

# FINDING THE FUNNY IN NAMES

By Craig Hackin' 'Boo Harrison

A great way to add humor to your stories is through the names you choose for people, places and things. Let's face it, some names are just funnier than others.

Consider these pairs of names. In each case, one is not funny, the other is:

Tom Jones.....Not Funny  
Englebert Humperdinck .....FUNNY!

Paul Simon .....Not Funny  
Art Garfunkel.....FUNNY!

Alexander Solzhenitsyn .....Not Funny  
Yakov Smirnoff .....FUNNY! (some thought so)

Harrison.....Not Funny  
Higgenbotham .....FUNNY!

Richard Chow .....Not Funny.  
Dick Nibbler .....FUNNY!

McDonald's.....Not Funny.  
Fuddruckers .....FUNNY.

Jonathan Schwartz .....Not Funny.  
Vinny Virelli.....VERY FUNNY!

Rick James RIP.....Funky (but not particularly funny)  
P. Diddy.....FUNNY!

George Bush .....Not funny  
Rod Blagojevich .....Funny (except in Illinois)

Dilbert; Lippshitz; Shmuckers; Seymour Butts; Nickie Noodleman. To English speaking audiences these names are funny. Names that are Chinese, Vietnamese, Yiddish or German sometimes sound funny to English speakers. No doubt speakers of those languages find some English names humorous. Each culture has jokes about other cultures. So be it.

Humorist Virginia Tooper of Oakland has a distinctive first *and* last name. She tells people her first name, Virginia is like the state. On occasion people who meet years later and refer to her as Georgia. And Tooper is often confused with Hooper or Cooper. It's

when they replace the T in Tooper with a P that things get really funny! In one of her Humor Defense classes for UC Berkeley Extension she invited her students to form a company based on their name. One of her students suggested she launch Virginia Tooper's Super Duper Pooper-Scooper. Thereafter, that student had *no* class!

Sometimes names are funny because they make funny sounds, or sound funny to us. For instance, repeat after me: Whiffenpoof! See what I mean!

Sometimes names that mean one thing in one language mean something else in English. That can be funny. Fuk Yung, Davy Dopplegänger, Luong Dong.

Storytellers should be sensitive to cultural differences and encouraged to avoid cheap laughs at the expense of any ethnic group. Yet we've all seen orators make light of their *own* name. Even President Barack Obama poked fun at his own name, noting that the person giving him the middle name Hussein never considered the possibility of his running for President of the United States!

Other times, names are funny because they contrast the occupation of the person possessing the name. The safety officer named Leonard Putz. Or consider veteran NSA member Linda Swindling, a recovering attorney. Ask her about the humor of being an attorney with the last name Swindling!

Remember Lucille Ball: her clown name was Lucille McGillicuddy. Now that's funny!

The other humor point here is that opposites make us laugh.

When a comedian on the Hill Street Blues TV series called himself Vic HITLER it was funny because we don't associate humor with Nazis. (Unless you're a fan of Hogan's Heroes.)

When a big adult musician plays a puny ukulele, has a high squeaky voice and calls himself TINY TIM...that's funny.

### **All Opposed...Laugh!**

In humor, opposites don't attract, but they do crack up! Comedian Steve Martin has a bit about how banks are named. He posits that banks need to connote strength, security and stability. (Especially true these days.) You can't call them Fred's Bank or Dave's Drive Through Drop and Dash, though these days anything's likely.

Perhaps you've chuckled when watching THE OFFICE on US or British television. The US paper company is called Dunder Mifflin. We love Dunder because it rhymes with Blunder. Based on its operation you can see the parallel! And Miff is reminiscent of a Muff.

Names with "K" sounds in them are funny! So are names that sound like names we already know. For example: a *not-so-bright* world leader named Boutros Boutros-Golly.

**Play The Name Game!**

So the next time you tell a story, think about making the names memorable and also funny. Notice too how names that rhyme with a real name we know will have resonance.

TEACHER: Maggie Pupilitis, Headmaster Dorkinpuss

NATIVE AMERICAN: Chief Running Mouth (loquacious), Pronto (swift),

BOSS: Jacob Flatusmouth. Arnold Dumbkopff

COWARDLY SOLDIER: Joel Coward, Chief Leaky Bottom

PUGILIST: Sir Bleed-A-Lot

RAPPER: Puff Flabby, Queen La'Reefah, Big Daddy Vain.

BONUS: USE "K" Sounds: Klosterbaum, Curley, Chuckie-Cheese! Krusty the Clown!

So remember, you can be funny as storyteller through the names you use for your material, even if your name isn't Ish Kabibble!

*Craig "Happy" Harrison has been known by many aliases over the years. His happy moniker came at age eleven when he went door-to-door in Berkeley CA selling USED JOKES. He is the founder of Oakland's LaughLovers ([www.LaughLovers.us](http://www.LaughLovers.us)). For more about Craig visit [www.HackinBoo.com](http://www.HackinBoo.com) or call (510) 547-0664.*