

What's In a Name?



By Anna Von Reitz

People get attached to names. They think that their name is the same as their own self, not a separate thing at all. But it is a separate thing. Ever since I was a small child I have had problems with my name, and cause to know that. .

To begin with, I never liked it -- my name. It was big and ugly-sounding and foreign and old and dusty as a certain hand-carved Black Walnut bed I also inherited--- and had to dust and polish every Saturday of my young life, too. .

And then, being born in the wake of the Second World War, my name meant I was subject to a vague and seemingly universal social disapproval, even though for Heaven's Sake, the Supreme Allied Commander was a man named Eisenhower? Hello?

All those wartime associations didn't make my relationship with my name any easier, though I wouldn't turn my back on it, for reasons too firmly rooted in my sense of honor and justice to deny it.

My First Grade Teacher, Mrs. Larkin, was very clear that I couldn't possibly have such a name.

Why not, I wondered?

Anna Maria Wilhelmina Hanna Sophia Riezinger-von Reitzenstein von Lettow-Vorbeck.

Well, it is a major mouthful, but I figured if I could say it and spell it, it was nobody else's business, right?

So you see, right from the start of my life, I have had to consider issues of name, my name in particular. And I had to come to terms with being called by different names, too, because my name wouldn't fit on any standard forms or records.

My name, I realized dimly at age six, wasn't a name so much as it was a family record, a description or a pedigree, somewhat like a short list of the Begats in the Bible.

And though I was regularly called by it in various permutations, and quite a number of nicknames, too, I had to face the fact that none of the verbiage used as my name at any given time ----- none of it was me.

Worse, I didn't get to choose any of it.

What a backwards situation, right?

I always bridled up against it and yearned for freedom to be who I wanted to be.

Who says I am not "Sally Brown" ---- Charlie Brown's little Sister?

It would, I felt, be so much simpler to be her, some ditzzy little blond girl in Suburbia who was slightly confused most of the time, and in love with a Philosopher....

I spent most of my teenage years feeling more like Snoopy in his "Vulture" persona, lurking around, watching intently, waiting for some unknown and unknowable roadkill to enter my life.

A bit later, I turned into a female version of Joe Cool.

Through it all, I knew that names were just names, masks, "persons" that could never really be me, or you.

So I wasn't quite as slow on the uptake as most Americans when I saw "my name" spelled in all capitals: ANNA MARIA RIEZINGER. That, whatever it was, wasn't any name I recognized as mine.

No, I drew the line in the sand and stood behind it. I knew and still know exactly how to style a Proper Name in English. And that isn't it.

Thank you, Mrs. McManners. Thank you, Aunt Mary.

Ironically, I am over sixty years old, and I have been fighting over my name my entire life.

I suppose I have to have one for convenience sake, as a communications outpost with the rest of the world, but it should be mine --- mine to control, mine to recognize or disavow, mine to define.

I copyrighted the name "Lady Flamolare del Chesa" in a fit of passion as I mentioned it once or twice in an article, deriding this whole nonsense of names and ownership of names and styles of names and even names expressed in certain type fonts.

I promptly started getting mail addressed to "her", too. Why not? She's just as vaporous as "Anna Maria Riezinger" or "Anna von Reitz".

In disgust, I started to look around for other people who have faced similar problems and hopefully, overcame them. I found one. And his name is familiar to everyone: Picasso.

Care to guess what his birth name was?

Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Martyr Patricio Clito Ruíz y Picasso.

Now we know that it was not the Spanish Civil War that drove him crazy.

This has me sunk in reverie, absorbed in the mental challenge of collapsing "me" down to a single, splendid, brave word --- like "Picasso"?

But nothing comes to mind and nothing seems to fit, except maybe, "Grandma"?

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