



For 44 years of freedom, family, and chewing gum. – This Monday night, Halloween, will mark 44 years of my arrival to this country. Growing up in La Habana, I heard great things about the USA, Miami specifically. I loved receiving that surprise Air Mail envelope from my cousins in Miami carrying a stick of Juicy Fruit gum, which I would make last a month; a practice unheard of during the plenteous days of a pre-Castro Cuba. Understand that by 1969, such a treat was a luxury item, especially for the closely scrutinized soon-to-exile family, and nothing ever tasted so sweet to me. *“Mira, tus primas te mandaron chicle,”* was music to my ears. Bigger than the landing on the moon, which coverage I remember watching live on TV that night, most likely while chewing on my American gum. So of course I was super excited to finally get to live in Miami and reunite with my family (and have all the Juicy Fruit I wanted). After a chorizo-eating three-year stretch in Madrid, Spain, that day finally arrived.

However, on that Halloween night in 1972, I went from feeling excited to having the heebie-jeebies. I thought America was a very strange place (not that I don’t now, but that’s a story for another day). On our drive from the airport, I saw odd looking characters acting bizarre, walking the streets collecting something or other. Hey! I was 9 and unaware of this creepy, ghostly, trick-or-treating tradition. You would’ve thought the same thing. God knows we had plenty of dress up days in Cuba for festivals and such, all our costumes hand-made by Mom, but never the kind of creepy stuff I was witnessing that night. Needless to say, *that* Halloween was unforgettable. And strangely enough, or not, that was the beginning of my fondness for this holiday. To this day, Halloween means freedom, family...and chicle. And Lord, I am thankful for all three.

Kids, may we always live free, be surrounded by family, and have as many sticks of gum as we’d like. Have a safe and happy Halloween.

What are you thankful for today?

*“Clothes make a statement. Costumes tell a story.”*

*-Mason Cooley*

"There is a child in every one of us who is still a trick-or-treater looking for a brightly-lit front porch."

-Robert Brault

"We left the way one leaves a cherished but impossible love: our hearts heavy with regret but beating with great hope."

-Mirta Ojito, *Finding Mañana: A Memoir of a Cuban Exodus*

"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."

-Ronald Reagan

Me. In costume. Habana, Cuba, 1969.



Us. In costume. Miami, U.S.A., through the years.



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