



## Save Halloween!

*Stephanie S. Tolan*

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Is Halloween really the devil's holiday? Johnna's family never celebrated Halloween; her father's a minister who doesn't like kids dressing up as witches and devils. But nobody worries about Johnna's deep involvement in a class Halloween pageant until Uncle T.T. comes to town with his fiery crusade to abolish Satan's own holiday.

## Save Halloween! Details

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Author : Stephanie S. Tolan

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## From Reader Review Save Halloween! for online ebook

### Josiah says

"How come everybody else thought it was so easy to know what was right?"

—*Save Halloween!*, P. 96

My rating for this book was a bit tough to figure. I knew that I wanted to put it at two and a half stars, but I hovered for a good long while, and am still hovering, really, between rounding it up to three stars or down to two. *Save Halloween!* is a thoughtfully written and unusually introspective book, asking some difficult questions of the reader right alongside the main character, Johnna, as she asks those very same questions of herself.

The book's basic issues are well-familiar to American Christians, who tend to live more "in the world" than believers from countries such as China, India and Afghanistan, where the open practice of Christianity can bring severe repercussions from the law. As American Christians, it can be much easier to settle into the normal comforts of society like a warm bath, hardly noticing the violations of the faith as they sneak in the back door and make themselves at home. Many authors would not want to take on the task of writing about Halloween from the perspective of a young Christian girl like Johnna, but Stephanie S. Tolan has braved those troubled waters in this book, and done a good job of it. The debate goes back and forth in these pages and while I don't agree with every turn that Johnna makes down the pathway of logic, there nonetheless is some real food for thought in her mental wrestlings with the moral consistency of Christians being involved in Halloween, and it should cause us to pause and give more careful consideration to what we ourselves believe.

Johnna Filkins, a sixth-grader, is part of a family with a long tradition of preaching the gospel message. Her father has continued the line of pastors in the family by becoming one himself (as did his younger brother, T.T.), and had four children of his own: Matthew and Mark (twins, currently in ninth grade when the events of this book take place), Luke (an eighth-grader), and of course Johnna, the four of them being named after the authors of the Bible's four gospels. Johnna's father is a proactive Christian leader who takes his job of helping to nurture and provide for the poor very seriously, caring less about how much money he makes or his church is making than he does about what he is doing with the money he *does* have to serve the needs of a hurting world. This determined commitment to helping others causes some strain around the house, though, since Johnna's mother is a very practical woman and knows that the family's modest funds can only be stretched so far before they eventually snap.

It's Johnna's charismatic Uncle T.T. to the rescue when he takes a "vacation" from his normal job—leading Christian revival and fundraising crusades all around the country—to visit Johnna's family for a while. T.T. is a lightning rod for the sort of infectious outpourings of enthusiasm that can turn a church's dire financial situation around very quickly. He is possessed of a tremendous gift for being able to appeal directly to people's emotions and thereby bring about vital change in their perspective on important matters of faith. With T.T. around, the money troubles that have been recently worsening for Johnna's father and his ministry will soon become a footnote from the past.

As Johnna and her family prepare for the arrival of her spark plug uncle, Johnna has also begun working on a special Halloween project that her class is doing for school. Johnna is understandably uneasy about this, since even though she herself has always found Halloween to be a nonissue, her family is not so ambivalent on the matter, in plain terms condemning the holiday as a celebration in which an active and faithful Christian should have no part. Johnna's involvement in her project at school—the writing and directing of a

play about the history of Halloween—starts out small but continues to grow as her help is needed more and more, until she has virtually become the linchpin holding the production together. And she does hold it all together somehow, including the precarious balancing act of deciding how much information she should let her parents know about what she's doing for the Halloween project, until suddenly it all falls apart anyway.

When T.T. arrives in town, Johnna is not happy to find out that the impetus for his revival crusades at her father's church is going to be a spiritual revolution against the evils of Halloween. T.T. will, in fact, be rallying the support of the community to ban celebration of the holiday. Johnna believes in the Christian faith that she has been taught since she was a tiny child, and fears the devil and doesn't want to do anything to further the spread of his influence, but she's not sure that she buys into the satanic idea of Halloween that her uncle is now passionately pleading to the people of her hometown. When the status of her Halloween stage production at school is thrown into limbo by her uncle's crusades, Johnna will have to figure out very quickly exactly what she believes, and whether or not she has enough confidence in those beliefs to fight for them even if it means defying her family.

*Save Halloween!* is a good book that does a noteworthy job of laying out some serious issues in a way that could spark further discussion and thought. As I mentioned earlier, I can't say that I agree with all of the conclusions that Johnna draws about Halloween and its compatibility with contemporary Christianity, or the logistical considerations of her own personal faith in general—in fact, there were several times in the book when thoughts that Johnna had made me wonder how thoroughly her father had explained to her some of the important concepts of the Christian faith—but on the whole, this was a book marked by a lot of deep thought and unflinching debate on a topic that many writers would steer clear of so as to avoid the possibility of controversy. I also appreciate the objective view of Christianity that the author provides, drawing characterizations of the Christians in the book not as greedy for money, or living lives exactly like non-Christians and just throwing around the name of Jesus every once in a while as if that proves that they are believers, but painting them as they truly *are*: normal, imperfect people who make mistakes just as often as anyone who's not of the faith, the difference being that they believe Jesus paid the price for the many sins of their life with his death on the cross, and thereby freed them from the power of death. It's not about being better than anyone else, but about simply believing in the ransom that Jesus paid to save them, and the reality of Christians as that type of people comes through in *Save Halloween!* better than in any other mainstream book of juvenile fiction I've ever read. This is a memorable story that's worth reading, and I recommend it particularly to the thoughtful reader.

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### **AMIYAH says**

i think this book is just right for me

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### **Morrigan says**

I read this book aloud to my mum and we both thoroughly enjoyed it. It portrays a lot of views on some difficult topics, namely halloween.

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### **Eden says**

Joanna comes from a family of preachers and she has never been allowed to Trick or Treat, or really

celebrate Halloween in any way. She has never viewed Halloween as bad and without her parents knowledge, has been involved in some Halloween activities at her school. This year, she was asked to write a script for a Halloween pageant.

It is all going well until Joanna's uncle T.T. comes to town. He is there to help her family, who is struggling, but his preaching about stopping Halloween seems to have the town divided and fighting one another.

There is even friction within Joanna's own family because of her involvement. But, Joanna feels she needs to do what's right. And she knows she needs to save Halloween.

I don't normally read Christian books, but this one caught my eye. I was raised Catholic, went to church throughout my childhood and part way through my teenage years. But, Halloween was always celebrated at my house. I went Trick or Treating every year, and some of my best childhood memories are of Halloween. To this day Halloween is still my favorite holiday.

I thought this book was interesting because it was through the perspective of a Christian girl. To me, she often seemed that she wasn't very much like her family. And I actually feel bad that she never got the chance to really celebrate Halloween. It also made me feel bad for Joanna that her parents never really supported her choice. I understand they weren't into Halloween, but what Joanna did was quite amazing and they should have shown her some support.

I do want to say that Joanna is right that Halloween, or Samhain, has never been about the Devil. It is only takes doing some research to find that out. And I definitely recommend researching Halloween. It has a vast and wonderful history. Don't listen to the people who say that it is evil or a day to worship the devil. It's not that at all. Sure, some people do bad things on Halloween, but bad things happen every day of the year as well.

I thought this was a good that asked some serious questions and for those who read it, it will give them a lot to think about.

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