

OUCH! Big stick



Speak Slowly and You Won't Need a Big Stick

by Reg Green

Reading the other day about problems of communication in education, I remembered my first weeks at university (in England) when one of the other students made an offhand reference to Fairy Nuff.

Those weeks had been a whirl of jargon, incomprehensible regulations and frightening class assignments. We'd also just had our first essays graded by the formidable Max Beloff (later Baron Beloff), who taught economic history and were shaken by his caustic comments in front of the entire class.

I squirmed as he called my ideas naive and another student, steeped in Marxism, had his essay rejected out of hand. "Don't send me anything if that's what you decide but I won't accept nonsense in lieu of an essay," our good-natured mentor told him. This wasn't a bit like high school!

So, I let Fairy Nuff fly over my head, hoping that one day I'd get the hang of him/her/it. And the next time she said it I did. It was "fair enough."

Maybe I was a dope not to have tumbled to it earlier but don't forget that Humbert Humbert, no dope, was baffled when Lolita told him about Our Glass Lake and only figured it out later as Hourglass Lake.

Similarly, I scratched my head when, as I prepared for a trip to Canada one winter a few years ago, the friend who'd invited me said it was so cold that I should equip myself with "min kunderwear."

But most puzzling of all was when my first wife told me I looked like a rubber sheep. I wasn't offended, my appearance has never been noble. But try as I might, I couldn't make the image fit so, reluctantly, I gave in and asked what she meant. "Not rubber sheep, you nitwit," she said. "Rubbish heap."