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PRESENTS THE COACHING SERIES...

“A PANE IN THE GLASS”

LOOF LIRPA

by Bill Tschirhart

First, as evidenced below, I have done due diligence on this subject. My source was Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia that answers so many of my questions these days. The subject is **April Fool's Day!** Here's what I learned.

The origin of this custom has been much disputed. Many theories have been suggested.

What seems certain is that it is in some way or other a relic of those once universal festivities held at the [vernal equinox](#), which, beginning on old [New Year's Day](#), the 25th of March, ended on the 2nd of April.

It has been suggested that Europe derived its April-fooling from the French.^[2] France was one of the first nations to make [January 1](#) officially [New Year's Day](#) (which was already celebrated by many), by decree of [Charles IX](#). This was in 1564, even before the adoption of the [Gregorian calendar](#) (See [Julian start of the year](#)). Thus the [New Year's](#) gifts and visits of felicitation which had been the feature of the 1st of April became associated with the first day of January, and those who disliked or did not hear about the change were fair game for those wits who amused themselves by sending mock presents and paying calls of pretended ceremony on the 1st of April. French and Dutch references from 1508 and 1539 respectively describe April Fools' Day jokes and the custom of making them on the first of April.

Though the 1st of April appears to have been anciently observed in [Great Britain](#) as a general festival, it was apparently not until the beginning of the 18th century that the making of April-fools was a common custom.

In [Scotland](#) the custom was known as "hunting the gowk," i.e. the [cuckoo](#), and April-fools were "April-gowks," the cuckoo being there, as it is in many countries, a term of contempt.

In France the person fooled is known as poisson d'avril. This has been explained from the association of ideas arising from the fact that in April the sun quits the [zodiacal](#) sign of the fish. A far more natural explanation would seem to be that the April fish would be a young fish and therefore easily caught. The French traditionally celebrated this holiday by placing a dead fish on the back of friends. Today the fish is substituted by a paper cut-out.

The [Dutch](#) celebrate the 1st of April for other reasons. In 1572, the [Netherlands](#) were ruled by [Spain's](#) King [Philip II](#). Roaming the region were Dutch rebels who called themselves [Geuzen](#), after the [French](#) "gueux", meaning beggars. On [1 April](#), 1572, the Geuzen seized the small coastal town of [Den Briel](#). This event was

also the start of the general civil rising against the Spanish in other cities in the Netherlands. The [Duke of Alba](#), commander of the Spanish army could not prevent the uprising. Bril is the Dutch word for glasses, so on [1 April](#), 1572, "Alba lost his glasses". Dutch people find this joke so hilarious they still commemorate the first of April.

Now that I have paid my dues to academia, the real reason for this “bonus” essay in the “**A Pane in the Glass**” series is to take you back to a simpler time in your life when you were a student, likely attending elementary school. As the calendar progressed toward the end of March, with Winter Break now just a memory, turning the calendar page not only meant April showers as a harbinger of May’s flowers, but that first day of the next month gave new meaning to the word “scheme”. And the most likely target was one’s teacher.

I was a relatively new teacher at an elementary school in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, my hometown. It was the very early ‘70’s (that’s the **1970**’s). The school was a K-6 elementary school in a middle-class area of the city. We had two grade six classes. I had one and as luck would have it a woman with whom I attended high school, had the other. We decided that we would “team teach” the two classes by splitting the subjects and spending half a day with each class. It was a very workable arrangement for all concerned. We only had to prepare lessons for half the grade six curriculum and we got to know all the grade six students really well. It was a win/win situation.

For the purpose of anonymity, my colleague shall be known as Brenda. I'm not sure where she is right now. We've lost touch over the years, but I'm sure as she flips the calendar to April, she too will recall a particular April 1. It always does for me!

At that time, there was an “end of the winter one-week holiday”, but it wasn’t called Winter Break. Wherever Easter fell, the week following was known as the Easter Holidays. Since the celebration of Easter, for some unknown reason (sounds like another job for *Wikipedia*) is regulated by the phases of the moon, April fool’s Day that particular year was going to fall in that Easter Holiday time.

A few days before the Easter holidays, in the staff room, Brenda took note of that and lamented the fact that the students were going to lose the fun of April Fool's Day. She also noted that the target of the April fools jokes was always the teaching staff and perhaps it was time to turn the tables. Worthy of note here is the fact that this entire idea was Brenda's, not mine. But as you will see, I was a willing participant and therefore just as guilty.

