



Halloween: Urban Legends in the Urban Jungle

by James Koren

Halloween is supposed to be a night for youngsters in costume to take to the streets and ask for candy from strangers. In South Central Los Angeles, county officials host Halloween festivities for local kids – they say kids don't trick or treat because it isn't safe.

Trick-or-treating in the neighborhood around the Olympic Swim Stadium - on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard – is especially dangerous, according to Kimberly Simonet.

Her fears are fairly customary: a combination of anxieties about tainted Halloween candy and the area's high crime rates.

That's why the Swim Stadium hosted a haunted locker room and Halloween carnival. But residents of one street near the stadium and an expert on trick-or-treating said Simonet's – and the county's – fears don't jibe with reality.

Tyrone Moore lives on 40th Place, just a block south of the stadium. He said kids were trick-or-treating in full force this year.

"It was cool, you know, all the little kids walking around trick-or-treating – it was cool to see that around. A lot of kids this year [compared to] last year," he said.

He said most trick-or-treaters were accompanied by their parents.

Mario Leo and his three children also lives on 40th Place. Leo says his kids are safe playing in the neighborhood.

While this particular street may fly in the face of Simonet's fears, stories about tainted treats – razor blades in apples, for example – stretch well beyond the borders of South Central Los Angeles. More importantly, though, the stories aren't true, said Joel Best, a professor of sociology and criminal justice at the University of Delaware.

He's done extensive research on stories of tainted Halloween candy, and "I can't find any evidence that any child has ever been killed or seriously injured from a contaminated treat that's been picked up in the course of trick-or-treating," he said.

People believe these urban legends, Best said, because they are interesting stories that appeal to our anxieties about children and the future.

"Children are sort of the walking, talking future," he said.