

What's in a Nickname?

By Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

Beautiful names are ruined by absurd nicknames which should be a sin and a shame in my opinion. Good names are shortened into meaningless feeble monosyllables. Some nicknames are so stupid that they make me trip over a cordless phone.

Consider a man being called 'Abby.' Yes, that's what everyone called him. One day I asked him, "How come everyone calls you Abby?"

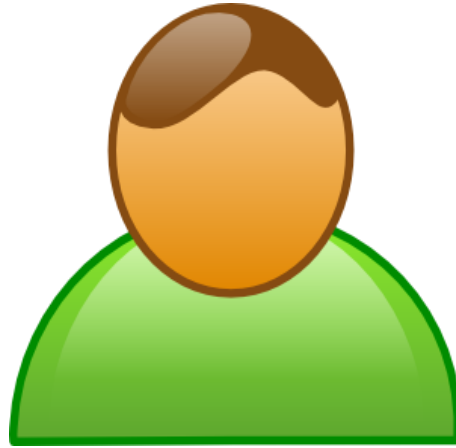
"Well, that's my nickname," Abby replied.

"But don't you realize that is a woman's name?" I asked.

"Well, there is a long story behind that." Abby continued, "Actually my real name is Norman, but my parents called me 'Norm.' My friends in school changed that to 'Normal.' I got so frustrated by that name that I started acting funny. One day I was caught drowning a goldfish in water. My friends started calling me 'Abnormal' instead of 'Normal.' Later in life 'Abnormal' was shortened to 'Abby.'"

Nicknames can be cruel I thought. I am sure that Newt Gingrich wouldn't like to be called 'Nuts.' That would be as insulting as calling Donald Trump 'Dump.'

Nicknames can be very misleading too. After finishing my schooling I went to Calcutta (now Kolkata) for a job interview. It is customary there to be a freeloader to save a few bucks. So I stayed with a friend's distant relative. Calcutta is so crowded that people working in different shifts rent the same bed at different times (asynchronously). My host had a big family. They all lived wall to wall in a 500 square-foot area. My host asked me if I would like to share the bed with baby. I complied. The



next morning when I woke up, I found a nineteen year girl sleeping by my side.

"Where is the baby?" I asked.

"I am Baby," she replied sweetly, "that's my nickname."

Nicknames sometimes can come back to hit one like a boomerang. I knew a gentleman named Raj who immigrated to the U.S. in the last millennium. He officially changed his name to Rogers to sound more like a

mainstream American. His honeymoon with his newly acquired name lasted only a few hours as everyone started calling him Raj for short. He was back to square one. He got back to where he started from.

Nicknames can be like an iceberg. There's more to it than meets the eye or ear. This reminds me of Crazy. On my first day on the job I was asked to contact Crazy, the SME (subject matter expert). Crazy was very nice to me. He talked to me for over an hour. I noticed something peculiar about Crazy. He had a heavy South Indian accent. People in South India are usually not named Crazy. Out of curiosity I asked him, "You sound like a South Indian. How come your name is Crazy?"

"You are so right," replied Anthony, "that is my nickname. My real name is Chinthasway Ramanarayanan Ananthalingam Zhankaarswarupa Yadunandanam. Crazy is the abbreviation of my full name.

Shakespeare wrote, "What's in a name?" I disagree – names matter. I have friends with absurd nicknames, and some who have given their children absurd nicknames. Our goal should be to help our children have a happy adulthood. By giving ridiculous nicknames we will expose them to lifelong ridicule. No one will take them seriously. Think about it!