

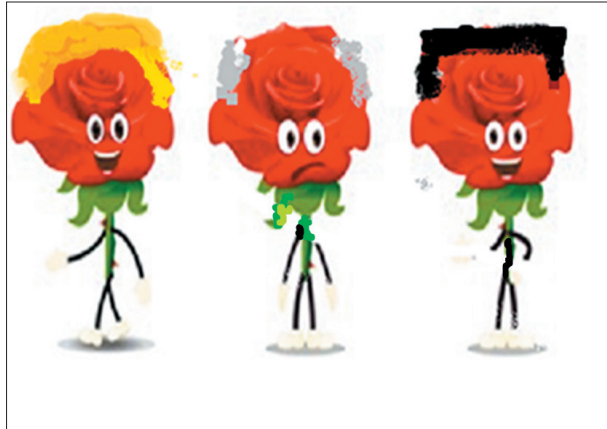
Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*Dedicated to Anne Cohen
Perry – my friend and muse
(1938-2024)*

WAT'S IN A NAME?

It was William Shakespeare who penned that immortal question. "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." That's easy to say if you are blessed with a choice of cool nicknames - like Willie, Billy, Will, or Bill - or if you have an impressive moniker like "the Swan of Avon" or "the Bard." But, unless you've gone through life with a name like Myron you can't really understand what I'm talking about.



When I was a child I was always reminded -

we set our own course in life - we are masters of our destiny. But, with a name like Myron our opportunities are limited. Did you ever see a leading man in a movie named Myron? Or a movie star, gangster, cowboy, or pirate? Don't tell me about Myron, the ancient Greek statue - that was the name of the sculptor. I don't think the discus thrower with the fabulous body had a name - but, if he did it was probably Hercules, Atlas, or Adonis.

While playing outside with my friends my mother would often stick her head out the window of our second story apartment and holler for me to come home. Her shrill voice stretched my name into a three syllable word.



"My-ur-on ...My-ur- on - hurry home, dinner's almost ready." How can you be a cowboy or a pirate, or a master of your own destiny when your friends call you "My Urine?"



THE OCEAN PALMS MOTEL

I remember the Summer of 1954 - I was 15 and my life had taken a few turns for the worse.

My best friends, the Steinberg twins, left town for a month and my brief relationship with Marlene Handleman, my first girlfriend, came to an abrupt end on her living room floor. (Hold that thought - I've got more to say about Marlene). My father compounded the problem by deciding it was time to discontinue my weekly allowance.

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

"Sunshine, I was working to help support the family when I was nine. You're 15 now - old enough to get a summer job. Bring me the newspaper, I'm going to teach you how to read the 'Help Wanted' section."

My father often called me "Sunshine," which struck me as odd since he was the one who convinced my mother to name me Myron.

My first job was at the Ocean Palms motel, a short bus ride from home. I worked from 1:00 – 5:00 PM as a cabana boy around the pool, serving orange juice to the guests and cleaning up at the end of the day. The orange juice part of the job was fun - several of the guests gave generous tips – but the cleanup work was backbreaking. I had to collect 50 lounge mats and stack them in an aluminum storage shed. My boss was Dirk, the life guard. (What a great name) He was a very muscular man, with long sideburns – but no hair on his chest or back. His only job was to walk around the pool area smiling, flexing his biceps, and socializing with the female guests, mainly the older women - and he wore a very tiny blue bathing suit – smaller than the jock strap that I wore in Phys. Ed.

"Fanny, it's a good thing I didn't bring my granddaughter to Florida," said Rachel Rosenberg, as she reclined on her poolside lounge chair, embroidering "RR" monograms on a set of matching pink towels. "She would go nuts for that gorgeous *'shaigetz*. Will you look at that bathing suit. Oye! It leaves nothing to the imagination, not even his religion."

"Rachel. Can you keep a secret?" said Fanny. "Tomorrow morning at eight, when Seymour is still sleeping, I have an appointment with Dirk. He gives massages." Fanny smiled, as she shared her secret with Rachel, but her eyes never looked up from the purple and blue blanket she was knitting for her grandson.

