Ah, my old friend Till Eulenspiegel.

I was a freshman in high school when I first met him. My German language teacher had given all of us our own books to read for practice, and I had received a children's book with a strangely-dressed man on the front. "Till Eulenspiegel" said the title, and below these words, Till himself marched through a town, wearing a bright red jester's outfit complete with bells and floppy shoes, smiling broadly at everyone he saw. His smile immediately fascinated me, and I wondered just what this rosy-cheeked jester did to warrant an entire book of tales. Who was he? Why did he wear such odd clothing and why did he look so pleased with himself? More importantly, why did I find him so intriguing? I had to find out more about him.

My fervent attraction to Till soon became a joke in my German class. Every project I completed for the class incorporated Till in some way; if an assignment paper contained the word "Eulenspiegel," my teacher always knew that work belonged to me. When we had to make a speech in German, my speech was about Till. When we had to design German advertising posters, my poster always showed a picture of Till. I placed his name in the middle of my essays, and I even dressed as him for Halloween.

"No one has ever enjoyed the Till stories as much as you have, Rachael," laughed my teacher. I think she thought I was a little strange. But that was okay, because Till was strange, too. Till's stories were funny, witty, and often vulgar, but above all, Till was the ultimate individualist. He used his wit to outsmart everyone around him, and I admired that immensely.

My Pilgrimage

My interest in Till continued into my adulthood, and when I went to college, I searched for more information on Till and his adventures. To my delight, I found several old books about him in the university library, and I read them over and over. I studied his origins and read speculations about the tales' author; though several scholars thought that Till was merely a collection of fanciful stories, I always believed that he was a real person.

In the fall of 1999, I spent a few months living and studying in Denmark. I met a lot of wonderful friends there, and one day, I convinced my friends to travel to Mölln, Germany with me so that I could see the Eulenspiegel Museum and Till's supposed gravestone. When we arrived in Mölln, I was overwhelmed by the sheer number of shops devoted to Till. It was like an Eulenspiegel wonderland! I walked through the town in a happy daze, buying far more Till toys and souvenirs than I could afford. Finally, we made our way to the museum, and then we finished our tour with a visit to Till's statue and the church containing his gravestone. As I stood before the church, I felt as if I was at the end of a long, sacred pilgrimage. I had never felt Till's presence so strongly, and I had never seen his life represented with so much respect and admiration. It was a trip that I will never forget.

Till In America

Throughout my obsession, I've found that Till is not well-known in America. The only people who know of him are students of German language, European folk tale scholars, or classical music fans who are familiar with Richard Strauss' tone poem "Till Eulenspiegel's Lustige Streiche." I've had several satisfying conversations with scholars who are interested in Till's exploits, but the majority of people I've spoken to have never heard of Till. That doesn't bother me, though, since I love to recount all of Till's merry pranks to anyone.
who is willing to listen.

Even though most Americans are not familiar with Till himself, the spirit of Till's pranks is still very much alive in this country. There are many echoes of Till's rogue-like behavior in our TV programs, movies, media, and even in our culture. Recently, there's been a resurgence of prank-based programs on TV, and several mischievous comedians such as Tom Green, Andy Dick, and Johnny Knoxville continue to be very popular in the U.S. If someone were to create a Till Eulenspiegel movie, I'm sure it would be a huge hit!

Till Lives!

To this day, Till is still a part of my life.

I love to write fantasy novels, and I've incorporated a little bit of Till into my writing. One of my novels is entitled "A Fool's Quest," and it features a court jester as the main character. Though it is an original novel, the plot is partly inspired by Till's pranks and clever humor.

I adore the name Till, and I have even half-joked that if I have a son someday, I will name him "Till." Now, the only thing is to convince my future husband that Till is a perfectly good name for an American boy!

In the future, I hope to visit even more of Till's European monuments and haunts, and I'd love to collect as much Eulenspiegel-related books, toys, and statues as I can. All in all, Till's biting wit and distinctive personality have inspired me for many years, and I'm sure that he'll be a friend of mine for years to come.