

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

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WORDS, NAMES, AND DISCONTENTS

by Regina Carlson

I am a lover of words. I am a respecter of names. My sweet hubby and I, and other friends, are always looking up the etymology of words. I'm careful to address people as they wish to be called and recognize the powerful demands that people in our culture have made about how they're named.

My son once said to me, "Mom, you know more words for things I didn't know there were names for!" I had just used *aiglet*—the stiffened sheath at the end of a shoelace. And I recently dazzled a friend with *mnemonic*.

Of course I eagerly took a course in etymology in college and learned there are some things with no commonly used name. For instance, that strip of grass between the sidewalk and the street? It's variously called the tree park, parking, berm, boulevard, the last two also used

for other things, and "the strip of grass between the sidewalk and the street."

When we first moved to Pennswood about two years ago and frequently since then, I find myself bemused, and sometimes irritated, about names here, including inaccurate names, the lack of uniform or commonly-used names, and the lack of nametags and signs. For instance, when we first signed up for a trip, we were directed to gather at "the link." We had no idea what or where that was. We saw no entrance or exit or gathering place named that.

Then there's the statue of the woman in the main front hall—the long hallway between The Link and The Barclay dining room. Of course, the hallway from the main entrance back to the terrace or patio or deck—all three names are sometimes used—might come to mind as the "main front hall."

Anyway, back to the (seemingly) nameless statue: The most frequent reference to it I hear is "the wooden woman."

Sometimes it's identified with references to her extreme slimness except for her bosomy top. My favorite, from one of our several retired Episcopal priest residents: "Oh, I just think of her as Our Lady of Pennswood." (There is a nameplate at the base: *Silent Friend*.)

The wonderful marketing staffer, Kim Superfine, who guided us into Pennswood, took us to and from Mott-Newman several times to show us apartments there. But, when I heard people referring to "the tunnel" to Mott-Newman, I never connected that word, for an underground passage, to the above-ground, glass-enclosed passageway along handsome ground-level landscaping that Kim took us through.

On the doorway from the glass passageway near Fell going outdoors toward Ellwood, someone has posted "to Ellwood" with an arrow pointing the way. Seems to me a sign would help. I mentioned this to another resident, and she told me, "Yes! I wrote that and put it there because I found a resident, lost and crying, trying to get to Ellwood!"

That glass corridor between Fell and Kinsey opens to the two large green areas, one with a gazebo, one with the bocce court. We call them "courtyards," although "courtyard" is generally used for smaller and more closely enclosed areas. Those greens are certainly not courtyards

like the smaller areas at the center of our one-story apartment buildings.

Speaking of which, I advocate giving the full names of our apartment buildings, instead of just A or B, etc. Why? Sounds less like designations for army barracks or warehouses, is less likely to be misheard (a particular concern in a community serving elders), and honors the Quakers for whom the buildings are named.

Nametags! Being in the "war with nouns" stage of life, I really appreciate nametags on people in gatherings and workplaces. I know they increase community and convenience and safety. I'm grateful Pennswood residents are quite good at wearing nametags.

Our staff members are so good about addressing us by name. We could return the favor more easily if their nametags were visible, worn at chest height instead of hanging from a lanyard and down around their middle, and, often, with no name readable. I wish all staff members would answer their phones by giving their name. Workers who come to our apartments should tell us their names when they arrive.

So, this is my discursive appreciation of, and sometimes disgruntled plea for, names, nametags, labels, and signs, here in Pennswood.

NAMES I'VE BEEN CALLED

by Henry Baird

When my older brother called me “Henrietta,” I hit him, as any boy would, but my heart wasn’t in it because I suspected he wasn’t, this time, merely irritated or bored. This was brotherly abuse all right, but it sounded also like a warning. And if I overreacted, he would pass it off as a joke, since my mother herself often infantilized me with “Henny” or even “Hen.”

From my bedroom, I overheard my mother talking with her girlfriends, all mothers: “Little Henny is all boy.” Grownups, I thought, must be stupid, not to know that.

When we were around twelve years old, brother Jimmy ceased throwing “Henrietta” at me. By then I had gotten the message. I stiffened my wrists, stood up straight, and stared out at the world.

Our parents were stationed overseas, and I was a boarding student in high school, where I decorated my cell with South-East Asian art. Nicknames were the rule, especially among boarders. I lucked out and got “Yogi,” a childish play on Yogi Berra and a welcome recognition of my exotic nature.

In the Army in Viet Nam, within my little circle of friends, almost everyone eventually got a nickname. One afternoon after work, we gathered as always

to agree how to fill the evening (movie? beer? political rants?), and I realized that I was the only one there without a nickname. Petulantly, I refused to join them until they named me. After a stunned silence, Gerald “McBoing-Boing” McCorkendale said, “Butch,” and every one laughed—and it stuck. I remain proudly “Butch Baird” to all my Army buddies.