The plan was simple really. As noted above, we divided the subjects for the grade six curriculum so she schemed that perhaps an April Fool's joke with a Social Studies twist was in order, and since I taught the Social Studies curriculum, I was clearly the person who had to “do the dirty work”. What follows is the story I told to both classes on the last day of school prior to the Easter Holidays. And remember, I had to tell this story twice, in the morning to one of the grade six classes, and in the afternoon to the other. Brenda

and I speculated that someone in the morning class would surely see through our feeble attempt at an April Fool's joke, and spill the beans and as a result I wouldn't even have to tell the story to the afternoon class. An abbreviated version of the story follows: *A new explorer had recently been discovered by the Ministry of Education. As with most of the grade six explorers, he came from a Scandinavian country and his name was “Loof Lirpa”.* The story should never have gone any further than that. Some forward thinking student should've raised his or her hand and said, *"Oh Mr. T., that's April Fool spelled backward. Nice try though!"* and that would have been the end of it. But, not only was it not the end, it was just the beginning!

The story went on to say, that *This new explorer did not have any print material about him in school textbooks. Therefore, your task for the Easter holidays is to find out as much as you can about "Loof Lirpa".* That was the end of the story, and again I thought that some student would instantly expose the hoax. But no one did!

In the staff room at lunch, Brenda was eager to learn the degree of success of my storytelling skills. When I told her that the entire class seemed to buy it, she joined with me in my surprise. We thought that when the students returned from lunch (those were the days when everyone went home for lunch) a parent upon hearing the story would reveal our joke and that would have been the end of it. But either no student related the fable during lunch or the parents did not realize what we were up to.

Now I had to tell the same story and issue the same challenge to the afternoon class. I did, and again it was bought hook, line and sinker.

When the bell sounded to end the day, everyone, students and teachers left the building quickly to begin the holidays. To be honest, I never gave Loof Lipa and all that went with it, a second thought. My thoughts were on skiing.

One of my friends had a family cottage near Huntsville in central Ontario. His parents had donated the cottage to a group of us to enjoy a week of skiing at Hidden Valley Ski Resort close by. So within an hour of the end of school on the Friday before the holidays, I was driving north for a week of skiing, leaving all thoughts of school behind.

But, while I was impersonating a skier, my students, many of their parents and friends, were busy on the task at hand. Some of my students were so diligent they made a special trip to the Kitchener Public Library and enlisted the aid of the librarians there to find out as much as they could about this intrepid Scandinavian wanderer. Needless to say, their search was quite fruitless. This was before home computers. You couldn't sit down at your Mac or PC and access anything on-line. On-line meant that you had caught a fish or Mom had hung the clothes out to dry. Research in that era meant physically gathering print material (you remember books don't you). To this day I can't imagine that someone, a librarian, a parent, or a friend didn't realize that this was an April Fool's joke. But no one did! Remember too that

April 1 fell during the holidays. Some students must have done their research on April Fool's Day. PT Barnum was wrong. You can fool all of the people all of the time!

There are some scenes in one's life that are indelible. One such scene was my arrival home from my week of skiing. My mother was literally waiting at the door. That was never a good sign! There was no, "How was the skiing, Bill?" only, "We have to talk!" You can imagine the subject of our discussion. My poor mother received many telephone calls from various sources, few of whom saw much humour in the situation. My mother was not one to mince words. She was the ultimate in “telling it like it is” and it wasn't pretty.

It was only then that I realized how successful I had been with my story several days earlier. Apparently, no one, I mean no one "got it" until very late in the week but many were understandably quite upset with the time that was spent trying to gather material that never existed. At that time teachers did not have the array of resources within the school that they have now. Most of our audio-visual material came through the Kitchener Public Library. The librarians were so upset, there was some talk that I was going to be banned from using library materials (although, likely due to the detrimental effect that decision would have had on the students, that never happened). Happily most of the parents thought it was a great joke and passed that sentiment on to their children. In fact there were many parents who applauded me for the first time having a teacher play the joke on the students as it was usually students who change seats, embed chalk in the chalkboard erasers, drop their books and writing instruments on the floor at a prescribed moment among the other April Fool's Day pranks the students loved to play on teachers.

The first day of school following the holidays was, shall I say, interesting. By that time the entire school, indeed the entire school system, knew what it happened and again most of them found the joke fun including all of the students (and an understanding principal). I was paid a visit by the school superintendent who passed along the concern of the Kitchener Public Library staff but who couldn't help chuckle at the whole affair.

The person who found the joke most hilarious of course was my friend Brenda!

Enjoy today and if you have an April Fool's joke played upon you I hope you will laugh along with it! And if you're thinking about perpetrating one, perhaps you might think about all the possible consequences before you do!

Long live “Loof Lirpa” (but only in my memory, and now yours)!