

*First part of “thunder,” and then “M-A-I”*

Tanmaya Sambare

“Hi I’m John Doe”

“Hi nice to meet you John, I’m Tanmaya”

“...I’m sorry what was that?”

“Tanmaya. Tan...maya”

“Dhanmaya?”

“T- with a T.”

“Tanmuy?”

“No not muy, maya”

“Tan-may?”

And so on for a couple minutes until one of us gives up the will to go on.

When I met someone new, this was generally what the first five lines of conversation would sound like. Consequently, I used to be reluctant to introduce myself to people. The question “Hi what’s your name?” was the one I most dreaded. I thought “anything! Literally anything but that!” A bit melodramatic no? Well I was in middle school so it makes sense. After moving to a new school, I had to reintroduce myself to everyone. During the first day of class, the teacher asked me to introduce myself, so I got up and said “Hi my name is Tanmaya but it’s spelled like ‘Tan-may-a’”

Some girl asked, “can we call you Tanman?”

“oh oh what about T-man?” added another boy.

“Sure,” I agreed, just wanting to sit back down and slip away from everyone’s piercing gazes. “Sure you can call me whatever.”

That was one of the least confident thing I could have said. And from there began the amalgam of nicknames. Some teachers called me “Tan,” in sports I was “Thunder.” Friends called me anything from “T-may” to “T-dog” to “Samba.” One time a girl I had a crush on called me “T-sizzle.”... Don’t act like you’re not impressed. But consequently, no one really knew my real name. In fact, when my principal introduced me before I spoke at graduation, he introduced me as “Tan-may-a.”

Before coming to college, I remember the anxieties I had about introducing myself to a plethora of new people again. I was so worried about exactly what I would say, fearful of ostracism because people couldn’t pronounce my name. I even remember talking to my mom about it and asking her to suggest a nickname that was easy to pronounce. A more “Americanized” version of my name. I contemplated shortening my name to the letter “T.” I even did this for a short time, and some people on this campus know me as T.

Looking back on it, I feel like an idiot. I mean think about it, not even willing to assert myself to the degree that I won't even properly state my name?

It wasn't until a month into freshmen year that I came up with that mnemonic: "Tanmaya, like the first part of 'thunder' and then 'm-a-i.'" Kinda surprising considering I had a whole lifetime of introductions and it really isn't hard to come up with it. It was after this point that I began introducing myself in that manner. The initial floundering of introducing myself was no longer an issue with my phonetic spiel. As a result, I was less reluctant in introducing myself, and found that my previous notions had been completely misguided. People did not just turn away and stop talking to me because they couldn't pronounce my name. They did just the opposite, they honed in and tried harder to pronounce it. Better yet, they remembered after our conversation. People actually took an interest in my name, one I thought was too unusual to merit interest.

"Hi I'm Tanmaya"

"...I'm sorry what was that?"

"Tanmaya, kinda like the first part of 'thunder' and then 'm-a-i'"

"Ohhh Tanmaya! Cool name where's it from?"

And on it goes until a few minutes later, that person knows quite a bit about me.

These few lines have been the serendipitous beginning of a number of close friendships I enjoy today, a lot of those friends sitting here this very moment. Those same friends will playfully scoff at my mnemonic like they would to a magician's stale act whenever I introduce myself to someone new. "Oh here he goes with that thunder thing again." But that 'stale act' is always new for that person across from me, catching their interest as if it is something completely unexpected.

Through my experience, I have come to realize that people actually like to hear unique things, such as a name that is tough to pronounce. I am no longer embarrassed by my name, or by other things about me that may be somewhat unorthodox – such as my irrational fear of street vent covers or my ability to quote episodes of Spongebob. Each of these things are all novel and vivid and shed light on my true identity. So I ask each of you, what makes you different? If there's anything that comes to mind, then say it! Whatever you have to say is more than welcome, its novelty capturing interest and leaving whomever is listening with a vivid memory. Don't reduce yourself to silence or normalcy like I used to do. Whether it's your upbringing, your clothes, or your name, tell the story. Because saying "just call me T" isn't gonna cut it.