunato into his cellar to taste a rare wine. Before the visit is over, Fortunato finds himself chained within an alcove which Montresor closes up with stone and plaster, saying: *In pace requiescat.* Then there is "The Fall of the House of Usher" where Roderick entombs his twin sister in a basement vault, only to hear the vault door clang open, to hear footsteps on the stairs . . .

Stories that work for Hallowe'en . . . scary . . . the encroachment of darkness upon our once sunny world . . . but all as prelude to All Saints Day – telling us that far from our world becoming populated only by ghosts, it will be populated by saints – people sacramentally risen from the dead here and hereafter. And therefore an occasion for us ultimately to break into a chorus of:

Oh, when the saints go marching in / Oh, when the saints go marching in / Oh Lord I want to be in that number / When the saints go marching in.