"Fanny - find out if he gives a discount for two," said Rachel, as she also smiled and continued embroidering the "RR" towels.

At 3:00 PM Dirk piled five lounge mats on my shoulder and aimed me in the direction of the aluminum storage shed. After ten painful trips to the shed I was in agony – I could barely walk. That night when I rode the bus home from work I was unable to sit in an erect position, my shoulders and back were throbbing – and my arms were numb. I could barely lift the dime to pay the bus driver.

"Go look in the medicine cabinet," said my father, and he laughed. "See if we have any Wintergreen Oil."

My father extolled the virtues of pain and suffering; he felt the Ocean Palms job was an excellent opportunity for me to mature - to learn to appreciate life. "Wisdom comes from reading" - he repeated his prophetic advice, which I heard hundreds of times in my youth - "but, from stacking lounge mats you pick up a different type of wisdom."

The wonderful thing about having two parents is that you can always seek a second opinion. After my father completed his long discourse on the value of sweat, toil, and hard work my mother sat down with me on the couch. She put a hot towel around my neck and brought a delicious root beer float - with two scoops of French vanilla ice cream. "You poor dear - I didn't raise you to stack lounge mats. My father, may he rest in peace, would turn over in his grave if he knew his namesake was schlep-

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

ping lounge mats for fat 'alter kakkers.'" (a derisive Yiddish term that translates as "old shit") She had a sympathetic cry in her voice as she called out to my father. "Sol, bring us the 'Help Wanted' section of the newspaper."

PIX SHOE STORE

My next job was at Pix, an inexpensive shoe store on Lincoln Road – the fashion center of Miami Beach. The new style for women was a cork platform shoe, with the toes covered by clear plastic. The shoe was designed to make a woman look taller while displaying her bare feet and cute little toes. In 1954 women wore long dresses that covered their legs - and pointed bras conveyed a bellicose image of their bosom. Painted toenails became a popular form of female sexual exposure, especially erotic colors like iridescent purple, sparkling chartreuse, or metallic black.

"Myron, look at this shoe," said Irving Glickman, the elderly manager of the store. "'Vut do you see? 'Gornisht!' (nothing, zilch) Like a 'schmuck I bought five hundred pairs of this 'chazzerei.. Five hundred pairs!"

Mr. Glickman was Romanian, a survivor of Auschwitz, the horrific Nazi death camp. Many of those brave people lived in Miami Beach. He always wore a long sleeve shirt to hide the numbers branded on his arm – a memory from hell - but he never talked about that terrible experience. Mostly, he walked around the store, quiet and pensive, with a clipboard in his hand, analyzing several pages of inventory turnover reports. Unfortunately, his inventory of cork shoes was not turning over.

"But, not to worry' - good ideas; they sometimes come in dreams." The old man had a far away look in his eyes. "I had a vision of Carmen Miranda, the Brazilian Bombshell. Why Carmen Miranda? Good question.' Listen closely; I'll tell you."

Without letting go of his clipboard, Mr. Glickman put a hand on my shoulder and looked straight into my eyes. Then, he provided an explanation of his dream. "Myron, that beautiful lady 'vus' standing there in her birthday suit – she 'vus' smiling – oye 'vut' a smile - I listened closely – but she didn't say a word – 'vut' did she want? She just stood there 'vit' a basket of fruit on top of her head. Finally – it came to me! It 'vus' a message from above. Fruit! 'vimen' love fruit."

My job was to staple plastic bananas, cherries, apples, and strawberries on top of each shoe, to turn "chazzerei" into gold. I sat alone in the back of the store, a hot, dusty room, and spent six days sweating and stapling. Five hundred pairs of boring platform shoes were being resurrected from the dead.

On the seventh day I began sneezing - my nose started to dribble - my eyes turned red and I could barely breathe. I left work early. The next morning I called in sick and went with my mother to our family doctor.

"The boy is seriously allergic to dust," said Dr. Notowitz. "He can't continue working in that type of environment."

"See, I told you so," said my mother. "Now, you won't laugh when I keep telling you that cleanliness is godliness."

