

THIRD AND LAST

When I was born, the disruption caused my brother to protest, lobbing endless arcs of shoes into my crib. Squinting, he says

he can still remember a time before me. Mom often jokes that after having a boy and a girl, the next logical step would've

been to get a golden retriever. But instead I arrived: a shrill pudge forever destined to be the yellow crayon in my mother's

Halloween costume idea. Home videos show I was a child in a persistent state of moping, my wide eyes always teary

and on the lookout for gross injustice. These injustices, or at least those that were recorded on film, include:

having my birthday candles cruelly blown out by my older sister repeatedly on my third birthday; being viciously

knocked over in an inexplicable hula contest on our front lawn; and a walk of shame after I peed in my ironically

yellow snowsuit during the annual Christmas tree hunt. Today, when friends look through old photo albums,

they have trouble finding me. It's easy,
I say, just look for the one purposefully
having no fun, the one with the bad

self-given haircut, the one crying over
her ugly jack-o-lantern, the one whose
pout seems suspiciously practiced,

the one that looks like the answer
to the question: *Come on, how bad
could having one more kid be?*

MY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CONFESSIONS

I never finished my year-end final report on Apartheid, and by *never finished*, I mean never even started.

For a whole year, I made fun of a kid because his lunch mat showcased the brief biographies of every U.S. President, despite the fact that I had a proximity-based crush on him, and that honestly, I'd kill to have that lunch mat now.

While my friends did their oral reports on, no joke, the RFK assassination conspiracy and the mating songs of humpback whales, I phoned it in with two reports on the only things I cared about: dogs and Bigfoot.

My teacher only agreed to these topics, I'm sure, because she thought it would bring some passion

and actual effort to my work. It did not. In the first grade, I kicked a kid named Dennis in the nuts so frequently,

his mother had a conversation with me during library time. In the second grade, I broke a two-foot tall Virgin Mary statue

which belonged to my teacher: a catholic nun named Mary. In the third grade, I constantly ate the plastic buttons

off my shirts, just hoping I'd get sick. In the fourth grade, my entire book report on *James and the Giant Peach*

was really just one long run-on sentence and somehow I still got an "A." In the fifth grade, I told my classmates

my *Sunflowers* repro on canvas was a real Van Gogh.
In the sixth grade, I had the whole school pray for my dad
who was missing in the San Francisco earthquake,
when in reality, he was safe in his hotel lobby in Oakland,
organizing businessmen to make rounds to all
the local powerless restaurants, offering to eat
their melting ice cream and defrosting shrimp cocktails.
It took years for people to stop thinking he was dead.

THIS MASK IS WHAT'S HOLDING MY FACE UP

The first and only year
that the neighborhood dads took
the kids out trick-or-treating

was also the only year that
an open Budweiser keg was
dragged around behind us
in a red Radio Flyer wagon.

It soon became the only Halloween
when us kids were encouraged
to tell people when their candy *sucked*,
or that pennies in a bag didn't cut it;

the only Halloween when
we were allowed to punch jerks
who tried to scare us with
the old *I'm just a mummy sitting
by the candy bowl* trick;

the only Halloween when,
if we ran into the cemetery
and stayed there for 30 seconds,
we were allowed to take whatever
we wanted from the other kids' bags,
even if, and especially if,
it was that kid's favorite candy;

the only Halloween when
we were allowed to switch costumes
and trick or treat at the same house
two or three times because
the candy was good or because
the owner was a *sonuvabitch*;

the only Halloween when,
if you saw a dog dressed up
in a Philadelphia Eagles jersey,
you had to take a shot:

Jack Daniels for the dads,
Extra Sour Warheads for the kids,

and neither one was allowed
to spit it out.