

Idiom by Lon Yan

大吃一驚

da4 chi1 yi4 jing1

An 11-year-old girl thought she had a pleasant surprise when she saw an alligator in the backyard of her home in Hamilton, Canada, thinking daddy has bought her a new toy.

But when the 1.5-metre new “toy” started to move and showed rows of razor-sharp little teeth, the girl screamed. Her father called the police.

How a deadly reptile made its way into a residence was not immediately known. But animal service officers suspected the alligator was an escaped pet. The girl’s response when it dawned on her the “toy” could have bitten her hand off was “大吃一驚” (*da4 chi1 yi4 jing1*).

“大” (*da4*) is “big,” “huge,” “great,” “greatly;” “吃” (*chi1*) “to eat,” “to suffer,” “to sustain;” “一” (*yi4*) “one” and “驚” (*jing1*)

“to startle;” “be startled;” “to frighten;” “be frightened;” “fright.” Literally, “大吃一驚” (*da4 chi1 yi4 jing1*) is “to suffer one big fright;” “shocked and startled.”

The idiom means “to be startled at;” “to be taken aback at;” “to get a big surprise;” “to jump out of one’s skin;” “to have a fit;” “shocked.”

When you go home and found the place ransacked, you will “大吃一驚” (*da4 chi1 yi4 jing1*), so will a student who got his report card and found he has failed in all the subjects.

And if you go out on a limb to back someone publicly, and discovered subsequently that he or she has been lying, you will also be “大吃一驚” (*da4 chi1 yi4 jing1*).

Terms containing the character “驚” (*jing1*) include:

驚人 (*jing1 ren2*) – astonishing; alarming; startling

驚慌 (*jing1 huang1*) – alarmed; frightened; panic-stricken

驚奇 (*jing1 qi2*) – to wonder; to be surprised; to marvel

驚喜 (*jing1 xi3*) – pleasantly surprised