

## A TRAGIC END

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October rolls around, and my friends Liz, Callie, and I began to feel homesick. Our favorite season is Fall, and while it is not Fall here in Santiago, Chile where we are studying abroad, we see pictures from friends back home, walking through beautifully colored trees and playing in the falling leaves. In order to cure ourselves of the longing to sip spicy cider and pumpkin carving, we decide to treat ourselves to a night dedicated to Fall activities.

We meet up at the *Principe de Gales* metro station and walk to the market. It is warm outside and nothing at all like the pictures we see from back home. We set out with the purpose of finding huge orange pumpkins to carve. When we get to the fruit and vegetable section of the store, we are hugely disappointed. They don't carry anything that looks anything like a pumpkin and when we ask, we are taken to the Halloween candy aisle and handed a hollow neon orange plastic pumpkin, used for collecting goodies.



*"No, no, no. This is not at all what we are looking for. Thank you".*

We are filled with desperation. The homesickness gets deeper, standing there helpless near the tropical papayas and mangoes. Nothing here resembles a big happy pumpkin that you can make pie out of or scoop out the goo in order to roast salty seeds in the oven. Callie spots an ugly, grey looking spherical vegetable and gives me a sly look.

"What do you think of this thing?" The sign above it informs us it is a *zapallo europeo*, or European squash. Our hopes are lifted and we scour the pile for decent-looking squash that might support a jack-o-lantern face. We lug them home, excited that we have found something to that might contribute to our homemade Fall day in Chile.

With our steaming cups of apple cider nearby, the table lined with newspapers and equipped with the largest kitchen knives we could find, we start to cut a hole in the top of the *zapallos* to make a lid. Instantly, our eyes meet and the same message is conveyed between the three of us.

*Oh no, this is going to be very difficult to cut through.*

It takes a good ten minutes just to cut a circle in the top and when it is pulled away, we are surprised to see that the walls lining the inside are about four inches thick. How on earth are we going carve into something this thick? But we are determined to make jack-o-lanterns just as if we were celebrating Halloween at home. We turn on some tunes, and spend the next three hours or so hollowing out our squash, making the inner walls thin enough to eventually carve some interesting looking faces. Every once in a while, my friends' host mom comes to check on us and asks if we are hungry. But we are much too busy to bother with food - we are determined to see the job through. She walks away shaking her head and we know she is baffled by our crazy *gringo* activity.

As the sun begins to set, we have finally completed what we set out to do. We place tiny tea lights inside the squash, sit back, and admire the work we have done. Three squash sit on the table, each with their own personality: scary, happy, and a silly pirate. We are covered in orange goo, it is all over our clothes and hair as if the vegetables in front of us had exploded instead of been carved. Callie and I leave Liz's house and head to our own host families to show them the work we have done. When I get home, I show my mom what we have been working on and the look on her face shows me she has never seen anything like it. I explain to her that in the United States people go to pumpkin patches and choose a pumpkin, bring it home to carve designs or faces, and leave them outside of the house for kids to admire as they are trick-or-treating. Halloween is a relatively new holiday in Chile and all the traditions that go along with it have still not reached this far down below the Equator.



She is so excited about my pumpkin that she promises we will put it outside in a few days for Halloween. For now we leave it on the dining room table and head to bed. I am exhausted from spending so much time trying to carve this masterpiece.

The next day when I get home from school, our *nana* (nanny who cooks and cleans the house) is making dinner. I am happy to see her and excited to show her what I have made.

*"Hi Ester! Did you see the pumpkin that I carved?"* I notice it is no longer on the table so I assume it has been put outside like I talked about with my host mom.

*"Yes Ali! It is so beautiful! Thank you so much for bringing it home and sharing with us."*

*"Of course! No problem. Do you know where it is?"* She tilts her head and looks at me funny.

*"Well,"* she points to the pot simmering on the stove, *"I made it into soup."* saying it in such a way that she is confused as to why I hadn't already known that. My face must be priceless in this moment since I am completely shocked by what she is telling me.

*"Oh, ok."* I say to her and excuse myself to take my school stuff to my room before dinner is served. I shut my door, sit down on the bed, completely confused at what has just happen. After about three minutes, I begin to chuckle to myself about the situation. Chuckling quickly becomes hysterical laughter and my host mom rushes into my room to check on me. She has just been informed by my host brother what happened.

*"I am so sorry Ali! I had no idea!"* she is close to tears, knowing how hard we worked to carve the squash. But I can't help but laugh not only at the fact that my silly jack-o-lantern is soon to be served to my family as dinner but also at my host mom for taking it so seriously.

I try to explain to her how funny it really is and eventually she is convinced I am not upset. This cultural mix up is one for the record books. When we head to the kitchen, I see that Ester has been informed by my host brother what she has done and she is holding the remaining pieces of the silly face out to me as a peace offering. At seeing this, I start laughing even harder, and she realizes I am not mad. We spend the entirety of dinner cracking up at the demise of my *zapallo europeo*.