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

Two days later I applied to be a bag boy at Food Fair, a large supermarket three blocks from my house. I hated leaving the job at Pix. I was hoping that once Mr. Glickman stopped worrying about his huge inventory of cork shoes he would feel comfortable telling me about life at the horrible Nazi death camp.

FOOD FAIR

"I know the manager of Food Fair," said my mother, and that beautiful supermarket is so clean, you can eat off the floor – not like that *farshtunken* shoe store. Let me talk to him."

Note: My mother's parents were from Germany – she often spoke to my grandmother in a confusing blend of English, German, and Yiddish. It sounded like they were both coughing up phlegm – I couldn't tell the difference between German and Yiddish – but I usually understood the gist of their conversation.

"Ma'am , I appreciate the fact that you're an excellent customer," said the manager, "but you've got to understand my position. Thirty boys are applying for the job and we only have three openings." The manager's name was Myron DeLuca. My mother was very persuasive. It didn't take long until she convinced him that Myron's of the world had a special bonding - they were soul brothers. He had a moral obligation to hire me.



I wore a black bowtie at work, a white paper hat, and a plastic Food Fair badge with my name and greeting. "Hi, I'm Myron 'L' - it's my pleasure to serve you." And I had to call every customer sir or ma'am.

My first assignment was to walk up and down the aisles, returning misplaced items to the proper shelves. It was more challenging than I anticipated. Where does horseradish go? With mustard, catsup, and other condiments? With cheese, sour cream, and chilled dairy items? In the Jewish section with matzos and gefilte fish? [As I pondered this](#) decision I heard my name called on the public address system: "Myron, please come to cash register four, we need help." I put the bottle of horseradish on a shelf in the produce section, next to the fresh radishes; that seemed like a logical place. I straightened my bowtie and scurried to cash register four; so did two other bag boys. All three of the new bag boys were named Myron.

Myron 'K' was 70 years old, maybe older, a semi-bald retired man who was working as a bag boy in order to supplement his pension and Social Security. A bag boy's income is mainly from tips, and its all cash.

"Don't go telling people I cheat on my taxes," said Myron K. "OK! So I don't report everything. What are they going to do, put an old fart like me in jail?"

Myron K was a charming old man, with a twinkle in his eyes – the female customers loved him – even younger women. Maybe that's why he'd been married five times. He taught me how to get big tips from the elderly

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

Jewish women. "It's all about listening - let the old ladies talk, talk, talk - without interrupting - and after they tell their story - which will probably be about their recent surgery or some other problem - respond by saying, 'oye vey - such *t'soris* (Yiddish: *misfortune*) - I wouldn't wish that on a dog.' And, if they ask you why you're working as a bag boy - lower your head - close your eyes - and tell them you're helping to pay for your grandmother's hip replacement."

The other new bagboy was Myron Peterson III. He was 19, the third generation Myron in his family. He was tall, thin, and muscular, with dark eyes - and his black hair was cut in an exaggerated type of crew cut - sometimes called a "flat top." Myron III lived in a low-income section of Miami known as Little River. After three attempts at the eleventh grade he dropped out of school - with plans to be a career bag boy.

"That's not true," said Myron III. "I'm not always gonna' be a bag boy. Some day I'll be a meat manager - those dudes make big bucks."

One week later I was asked to help Myron III in the meat department, an eerie refrigerated room in the back of the store. I wore a warm Food Fair jacket and maneuvered between rows of hanging cows, all tattooed with blue numbers - the secret laboratory of Dr. Mengele, the Nazi "Angel of Death" - he was conducting grotesque experiments on the frozen carcasses.



I was searching for Myron III, but couldn't find him. Then, from the far corner of this chamber of horrors I heard moaning - it sounded like a female voice - and I saw the handsome bag boy standing behind a frigid cow. He was hugging, kissing, and undressing an older woman. I was stunned; I didn't know how to react. I just stood there, frozen, like the slabs of chilled beef that were hanging from the ceiling.

"This is Simone," said Myron III, and he chuckled. "She's a happy customer - very happy - this lovely French lady sure loves our prime beef at Food Fair."

I turned my head and refused to respond to his crude comment.

"It's too bad," said Myron III, "if you mess around with Simone you're gonna go to friggin' hell, but not me."

