

You Name It

Filipinos love both colorful names and nicknames. This essay is not original as such. My cousin, Rosalinda L. Orosa, wrote an essay titled "What's in a Name?" An Englishman named Matthew Sutherland wrote about the subject of Filipino names and nicknames, calling his piece "A Rhose by Any Other Name." He also wrote about Filipino eating habits in "A Matter of Taste" which is not for the queasy. So I will avoid territories they've traveled on and confine myself only to our family nicknames.

There isn't any branch of the Orosas that demonstrates this trait more than my late cousin Sixto Jr. His nickname was "*Ting*" but his father Sixto Sr. to my knowledge didn't have a nickname. Since Sr. was a medical doctor maybe they didn't think it would be dignified. No one ever called him Doc either. Ting gave all his children unique names. I wish I could've asked him about their origins. His son Sixto III was "*Coy*," another son was "*Kine*," and the third "*Monet*." *Kine* was Jose but later on he switched to the more conventional Joe. Monet was Ramon and he made it Ray later on. Ting's girls were "*Diding*" (for Maria Christina) and "*Yoying*" (for Maria Socorro). Roberto the youngest son was "*Titoy*." Last but not least, Ting's wife was called "*Eding*."

There seems to be no consistent protocol for nicknames. Having the same name as your father doesn't necessarily translate to being called "*Junior*." My father was Vicente Sr. and he was called "*Inte*" by relatives or *Vincente* by American friends. But my brother Vicente Jr. was always called "*Jing*." My mother's name is Rosario and she was called "*Chayong*." One sister is also named Rosario but her nickname is "*Charito*." My eldest sister Angelina is "*Tita*," my eldest brother Augusto is "*Toto*." For some unknown reason I never got a nickname.

"*Baby*," "*Boy*" and "*Girl*" are favorites. Ting's had a brother called "*Baby Boy*" to start with and never outgrew it. I have a cousin-in-law in California who is retired and on Social Security. Everyone in the family still calls him *Boy*. I refuse to join the chorus and insist on using his formal name. A nickname may have been bestowed when you were a baby or toddler but the name sticks forever. Boy has variations like "*Boyet*," "*Boying*" and "*Bebot*." Sometimes Boy is combined with another nickname like "*Joe Boy*." Variation for baby is "*Babie*" for girls. A boyhood friend who is a lawyer is still called "*Babes*" although he is past 70. I once met a lady lawyer who was also a professor and she was always "*Girllie*."

Some cousin's nicknames are "*Dado*," "*Nonoy*," "*Tito*," "*Miling*," "*Cilding*," "*Binay*," "*Nene*," "*Benjie*," "*Menchu*," "*Chuchi*," "*TinTin*," "*Mishi*," "*Mitoy*," and "*Saro*." Keep in mind that you couldn't hazard a guess on their given names from their nicknames. For example who is Conrado? Both *Dado* and *Nonoy* were named Conrado. My uncles are "*Paito*" and "*Aching*" (pronounced at sing). Another uncle is "*Pepe*" which is a common Spanish nickname for Jose.

We see the same phenomena on my mother's side. I have two cousins named Cipriano. But one is "*Pering*" and the other "*Amang*." I have no idea where the latter came from. Rounding off the list is "*Binky*," "*Pinky*," "*Jojo*," "*Caloy*," "*Poochi*," "*Butchie*," "*Ato*," "*Pipoy*," and "*Pen*." I have a maternal great uncle called "*Boyong*" and an aunt named "*Anday*." One cousin named her first child Alpha and the last Omega. These were formal names, not nicknames.

While the older generation typically was named after Saints as dictated by the Catholic Church then, the younger generation doesn't feel as confined. I have a niece named

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"*Sunshine*." I'll have to ask her sometime what time of the day she was born. Her brother is called "*Buddhjie*."

There are some who don't strive for originality so they stick to the conventional – Francisco is "Frankie," Jaime is "Jimmy" and Michael is "Mike." Maybe the other nicknames keep us from getting bored.

As kids in the 1950's, we were quite politically incorrect. Body parts were used liberally as nicknames. If you were fat, then its "*taba*," thin is "*payat*" and short is "*pandak*." If you had prominent ears, you could be called "*tenga*." Bushy eyebrows are "*kilay*." Someone with a pronounced limp is sometimes called "*pilay*" which literally means cripple. I hope we have stopped some of this practice.

No group in America comes close to our nicknaming proclivity but the Southerners try. We lived in Tennessee and our friends always had nicknames but they weren't as colorful or unconventional except once in a while. We had "*Windy*," "*Doc*," "*Buddy*," "*BJ*," "*BT*," "*Hoagy*," "*Crash*" and of course the quintessential southern "*Billy Bob*" and "*Bubba*."

Do you know what name Filipinos call Americans? It is "*Kano*," the last two syllables of Amerikano. Remember, the original Tagalog alphabet has no c, only a k.

So, what shall I call you?