(Trigger alert: a sad event!) After my husband died, I faced starting over at age fifty. I could not feel like my self anymore, so I introduced myself to new friends and potential new husbands as “Hank.” My family and earlier friends never took to it.

After twenty-five years as “Hank,” entering Pennswood and daunted by the challenge of learning hundreds of names, I pitied my fellow residents and trimmed my own names, dropping “Hank” and embracing “Henry.”

Just Henry, now.



YOMA

by Yoma Crosfield Ullman

The nurses call, “Margaret, Margaret,” but I stay in my blissfully anesthetized state. Coming around later, I remember I should have reminded them to call me Yoma.

Too late. My father should have thought harder when he gave me this peculiar name and prefaced it with Margaret, my mother's name. Margaret is what doctors and nurses would call me. In the family, I would be called Yoma so that two Margarets wouldn't come running to his call.

Leaving that aside, no one called me Yoma except for my English nanny when she was angry with me. My mother called me Pooh; my father called me Shrimp. I begged to be promoted to Prawn, but he wouldn't agree. At school, I was Mickey because the other girls thought I looked like Mickey Mouse, and my initials were MYC. Later, young men made valiant attempts to pronounce Yoma, the furthest off being Muriel.

But back to Yoma, why? And what? When my father took up his first job, in Burma, he fell in love with the place. When I was born, he expressed his love by giving me a Burmese name. The practice was not unusual among the English who worked for the Burmah Oil Company. My name was in the atlases attached to two mountain ranges now known as the Arakan Yoma Range and the Bago Yoma Range. I never tried to find out what Yoma meant.

I was working one day on a paper in the Indian Institute at college, when a tall librarian loomed beside me. Using my formal title, he said, "Miss Crosfield, do you know what Yoma means?"

I had to admit that I didn't. Aghast at this lack of intellectual curiosity, the man left, saying, "I will tell you tomorrow."

Tomorrow came. "It is a Burmese name," he told me. "It means mountain, peak, or backbone."

I thanked him but never liked the name. I only ever heard of two other women called Yoma—one was Polish, the other the daughter of an Irrawaddy (old spelling) riverboat captain.

Decades later it was a surprise when a cousin visiting Burma (then Myanmar) discovered a bank with my name in its title. Had she visited Upper Assam, she might have found the descendants of the young cow, that, when I was five or so, was named Yoma in my honor with the expectation that her progeny would carry the name forever.

MY NAME

by Joanne Brown

My brother was four years old when my parents told him that he would be having a new baby sister and that they were thinking of names for her. He immediately shouted "Joanne"—his favorite baby-sitter whom he dearly loved. My parents wanted to begin all their children's names with "J"—so here I am!

HOW SHE BECAME VICKI

by Sean Fox

On August 15, 1945, in a hospital in Philadelphia, Mrs. Rae Cushner gave birth to her daughter, and virtually the entire world erupted into an epic period of celebration. Also on that day, the Empire of Japan agreed to surrender, ending World War II.

The celebration in San Francisco was on par with the rest of the war-weary world, and a heroic number of young males, both those already in the military and those facing being pulled into it, consumed vast amounts of alcohol in a spontaneous festive public display. It was in that city, however, that a number of young sailors who were on a ship that had just been ordered to join the combat in the Pacific, were so raucously, drunkenly dancing in the elegant water fountain of the city's poshest hotel that the police were ordered to arrest them.

As one of the happily wet sailors was being led into the jail, he began pleading with the police that he had to be allowed to send a telegram to his older sister. He explained that they had always been especially close, and she had just given birth to a daughter. No doubt, the police officers were also feeling the same emotional relief, so they complied.

That is how Mr. and Mrs. Cushner received a telegram from someone who, due to wartime censorship, could not reveal his location. The telegram unnecessarily informed them of their daughter's birth. The father and mother agreed to mark the occasion by naming the new arrival Vicki in honor of the great victory.

LAST NAMES

by Kathy Hoff

Back when England was still feudal, villages were tiny. Folks all knew each other and knew their places. "Oh, that's William, who works alongside me pitching hay in the barn." Often last names weren't needed to identify fellow villagers. As villages and towns grew and after 1066, when William the Conqueror began to register names in the Domesday Book, your fellow villager William might become William of the barn (*Barnes*) to distinguish him from William the blacksmith (*Smith*) or husky William (*Stout*). Any William's son might become *Williamson*, *Williams*, *Wilson*, *Wilkins*, or *Wilkinson*.

Over time, last names fell into four categories: from fathers' names, occupations, locations, or personal traits.