"Why not - do you have a special deal with God?"

"You're 'damn right I do - Jesus died for my sins, not yours - you're a Jew, ain't you?" Myron III smiled and pinched Simone on the butt. She blushed.

"Are you telling me that Christians can have sex in the meat department but Jews can't?"

"Well, we ain't supposed to either, but I go to church every week and confess to Father Timothy. I say a few Hail Mary's and put two dollars in the poor box - and all is forgiven."

"You must be kidding! Do you really tell your priest that you did nasty stuff with a customer in the meat department at Food Fair?"

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

"Well, its already a sin – don't matter none where you do it - Father Timothy don't need all the details.

"But, what's the good of confessing if you keep repeating the same sin – week after week?"

"It's a lot better than you Jews – you sin and never confess."

QUEEN GUINEVERE

I was serious about the job at Food Fair. I worked hard and saved my money, hoping to buy a car for my 16th birthday, which would be in nine months. Of course, I wouldn't be paying the full cost of the car; my father promised to match whatever I saved.

A very smart girl named Jane Liebowitz lived one block from Food Fair. I liked hanging out at her house during my lunch break. We both read a lot and loved root beer floats, and we both hated our name. "Jane is so 'quotidian' - every maid and waitress is named Jane.

You can call me Guinevere. She was the beautiful wife of King Arthur, the legendary king of England."

"Great name, but Guinevere Liebowitz sounds kinda' dumb."

"That's just a short-term problem - I'll only marry someone with an impressive surname – like that British lord – Mountbatten."

"I thought Guinevere got divorced from King Arthur," I commented. "Didn't she run off with Sir Lancelot, the handsome young knight?"

"And give up her throne? Are you out of your mind? But, she really enjoyed afternoon dalliances with Lance a lot."

D'ya get it?" Guinevere chuckled, "with Lance-a-lot."

Guinevere Liebowitz, the beautiful queen, carried a pocket size The-saurus in her purse and tried to use five new words every day - impressive words. And if anyone asked what they meant she'd stare at them – a look of condescension - so I started carrying a tiny dictionary in my pocket.

"Excuse me your majesty - how do you spell quotidian?"

One morning, while walking to the beach, the queen stopped by Food Fair, just to say hi. It was 7:30 AM - bagboys had to come to work 30 minutes before the store opened. My morning job was to return misplaced items to the shelves. Myron K had a much easier job – all he had to do was stand outside and "shmooze" with the old ladies who were waiting at the front door.

And Myron III was responsible for the meat department; he had to adjust the thermostat on the refrigerator and spread sawdust over the floor. Needless to say, he loved that job, especially on the days when Simone went shopping.

"Hi Myron," Guinevere smiled. "Why don't you introduce me to your friend." Her smile was directed toward Myron III, who was standing next to me.

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

She looked very seductive - wearing tiny shorts - teasing us with a hint of her cute white tush. She stood tall in cork platform shoes that were topped with plastic bananas - and her toe nails were painted metallic black, to match her pointed finger nails.

"Oh - he's Myron too - I mean three." I tried to introduce her to the handsome bag boy, but Myron III had already run off to the meat department - this was Simone's shopping day.

"His flat-top is so libidinous. Why don't you bring him to lunch today - I'd like to engage in intercourse with him."

"Intercourse! Really?"

"Not that kind!" The queen chuckled. "I'm referring to verbal communication."

Later that day, as we sat around the kitchen table at Guinevere's house, Myron III said we were the first Jewish people he ever met, he felt sorry for us. We would be going to hell when we died. That was the fate of all Jewish people, even nice ones like us, even Moses and Albert Einstein.

"How do you know Jews all go to hell?" asked Guinevere. "Last time I checked, there were no postcards from the dead."

"Shit! That's the reason they got separate cemeteries for Jews and Christians. That's how Saint Peter knows which souls go up and which go down, but the body don't go nowhere - just the soul."

"What if someone lies?" I asked. "What if a Jew bribes a cemetery guard and gets buried in a Christian cemetery?"

"Yeah, I guess that would be kinda' confusing, but Saint Peter, he got assistants; they check for things like that - especially if the dead man is circumcised?"

