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about 1,615 words

**LABOR DAY, 500,000 BC—**  
***(another story about cavemen)***  
By Paul Lambrecht

Smoke from the fire danced skywards on oxygenated wings, each wisp participating in the story an old Grok was conducting. He had become the chieftain one decade previously, and now was reaching the ripe old age of 36. He was on his way out physically. He had a long beard and noisy rheumatic bones.

He had been MARRIED to Rosen for twelve summers before she died delivering a baby who came out sideways.

This was Grok's male heir, Bruno. Bruno was a very strong fair boy, with a flair for mischief.

He liked catching butterflies and holding them over the fire.

He was now six summers old.

He was very sharp and bright. Little Bruno was also a naturally prolific hunter. At five summers, he had already captured his first duck-billed ratypus. He had begun terrorizing the long-toothed loons as soon as he could walk, even before he could swim.

He was a gifted fisherman, too, and this more than anything, even his pedigree, endeared himself to the bosom of the tribe.

The shrill squawks of the loons reverberated in the looming dusk of evening.

Meanwhile, Grok, advanced in his ponderings, and familiar with some of the mystical words, wondered at the dawn of humanity. This clever species always astounded him.

There was another tribe not far away, with whom they were all friends.

The tribe nearby was homo sapiens sapiens, too, though they all possessed less hair than those of Grok's tribe.

Grok actually thought it best for Bruno to grow up among this tribe rather than his own when his time came. His tribe was mostly comprised of the old and feeble, in mind, body, and spirit, since Minik and Punko had passed.

Grok had maimed Punko eighteen summers past. This had done nothing to cheer the fellow up and he died of sick rather gratefully. For the purpose of debuting his son Bruno, Grok had feasts and invited the other tribe to them. The members of this tribe were lean and hungry, though gentler and fairer to look at.

Grok spoke to them in sacred words and they regarded him with a mix of awe and amazement. They comprehended that Bruno was Grok's SON, and repeated the word. Then Grok would pat Bruno's head and the males of the other tribe he encouraged to follow suit.

At one feast, Grok stood up. It was clear to everyone gathered that he had imbibed too much of the blueberry wine. He called up his son Bruno and the chieftain of the other tribe. For the instruction and amusement of the merry-makers present, he joined the crania of his son and the chief together in an arc. The crowd ooh'ed and ah'ed appreciatively. The other chieftain looked quite put out

because it was necessary to hobble him over to touch crowns with a six year old, and Grok was none too gentle.

After that Bruno went to live with the other tribe. Since learning the secret of mystic words from Grok, they had taken to naming everything. Bruno tired of all the words but memorized them nonetheless.

Now he was even more popular in this tribe due to his ability to hunt and fish. It was clear from his developing stature, hairier body, and precocious gifts for language, sagacity, and sport, that he would be their chief one day. So the current chief raised him as if he was his own flesh and blood.

When Bruno had reached the age of ten summers, Grok passed away. Bruno grieved this loss very much.

They put his body atop a cairn where long-toothed loons picked his bones clean. They ground Grok's breastbone down to a fine grey powder with a pestle and Bruno wore him in a skin pouch around his neck. After this he never saw the tribe of his father again. What few of them were left stayed in the cave and died there or were absorbed by one of the smaller nomadic tribes who passed through.

When Bruno had reached the age of fourteen summers, he became the chieftain when his adoptive father died. This

was a lot of responsibility for a teen, despite the fact that Bruno was already approaching middle-age for a caveman.

He held a feast to celebrate Bucko, the old chief. In it he delivered what may have been the planet's first eulogy, though very few there gathered understood much of it. Here follows a rough transcription:

Bucko good father

Feared very much by wolves and cave-bears

Big smile, long beard

Strong like a she-bear protecting her cub

Good with spear

Loud fart, big crap

Mate of Sheleb

With Bog now

Goodbye Bucko

Praise Bog

The rest of the tribe stood in unblinking amazement of Bruno until he had stopped, then they erupted in a chorus of hooting and howling, which crashed off the still stars and moon.

