

“The More Difficult Path”

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As the strike continued, the Alberta coal miners hung out in the union hall, whiling away the time as they waited for resolution. Lawrence Grassi, a young Italian immigrant, however, had better things to do. He slung an axe over his shoulder and headed for the mountains above Canmore to build new paths.



When he first came to Canada in 1912, he worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Later he worked as a coal miner, but his real passion was mountaineering. He made several significant ascents as well as guided individuals during their mountain expeditions.

One of his projects was to build a trail up the mountain from Canmore to two small pristine lakes called Twin Lakes. With the help of some friends, he chose a scenic route past a 300-meter waterfall and a breathtaking panorama of the Bow Valley below.

His strength was legendary. Many of the rocks that were used for steps and to hold the trail in place were lifted single-handedly. He even made benches from the trunks of small trees for people to sit and rest while enjoying the scenery.

A hundred years later, my wife and I stood at the trailhead for these lakes renamed in honor of this famed mountaineer. We had come for a hike while visiting Canmore on our way to the Western Canada Teachers' Convention.

“May I make a suggestion?” ventured a fellow hiker. “A little ways up the trail you will come to a fork labeled ‘More Difficult’ which points to the left and ‘Easy’ which leads to the right. I recommend that you take the more difficult path because it is more interesting and scenic. You might wish to come back on the easy route.”

After some conversation, we learned that the hiker had lived his entire life in Canmore and had been to Grassi Lakes on numerous occasions.

The hike lived up to our expectations. The views were spectacular and we appreciated the rock steps and the log bench to rest on. Best of all, though, were the two small, blue-green lakes themselves. In the crystal water along the edge was lime-green moss that sparkled in Technicolor.

Near a small waterfall where the upper lake emptied into the lower lake was a stone marker with this inscription:

LAWRENCE GRASSI

1890-1980

Master Trail Maker

“He sought new paths; made rough places smooth;
pointed the way to higher levels and loftier achievements”

As my wife and I returned on the non-scenic service road, I reflected on the lessons learned that day.

First of all, none of us is above listening to the advice of knowledgeable mentors. Sometimes we think so, but time has a way of proving us wrong.

Secondly, what does it mean to take the more difficult path? I don't think the object in life is to make trouble for oneself. Enough will come without conscious assistance! Both paths lead to endpoints but one is the better route.

When teachers and administrators take the more difficult path, they take time to connect with students. They capitalize on teachable moments. They realize the point of having a school system is to introduce young people to God. The more difficult path is not just a school calendar without breathing space; it is a programme that helps young people be happy, engaged and caring individuals.

If by living like Leonard Grassi we can make the important things in life visible to others; if we can help people see and appreciate these things; we will be taking the better path. We will be master trail makers. How good it would be to have that said of us.

Resources:

- Several Internet articles on Lawrence Grassi including *When Coal was King* by Carolynn Van de Vyvere.