"So, I don't get it," said the queen. "Is Jesus the son of God or is he God?"

"He's both - that's why he's called the father and the son."

After a brief discussion about cemeteries, religion, and the next life, Myron III switched the conversation to his favorite topic - "meat." He then gave a lengthy discourse on the grading system for beef, including the granularity of fat. "Fat is what gives the meat flavor - It's also what makes some dicks thicker than others."

"I heard that's hereditary," said Guinevere. "If your dad has a little one so will you, and there's not a damn thing you can do about it - but who cares - size doesn't matter."

"You gotta' be kidding," responded Myron III. "Then why do girls stuff toilet paper in their bras? Cause it matters baby, it sure as hell matters."

"Well, maybe you're right, but only indirectly. I think if a girl has large boobs she feels sexier and I guess it's the same for guys with big peckers. And, if you feel sexy you act sexy - and you become sexy. It's all psychological, but yeah, in that way I guess size does matter."

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

Hey Myron," I interrupted. "Sorry to break up this enlightening discussion, but we gotta' get back to work."

Later that evening I called Guinevere on the phone to see what she thought of "Three" - that was his nickname.

"Yeah, the guy's really a hunk - but he's so vacuous. The only thing he knows is the afterlife and the granularity of fat."

That was the only time the three of us ever ate together, but I continued having lunch at Guinevere's house - just the two of us - we had interesting conversations, talking about intellectual topics, like history, classical music, philosophy, and religion. I told her about Freud's theory, that God was just an illusion. Our discussion of Freud eventually shifted from theology to penis envy and sex. Unfortunately, when we talked about sex, I didn't have much to contribute to the conversation since my only experience was with Marlene Handleman - fooling around on her living room floor.

Guinevere's eyes lit up - "So, did you and Marlene copulate on the floor?"

"No, we never went all the way, not even close - just kissing and a little squeezing of the private parts - but never under the clothes. Of course, that didn't stop Marlene from talking to my penis - she even gave it an affectionate name - George."

"I love that name," Guinevere smiled, "it's so monarchical - like George Washington or a few of those English kings - there was even a saint named George - he slew dragons. You should change your name to George. Myron is a better name for a penis."

"You're just jealous," I snapped at the smiling queen, "because you don't have a pet name for your vagina."

"Is that so?" Guinevere blushed. "I think Myron III might disagree with you - and Myron IV is so splendiferous - I have better conversations with IV than with III."

WHY MYRON?

Like I said before - I hated my name! I complained many times to my parents: "Why Myron?"

"Yes dad, I know, you told me many times, I was named after my grandfather, Morris."

"It could have been worse - mother wanted to name you Morris."

"Yeah, but Morrie's not so bad. What about Mark, Mitchell, Mathew, Michael? They're great 'M' names. Why Myron?"

"When we got around to picking 'M' names, in the summer of 1938, a man named Myron Taylor was in the news. He was appointed by President Roosevelt to lead a U.S. delegation at Evian France - they were trying to rescue German Jews from Hitler."

"Really? I didn't know that. Well - his efforts sure were inefficacious."

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

AN ODE TO THE BARD OF AVON

*Must our name forever be our face -
A mask of steel that keeps us in our place –
Sets borders on our space?*

*“D’ya think I care?” snapped a younger me.
“Ain’t that just how life’s supposed to be?”*

Defiant, confused – I hid behind a cold veneer
And whispered low, so no one else could hear.
“Play it safe Myron – remember who you are.”
See the world from a distance, from afar.
Not as a pirate, cowboy, or movie star
And forget about Sir Lancelot –
No such place as Camelot.

Study hard – the proven way – that’s what people say.
And one day you might sell insurance or aluminum siding.
You might even be a CPA
And tell clients how much taxes to pay –

*Wise Bard of Avon – was that your view?
Young Myron never listened, never knew.
Now, in golden years, I understand.
You didn’t care about our nose or clothes,
Nor were you talking about
a sweet smelling rose.*

*You were telling us, regardless of the name our parents chose –
We could reach for the stars - drive fast cars –
Or be an astronaut and go to Jupiter,
the moon, or Mars –*

A Jewish astronaut! Why not?