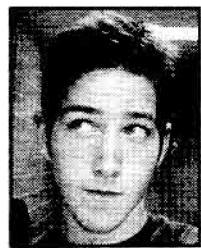


I'll Bet You Have A Great Driver's License Photo...

by Chris Ladd
A&E EDITOR

This may come as a surprise, but if you're reading this, chances are I don't know your name. It's nothing personal. Really.



WHERE THE
HELL IS
WAYNE,
MAINE?

If you think about it, it's just about the most impersonal thing in the world. Don't get me wrong, it's not like I don't think of you as an individual. It's not that I don't think you're special or important. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I've had long relationships with people, shared intimate family histories and personal truths, shared nights of the waxed political and the slippery

philosophical, all the while trying to remember exactly which impersonal pronouns I'd used already and adding them to my mental list of "things not to say again until tomorrow." Sport. Slugger. Buddy. Snorface.

Snotface actually goes on the "things never to say again ever," because the person in question actually has snot on their face most of the time. Not a lot, and not conspicuously, just a little globule suspended precisely at mid nostril by invisible nose hairs like a booger-ish Mary in an olfactory production of "Peter Pan." No matter how hard I try not to look, I hear the little piece of phlegm calling to me. "I'm one of the lost boys. I don't want to go to school." Gross.

The point is, names are hard. I almost wish we didn't have them. Rephrase. I wish they were something we had but didn't use, like floss.

I mean, we'd get along fine without them. In everyday vernacular, they're practically useless. Sure, we could use names for things like term papers, social security cards, and magazine subscriptions, and address each other by pointing fervently, or using visual characteristics, or a sharp "Hey, you there!"

The sheer number of my acquaintances whose proper names escape me evidence that names are extravagant, unnecessary, confusing, even dangerous. I have two close friends whose names I switch on a regular basis.

"Hey, Christina."

"I'm Kristin."

"Of course you are."

"I hate you."

Of course, this cavalier attitude could never go unpunished. Oh, no. However trivial I make names out to be, my inability to dredge up every moniker I come across irks, befuddles, and even enrages some people. One such person was in a class of mine last year. Outside of class, we shared the usual trivialities. No, I don't think the test will be that hard. Yes, I'm worried about my paper. Yes, the weather is decidedly cold and soggy today. Yeah, I heard it might snow tomorrow, too. Ok, well, see you later, man.

"Bye, Chris."

He knew. He knew, he knew he knew. Using my name, he pointed out that I hadn't learned his. Worse, a mere couple weeks past introductions it's impossible to learn someone's name, no matter how hard you try. It's like Super Mario, when you only have a precious few seconds to get to the secret level after you hit the 'pow,' and after that it's over. After four or five days, acquaintances become permanently nameless. Still, I had to try to find out what this guy was called. I pleaded and begged my classmates to divulge it, but they didn't know either. After a few weeks of 'man,' 'dude,' and 'kid from my government class,' he hated me.

He still said hi, but every time we passed it became a question rather than a greeting. The pronunciation of my name sharpened to an angry point of loathing.

"Hey, CHRIS how's it going CHRIS."

"Fine, I'm doing well, how're you doing?" I'd reply.

"Oh, I'm good, CHRIS. Well, CHRIS, I must be going now, CHRIS, see you later CHRIS."

With each repetition, his eyes narrowed until dagger-thin. He despised me, and still does. I still see him sometimes, but I try to look busy and in conversation. This column will undoubtedly drive him to violence.

And for what? Because I didn't learn his lousy name? Because sometime in the first five minutes of our acquaintance I spaced and didn't burn 'Chuck' or 'Pete' or 'Winston' into the back of my cerebrum along with chemistry homework and my latest shopping list?

I ran into an old professor of mine in the Spa the other day.

"Hi, Professor Imnotusinghisrealname, how are you doing?" I said.

"Oh, fine, fine, you know. How are your classes OK this semester?"

"Good, good, can't compare to Intro to Notarealclasseitherology, of course."



We both had a good laugh, and then a short, stocky man with pointy teeth came over. He looked every bit a leprechaun, he was even wearing green. Ironically, he was a visiting professor from Ireland.

"This is Mr. McAlsoafakename, a visiting professor from Ireland," introduced my old professor, then he gestured at me, smiled blankly, and said, "and this is - a former student of mine, forgive me I've forgotten his name."

I jumped in, stuck out a hand, and introduced myself, but this was something of a shock. This was something different. This was great!

Professors are expected to know each of their students, sometimes numbering in the hundreds. Students, however, have just as many names to remember in each of their own classes, which often outnumber even the most ambitious of tenure-track-will-teach-nine-sections-of-LS1 green Assistant professors. If this professor could forget my name, surely I could forget the name of one kid who sat behind me in one class for one semester. Surely it's OK.

And I'm even being generous. I'm the most obnoxious kid in any class ever. I make comments that are miles away from the discussion topic. I offer up my opinion on nearly every issue of subject matter or thematic discourse. Mine is always the first hand raised and the last word spoken. I am easily the most visible person in most if not all of my classes. If any names remain from the cluttered miscellany of term papers and in-class discussions that comprise a semester, mine should be foremost on the list.

I'm not faulting the professor in question for his forgetfulness, far from it. To the contrary, I'm praising his example of the correct attitude toward the scientific phenomenon of "Namulus Notremembris," that attitude being 'don't sweat it, baby.' Truer words were never spoken.

So, if you're out there, fixin' to teach me a lesson because I ain't learnin' your title and givin' you 'yer due, relax. I know and respect you as a person. I sympathize with you and unite in our common human condition. Now, what was your name, again? **i**