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# WEEKEND BREAK

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# Fool your friends, before they fool you

April Fools' Day isn't  
just for corporate  
shenanigans and media  
trickery.

By AARON BRENNIMAN  
For The Daily Astorian

Spring's arrival marks the coming of April Fools' Day, that delightfully joyous celebration of pulling one over on your friends and family members. Whether you select the harmless approach or prefer a more sinister in nature approach, April 1 is a great day to get playful.

According to Wikipedia, history.com, hoaxes.org and Snopes, there's plenty of controversy surrounding the origins of April Fools' Day, also called All Fools' Day.

While some sources date it back to Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," other references source it to the mid 1500s when France switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar. Other theories range from the Middle Age's New Year's Day celebrations ending on April 1 to far-stretching Biblical references to Genesis and Noah and the ark, sending the doves out on the first day of April. If there's a consensus, it's that there's no agreement on the day's origins.

And Western cultures aren't the only ones to celebrate, an equivalent day in Spain and Hispanic America is "Day of the Holy Innocents" and in Belgium the day used to be known as the "Day of Stupid Children" or "Day of Innocent Children" where parents and grandparents play tricks on their kids, but has reportedly lost favor recently to April Fools' Day.

In Scotland, a two-day event featured "hunting the gowk" in which people were sent on phony errands (where the gowk is another word for the cuckoo bird, a symbol for a fool) and then followed by Tailie Day, where stunts feature placing signs such as "kick me" on unsuspecting individuals backsides.

**Joke, prank or hoax?**  
First off, some semantics. There are jokes,



Upsplash

which Merriam-Webster describes as "especially, a brief oral narrative with a climactic humorous twist." Then there's the prank, defined as "a mildly mischievous act," which is a little more like it. And then there's a hoax, which is defined as "to trick into believing or accepting as genuine something false and often preposterous."

So, April Fools' Day shenanigans often fall somewhere in the prank-hoax realm.

Many corporate and media stunts have played prominently into the advance of the day, including the BBC's 1957 reporting of a record spaghetti crop in Switzerland, complete with noodle harvesting photos. In 1996, Taco Bell spoofed buying Philadelphia's Liberty Bell and claiming its subsequent renaming to the Taco Liberty Bell; while in 1998, Burger King advertised a "Left-Handed Whopper" leading many to attempt to actually order the burger.

One of the most extravagantly planned pranks was the "Eruption of Mount Edgecumbe" in 1974, when practical joker Oliver "Porky" Bickar flew in piles of old tires soaked in kerosene into Mount Edgecumbe's crater, lighting them to create plumes of thick black smoke leading many residents of the sleepy Alaska town of Sitka to take to the streets thinking the mountain was erupting.

In 1992, NPR's Talk of the Nation featured a hoax where a Nixon impersonator announced that he'd again be running for president, claiming "I didn't do anything wrong, and I won't do it again." After listeners flooded the stations with calls, the station announced during the second half of the show that the bit was, in fact, a prank.

**'Fake news'**  
It's interesting to contemplate the history of April Fools' Day's with today's "Fake News"

epidemic, covering everything from trickery to propaganda to maliciousness. These days, social media and some media outlets regularly spread "fake news" and false stories, pranks and hoaxes, but lacking a similar intent.

Wikipedia itself even set its "Rules for Fools" as a sort of 'code-of-conduct its editors to allow them to creatively have fun with the day, but to be responsible in their approach.

Personally, I tend to prefer the harmless, but am tempted toward the more mischievous. I've always wanted to Saran Wrap a toilet, although I figured I'd end up having to clean that one up so I've never actually done it. I've heard of offices and cubicles covered in tinfoil, bedrooms completed flipped in arrangements. Need an idea? Take a cue from how Jim messes with Dwight on "The Office" and pull off one of his many tricks (desk moved to bathroom, items in Jell-O, call a co-worker a different name, convince them it's a different day) ... even though April Fools' Day falls on a Sunday, take it to the workplace and pull pranks on Monday or Friday.

I've asked a few friends and on social media about their best pranks, favorite ones pulled on them or toward others. I've talked with those that favor and enjoy the simple, harmless stunts. Some have even pulled quite intricate, slightly malicious hoaxes on partners or spouses.

The basic consensus: it's far better to prank than to be pranked. So get creative, get the jump, start the day strong, go long with friends and family near and far. You'll also be more aware when it comes your turn from others.

May your merriment be laughable, cordial and follow the general theme of hilarity.

Aaron Breniman is a freelance writer based in Portland, When he's not talking about outdoor safety or what he's reading, he can most likely be found fishing small streams or enjoying mountain sunrises and sunsets bathed in silence and solitude. For this assignment, he tied it up on aboard a flight from Munich to San Francisco and is all to quick to encourage you to quit your job if you're not happy. Contact him or find him on the socials via [www.aaronbreniman.com](http://www.aaronbreniman.com)