

"It's the one we feed."  
The Danville News  
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30 January, 2025  
"What's in a name?"  
Word Count: 750

What's in a name? Well, these days you don't see many babies named Adolph.

There was in our first congregation's village an unfortunate family who did their best to reinforce the community's low opinion of their surname. Despite efforts to help them break the chain of bad choices and help them make better choices, they didn't. Tommy held up a neighborhood mini-market with his shotgun. The cashier said: "Tommy, what are you doing?" Tommy ran and hid from the police. They found him hiding in his closet. Then there was older brother, Ronnie. Upset that his pregnant girlfriend was driven home from work one afternoon by an African-American co-worker, Ronnie tried to perform a Caesarean to check if the baby was his. He also, on the fire hall couch, fathered twins by another woman, but that's a pathetic story for another day. It's tough to fight your family reputation when you keep feeding your bad behavior. It breaks your heart. If only Ronnie and Tommy had someone like Mr. Rogers who could have helped them pause and remember all the people who loved them into being. Some tried. It didn't take.

A Native American legend tells how a young child asks grandparent why some people are kind and loving and others seem so cruel and violent? Grandparent responded that there is a constant struggle in every person between two wolves, one that is compassionate and nurturing, and another that is selfish and mean. "But which wolf wins that struggle?" asked the child. "The one we feed," grandparent replied.

What a gift to live in such a way to have your name respected, to have your children and grandchildren proud of you, your principles, for when you loved others into being. What's in a name? Plenty. Ask Mr. Rogers. Ask Jimmy Carter. It's a gift to live so that when you die you are missed and they speak well of you. May we each live in such a way that people respect your name. Names matter. Columnist David Brooks called this, "Eulogy Virtues." What will they say about you at your funeral?

In preparation for moving to Colorado, I boxed up, ready to dump, all my professional files from the last 47 years, including a folder on every wedding and funeral I've conducted. These hundreds of funerals reminded me how the first purpose of a funeral is to glorify God revealed to us Christians in Jesus. If deserving, the dead person's life can be celebrated, but it's a life they owed to God. We aren't our own. The second purpose is to help us resolve to go forth from the funeral as better persons. Preachers hope it takes. We Protestants never need to pray for the dead. They're in good hands. Funerals are held to encourage those left behind, left to carry on.

Contrariwise, picture your grandchildren discussing how their grandpa smeared his feces in the Capitol building after assaulting a police officer. Presidential pardons cannot erase that disgrace. Actually, I disagree with Biden's pardons. I'd prefer to see Trump abuse his authority by persecuting Liz Cheney. Martyrs reveal what is in the heart of those who make them into martyrs.

Or (and here's a cute, timely historical reference), would you be proud if your ancestor was Congressman Philip Johnson, representing Pennsylvania's 13th District, who on January 31, 1865, voted

against the 13th Amendment which abolished slavery? Not so proud? Albeit typical of the series of our region's representatives.

Contrariwise, imagine your grandchildren proud that grandpa fought wildfires, he didn't burn down the house.

What's in a name? Bearing a name means we are held accountable. Anonymity isn't allowed, except when fearing retribution or violence from those with crimped and sick souls, as with abusive husbands or Mussolini-mad leaders. Anonymity usually is cowardly. Why else do folks who do bad deeds hide their faces? Or hide out as part of the mob.

Humorist Will Rogers advised, with a smile and wink: "Always drink upstream from the herd."

I'm guessing it didn't take when Donald attended Jimmy Carter's funeral and sat to hear the eulogies extolling both the virtues and foibles of a good man who lived a successful and well loved life, a life that brought out the best in us, unlike those who bring out our worst. Who will eulogize Donald when he dies? I sure won't miss him or the worst of America that he personifies. I'll grieve, however, how he failed his chances.

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