Clues that a name might have come from the name of the father include: ending in “s” or the older English possessive “es” (*Jones* means Jon’s or John’s son): ending in “-son” or “-sen”; beginning with “Mc” or “Mac” (Celtic); ending in “-in” or “-en” (diminutive). The name *Dickens* is doubly diminutive—a possessive diminutive of *Dick*, itself a diminutive of *Richard*.

Many names came from the occupations of our ancestors. *Smith, Stringer, Webb, Kees*, originally *Kaes*, German for *cheese*, Englished to *Kase, Case, Kees, or Keyes*, came perhaps from an ancestral cheese-maker.

Other names came from specific places (*Railsback, Littleton, Briscoe*); generic structures (*Barnes, Church, Hall, Hoff*, Dutch, related to German *Hof*, barnyard or farm); or features of physical landscape (*Streame, Seabrook, Camp*).

Some names reflected physical characteristics. *Lang*, German, Englished to *Long*. *White*, English, likely pale-complexioned or light-haired—Saxons were considered pale compared with Celts. *Becket*, English, diminutive of *beak*, i.e. small-nosed—a sparrow-sized beak. *Bird*: English—perhaps an ancestor sang like a bird, walked, or otherwise acted like a bird. We still say “eats like a bird.” (Might also be occupational—a bird-catcher.)

By the end of the Middle Ages (the 1300s in England), surnames were handed down from fathers regardless of descendants’ occupations, locations, or personal characteristics.

This history made me wonder how my own three surnames—*Taylor/Jobes/Hoff*—came to be. My birth name, *Taylor*, likely came from an ancestral tailor. My former married name, *Jobes*, derives from a Job’s son. The Hoff progenitor, *Dieter*, selected a surname, *Hoff*, in 1640 when he immigrated to Brooklyn from the Netherlands. Perhaps he identified as a farm worker.

Most of the examples above come from my family tree. Do you know the story of surnames from yours?



THE LITTLE GREEN CHAIR by Marjorie Burton

My heirloom item in the Passmore show is a very small child’s chair, always called, for some unknown reason, “The Little Green Chair.” It is a very dark brown! It was passed down through my mother’s side of the family from my great-great-grandmother, Frances Cowan Sharp (1835-1877).

The story goes that it was made by a slave with a knife, although to our knowledge, our family never owned slaves as farmers in west Tennessee.

During my childhood, the chair was always in my grandmother's living room in Memphis, Tennessee, next to a set of shelves full of breakable collectibles. Despite that safe setting, there were stories that at one time a male relative threw it at a misbehaving dog and broke one of the front finials off, so the remaining one was cut off to match. Another story was that some small child tipped it on its front, pretended it was a plow, and pushed it around the floor, thus the flat side of the front legs.

When our older daughter, the first great-granddaughter, was born, amazingly, my grandmother sent the chair to Pennsylvania, skipping two generations, and it currently resides in a 200-year-old house in Buckingham.

**SUMMER VACATION 1970:
WHITE BOY IN A
BLACK COLLEGE**
by **John Davison**

Since my Massachusetts boarding school was teaching me almost nothing of value, I decided senior year to read as many of James Baldwin's books as I could.

Then it seemed a good idea to break out of my comfort zone, leave white folks for a while, and study Black history. So after my freshman year at a white Quaker college, I enrolled for the summer semester at Winston Salem State, a historically Black college/university (HBCU) in North Carolina.

I picked WSSC because it was not Fisk, Howard, or Morehouse—the elite HBCUs. I wanted a typical one in the South. It had a fine African-American history course, which was to become my major back at Haverford College for the next three years. What I learned that summer informed the rest of my life.

Professor Galloway taught me African-American history. Rumor had it he left Florida A&M (another HBCU) after refusing to pass a failing student-athlete named Bob Hayes, of Olympic gold and Dallas Cowboys fame. Galloway was an inspiring and demanding teacher. He had us read Rayford Logan, Margaret Walker, and W. E. B. DuBois—African-American historians of the first order. I still have all my notes from his course. Professor Oubre, my History of Art teacher, told us about serving in the segregated U.S. Army during World War II. His unit was all Black, his officers were all white; they built and protected the Alcan Highway in Canada and Alaska. That's well known to historians now, but it wasn't in 1970.

There were two other white students at WSSC that semester, but both were part-time and commuters. I was the only white student who lived in a dormitory on campus. Slowly, I made friends. They were originally suspicious of me—for good reason. They told me later they first thought I was a drug addict. My hair was shoulder-length. I wore blue jeans and shirts rolled up to the elbow to “hide the needle marks on my arms and behind my knees,” they said. Fair enough . . . but not true.

