

What's in A Name?

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

America is a big town but men here have limited first names such as Mike, John, Bruce, Joe, Ed, Ted, Dave, Nick, Jim, Ron, George, Rogers, Charlie, James, and Hank. Of course, there are some aberrations too such as Hector, Hunter, Norman, Ben, Alex, Oliver, Leo, Oscar, and Nathan.

When I first came to this country, the above names belonged mostly to WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants). Now they are assumed by every ethnic group to sound homogeneous like an entree going into a melting pot.

I had a friend whose Indian name was Raj. He changed his name to Rogers not realizing that Rogers is called Raj in short. Oh well! I was Anil when I was a baby, remained Anil, and am still that after spending a lifetime here on earth. However, I can't make my friends in America pronounce my name correctly. I've a greater chance of being struck by lightning than my friends pronounce my name correctly.

I am pretty sure that if my parents knew that I'd move to America, they'd have been a tad more careful in naming me. Anyway, I was in the gym this morning balancing

myself on an out-of-control trade mill when the guy next to me shouted, "Hi! I am John. What's your name?"

"Anil," I shouted back.

"What?" He yelled shaping his hand over his ear like a conch. I hate this gesture as it reminds me of Iggy Pop.

"I'll talk to you later buddy," I yelled back.

"What?" He yelled again shaping his hand over his ear like a conch.

I got down from the trade mill considering the safety factor for both of us.

"Tell me your name one more time," he screamed.

"Anil," I replied at the top of my voice.

"Bye, Ali!" He almost screamed.

I think people should feel lucky because I have a short one-syllable name. Imagine dealing with Ramchandran Ramaswamy or Nageshwaran. When I first moved to Indiana in 1974, my Hoosier boss proposed that people call me Ann for short. When I

objected, he came up with Al. I still insisted on being called Anil.

Now almost everyone knows that I am Anil. Suddenly I saw John coming towards me with a coffee cup in his hand.

“Let’s walk together to the car, Aleen” John said

“Don’t worry about it Joann,” I said as I waved goodbye.

When Disaster Happens

Ashokkumar Lal

When disaster happens

Everybody is for himself

When rain falls from the sky

When the hot sun burns the eye

When love slowly leaves life

When one is alone,

Being lonely in a crowd

Lying in a casket minus a shroud

Desires to stop while in a race

In the company of people lacking grace

Being a coward but posing as brave

Wanting life but half in the grave

Getting up in the morning but wanting to
sleep;

Forced to laugh when the heart weeps

Trying to be a man

When disaster happens