

It's a mad, mad day!

"There's something under the bed!"

"What?"

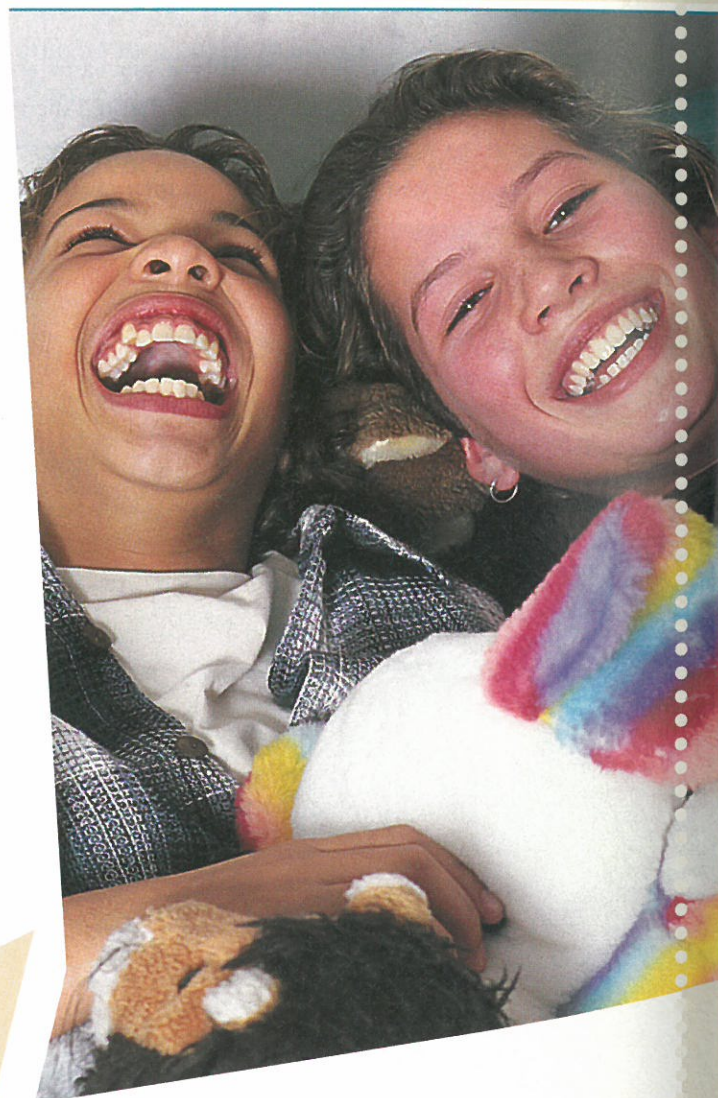
"Under the bed!"

"What is it?"

"I don't believe it! It's a rat!"

"A rat? Oh no! Get it out of here!"

"April fool!"



A typical start to the first of April in Britain. And only the start. You pick up the newspaper: "Too many tourists in London: triple-decker buses planned."

At school there are more jokes. Your form tutor tells the class that Prince Charles is coming to watch your PE lesson. A friend tells you that she saw the headteacher being taken away in a police car. At lunchtime the menu says: owl meat pizza, dog tongue soup, fried bat etc.

Don't trust the TV either. There will be pictures of the spring spaghetti harvest in Italy or of a new car that runs on lemonade.

There is one good thing about April Fools' Day. It stops at 12 am. After midday, no more jokes, no more tricks, no more surprises. For another year anyway.

The Unluckiest Boy in the World

There are 365 days to be born in. So why was I born on April 1? Everyone laughs when I tell them my birthday. But it's not funny.

I remember how bad that day was when I was a little boy. On April 1st I told all my school friends that it was my birthday. They just laughed and said: "You don't fool us, Jacob!"

Jacob Whittaker, born 1.4.81

APRIL FOOLS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Tampere, Finland

The local newspaper ran a story about piranha fish escaping from the Särkänniemi aquarium. They asked local fishermen to go to the Tammerkoski rapids and help fish them out.

Perth, Australia

A local newspaper published a photo of a black and white cow. It had a map of Australia on one side. The paper said the pattern was the result of genetic engineering, and that all the baby cows would have the same pattern.

Montreal, Canada

A Montreal radio station gave all phone owners a warning. One phone company was going to blow

the dust out of its lines at 11 am. Everyone with a phone was asked to put a plastic bag around it to stop the dust going all over the house.

London, UK

An advertisement in a London newspaper said that London Bridge was for sale. There was a showing at 11.30 for people who were interested.

Vienna, Austria

A shop selling garden equipment advertised unusual plastic gnomes. You could bring a photo of a relative or neighbour to the shop and they would make you a gnome that looked just like them. You could then put it in your garden.

(May 1) May Day

Dancing with Desire

Nowadays Valentine's Day is a day for lovers. It's ridiculous. Think about it! Freezing cold! Maybe snowing! Is February a good month for young lovers to leave their homes and spend time together?

Of course not!

In the old days the real romance happened on May Day! Warm weather, flowers, soft grass to lie on. That's why there were so many dances on May 1. So young people could meet each other.

Swedes, Germans, Brits all dance around a coloured pole called a maypole. A circle of dancers all hold strings which are tied to the top of the maypole. As they go round and round, the string winds around the pole, getting shorter and shorter. The circle of dancers gets smaller and smaller. An excellent way to bring people together!

Even more strange are the English Morris men! You will also see these on May Day. Long ago they danced in front of the village girls to show their strength and fitness. Sometimes they would put a handkerchief in their armpit at the start of a dance. Then when it was really sweaty they would take it out and wave it under their true-love's nose. The smell made the girls wild. With excitement? Or with anger?

It's difficult to say.



MAYDAY! MAYDAY!

May Day! The first day of summer. A day of dancing, singing and celebration all over Europe.

So why do British people shout "Mayday! Mayday!" when there is a disaster. If your ship is sinking, surely "Help!", or "Jump!" or "Damn!" would be more sensible?

Not at all.

"Mayday!" has nothing to do with "May Day", the first of May. It comes from the French "M'aidez!". It means "Help me!" British people, of course, pronounce it wrongly as "Mayday".

Hopefully people understand what they mean when British ships are sinking.