Partly, we were the same: we lived and ate together, studied together, watched TV, shot pool, and bullshitted together. And partly, we were different: summers, many of my WSSC friends picked cotton to pay for tuition. My parents gave me travel money; a few guys in my dorm sold their blood to get bus fare home for July 4 cookouts. Back at Haverford, I smoked marijuana; at Winston Salem, we put dimes and quarters together to buy bottles of Ripple and Thunderbird wine. Then we walked a few blocks to sit at sidewalk tables and eat barbecued ribs on paper plates. It took time, but I got comfortable in a community where everyone was Black but me. I learned as much outside the classroom as in.

The most difficult lesson I learned was a completely new way to see the police. In elementary school, I was a “patrol boy” (crossing guard), meeting weekly with policemen for training. I was taught to

trust and admire them. But at Winston Salem, it was different. The students were all Black, the city police were all white, and any interactions were usually bad news. When walking off campus, if my friends saw a cop, they’d cross the street. If there was actually a police car, it was worth going the long way around the block. First, we argued about this, but after hearing their experiences, I had to think. And re-think. One of my classmates, from Newark, explained what police and National Guard violence was like before and during the riot in 1967. That was a shock. The police? *Dangerous?* Yes. Abandoning one of the “truths” of my youth was hard. This was a different kind of education that I might not have gotten anyplace else. When I hear about police abuse of African-Americans now, I think back to what I learned on my summer vacation, and I remember those who taught me.

**MARCHING WITH
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**
by Norval Reece

There were 250,000 of us in Washington, D.C., March 28, 1963. I had come down from Philadelphia to hear the soaring rhetoric of multiple speakers and sing along with Mahalia Jackson, Peter, Paul and Mary, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Marion Anderson. The March for Jobs

and Freedom was spectacular! But it was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s day. He stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial and proclaimed, "I Have a Dream!" It was a game-changer and put civil rights on the national agenda. Big time.

When I was in the Soviet Union in 1962, the communists often cited racial unrest in the U.S. and King's protests as proof that democracy didn't work. They didn't realize, nor did many people in the U.S. at the time, that King was proving just the opposite—that democracy did work.

I joined King on a march again in 1965—in Alabama for the third "Selma to Montgomery March." The first Selma march on March 7, "Bloody Sunday," ended in tear gas and billy clubs. Two days later, King held a second march, short and symbolic. The third march, authorized by court order for "no more than 300," covered the 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery protected by the U.S. Army. I chartered a plane to carry Philadelphians down to join 25,000 others who marched with King the final five miles.

It was surreal to walk through thousands of people lining the streets screaming vulgarities and then to arrive at the pristine, sparkling-white state capital building in Montgomery and to watch King climb the steps and turn to speak. We

thought we had accomplished something. And indeed, we had.

In 1967, two years after Selma, several of us from the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) had lunch with King at the old Robert Morris Hotel in Philadelphia. By then, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act had been signed. The AFSC had nominated King for the Nobel Peace Prize, which he won in 1964. Now King was focusing on poverty and education. This was an organizing meeting for a Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C. It took place a year later, but King never got there. He was killed a few weeks earlier in Memphis.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had quiet charisma. When he talked to you, his eyes looked right through you. He inspired millions of people like Freedom George, a gang leader in Philadelphia in the '60s. When King was killed, I organized a rally at Independence Mall which we hoped would be an alternative to the riots in other cities. Over a thousand people came. Police ringed the entire Mall. After a while, the crowd started to get unruly. I asked Freedom George if he could say something to quiet the crowd. Big, young, burly George with his Afro walked up to the mike and said simply, "Look. It's gonna be peaceful, 'cause that's the way the King wants it" and sat down. And it was.

King's effect on Freedom George was symbolic of King's effect on the country. He provided a non-violent alternative to righting a wrong during a time of crisis. King worked patiently, strategically, pragmatically, and brilliantly within the system. He made democracy work—an inspiration for all of us then. And now. And for people all over the world.



ENDLESS LOOP DISPLAY

by John Wood

The 21st of May.
Not yet the longest day,
But the subtle shades
And spectral hues of spring
Have given way
To the full-green dress array
Of summer's uniform
That will remain the dress code
Until the August dog days concede
To fall's color-burst display
That soon self-immolates,
With legacy of winter's naked gray.
Then, the spool-spin repeats
As the buried bumblebee digs out
To buzz about and fertilize
The erstwhile sleeping seed.



POETRY & PROSE

Pennswood's semi-annual Poetry & Prose event will take place at 7:15 p.m. on Thursday, October 19, in Penn Hall. It's always a delightful evening. Some 17 residents read favorite pieces; the rest of us applaud vigorously. There's something about the event that makes it feel quite special. To be a reader, follow the directions in *The Bulletin* to apply. To be a listener, make a note in your calendar.

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