The first ever wake. After that, it became customary to say a few mystical words at every death ceremony. Usually it was simple. A sister or brother of the deceased

would stand and say one or maybe two descriptive tags about the departed's unique stature.

Snak-o smelled bad or Rocko disliked heights.

Beppo was allergic to giant bees apparently or Jocko didn't seem too keen on the females.

Faced with the sadness of losing someone close, these eulogies became one or two-line jokes. Thus comic relief was born, mainly as a coping mechanism.

The tribe grew and grew, despite the occasional death, and eventually all the young cubs got corralled together and were instructed in the sacred words. Thus began the first school.

And Bruno was the first teacher.

Sky is blue, he'd say.

Sky is blue, they'd say.

He paced back and forth, lost in pensive contemplation.

Grass is green, he'd say.

Grass is green, they'd say.

Minka has big breast glands, he'd say, and all of the cubs would snicker. Bruno found this a very rewarding occupation.

At night he'd dream of the potential of his tribe, and the discoveries these cubs would make. This world was such

a hidden mystery waiting for a person smart enough to uncover the solutions to its vast riddles. One of his pupils, Max-o, had taken to drawing figures in the dust with his stick.

O and □, for example.

Didn't make any sense to Bruno, but he fostered it anyhow.

They were visited by a neighboring tribe, once, who were frightened off running by this queer tribe where all the folk spoke to one another. Bruno and his pupils would talk the ear off anyone who would listen. Among Bruno's own tribe, even, this was cause for alarm.

A saying was developed to silence these over-talkers. Talking don't put buffalo meat on the spit. This was soon shortened to Buffalo Spit.

Then Buff-Spit.

This was the first way ever of emphatically telling someone to shut the hell up.

Buff-Spit.

No one ever said Buff-Spit to Bruno but he heard it aimed at his cubs often enough. What a stupid superstitious lot, these cavefolk.

The worst thing one could ever say to another soul was that his mother possessed a baboon's ass for a face. Hunko had killed Paco for saying that his first and only time.

That had led to the temporary moratorium on homicides.

Hunko had spoke at Paco's service and called the deceased a fat toad, which caused great offense to Paco's father, Taco. Taco was subsequently permitted to singe Hunko's testicles with a fiery poker. After that, Hunko was referred to as Fire-Crotch.

Bruno found the use and proliferation of words fostered mainly rancor and discord among his tribe, and was puzzled by this, what with the tool mainly being used for insults and Buff-Spits flying around everywhere.

It was soon necessary as a result to create a forum to redress grievances and resolve disagreements, this language cat being let out of the bag, and not being permitted to stuff it back in. As chief, Bruno felt compelled to moderate these petty squabbles and rudimentary complaint proceedings.

Minka stole my baby, went one such complaint.

That's fine. Look at all the milk she can offer the cub.

But I love my baby.

Not yet owning the wrinkles and wisdom of Solomon, Bruno didn't hit upon the truly wise solution of threatening to saw the cub in two to root out the true mother's identity. Instead he ordered Minka flogged. Before too long, she broke down blubbering into her waist-low milk bladders and copped to what she'd done.

Bruno felt no satisfaction in weaseling out the culprit and felt sorry for the old sow, so he postponed Minka's whipping indefinitely. Besso was just happy to get her cub back.

He trained some of his pupils to moderate these disputes and soon they were all arguing and advocating at every possible contingency, thus establishing the first system of earthly jurisprudence.

By this time, Bruno was nearing forty summers on this planet, and he was weary of life, and regretting all he'd brought into being. So he prepared some words, which he made his disciple, Ben, memorize, to be recited upon his death.

And one fine summer's day, not long after, Ben had need to utter the verses in honor of the fallen chief, amongst the general wailing, rending of hair, and gnashing of teeth. A rough transcription follows:

Bruno tried hard.

He loved his tribe and will miss them all.

Except for Sambo.

But if they ever try to find him when he is up with Bog, they had better just Buff-Spit.

**End.**