

# **Memoir-ish**

**Things I Accidentally Learned and Other Short  
Stories**

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These are my memories, from my perspective, and I have tried to represent events as faithfully as possible. These collections of stories occurred over time, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue recreated.

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Acknowledgements



# Chapter Four

## Being a Man Like Tony

By the later part of my middle childhood I already knew something was different. My family has always been interested in uniqueness and I carry that desire with me to this day. Attracted to rarity and quirkiness through brands of high fashion, less than usual automobiles, or artistic hobbies, self expression is paramount to my self identity. As a child, though, unique was understood as a word given to console those who otherwise wanted to be normal; the way people shift words to hide truth never conceals meaning. “That’s an interesting thought,” I have often said to my students. Only, the clever will reply “that’s what people say when I’m wrong and want to be

nice”.

Words. Words have great meaning and yet are often meaningless. Fuck. Asshole. Words that can bring such resentment when used properly and yet hold no real pain. I do not believe in swear words, there is no real power in them. This isn't to say that all words are meaningless. Those with a history of persecution, slavery, racial hate; those are words which should be stricken from the mouths of oppressors. But 'dickhead'? I find the image of a man with a dick for a head unsettling, sure, but mostly humorous; an uncircumcised face peering from underneath the hood of a sweatshirt made of skin.

As a child I had not considered words very deeply. There was no swearing in our home and only a few times in my youngest years do I recall hearing a 'fuck' or 'damnit'. I credit my father with introducing me to my favorite use of a swear. As my youngest

sibling slid headfirst into the hard angle of a staircase post, chased by another brother, I heard a concise “You Fuck!” to which I was never the same again. “You Fuck”. What does it mean to ‘be a fuck’?

Gendered names are a social construct. Billy, normal for a man, cute for a woman. And Sarah, normal for a girl, but an offensive and foul disturbance to humanity for a boy. In reality, the perceived gender of names changes over time: Ashley, Riley, Morgan, Jamie, Jesse. Thanks to the parents of Brooke Shields, I suffered a childhood fate of which no one could control. Much like *Office Space’s* Michael Bolton (fuck Michael Bolton) I endured years of bullying and microaggression for my name. Fuck Brooke Shields.

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“What is the name for the order.”

“Brooke” I replied, slowly and as clearly as

possible. This wasn't my first time, afterall.

“Brock?”

“No, Brooke.”

“Brooks?”

“No, Brook with an E.”

I picked up the cup and coffee cake. In bold lettering, the name “Ruff” appears. You fuck.

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“Would you like paper or plastic?” I asked as I scanned her order to begin mentally sorting her products. I had been working at the grocer for several years now and pinned to my polo shirt was a name tag, **Brooke** in bold lettering.

“Paper is fine.....Brooke? Oh my, that is so funny, switching your name tag.”

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“Welcome to our open house! So great to see

you all tonight. Please have a seat and we'll get started in just a few moments." Open house is one of my favorite nights as a teacher. My first chance to meet my students' parents, many of which will play music in our program for the next four years. These parents often become our greatest supporters in education and in some cases our friends.

"Who are you?" asked a parent quickly.

"Where is the teacher?"

"I'm Mr. Pierson." For the first month of school I had been signing all my emails with Mr. in an attempt to circumvent these situations.

"Mr.? I thought you were a woman!" shouted the woman.

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In reality, I don't blame Ms. Shields, nor do I blame my parents. Their desire for unique names of their children is not a reason for the cruelty of

middle school dickheads and their hooded sweatshirts. And so, one by one, each child was given a unique identifier, fodder for the cruelty of peers, complemented with the most 'normal' (by most standards) of middle names.

Anthony. As an adult 'Brooke Anthony' has an incredible ring to it. My love of Gucci, Versace, and Mini Coopers be damned, 'Brooke Anthony' could be a fashion mogul or heir to a vast empire of silks and cloths. At the very least he could be a model. But at the age of 12, 'Brooke Anthony' was no model. Homestyle haircut, middle part with uneven ends, a shaved widows peak, front teeth gap, homemade jean shorts which were too short (at a time they should have been hanging to the ankles), all complimented by a lack of understanding social norms: Brooke was an easy target. Not only young for my grade, Brooke was a girl's name after all, and that necessitated being

treated as such; a real testament to misogyny.

After middle school, most of my classmates had adjusted to the shock of my name. My social group was fairly large and included circles ranging from the band and chorus crowd, video gamers, and those in sports and cheer. Anyone could be my friend because I tended to see the good in people. As we all aged, names became less important than the relationships we developed, but the potential wonders of a life with a normal name lingered.

In college, I finally had a chance to rectify such a grave error. This wasn't the first time I thought about using a nickname. As a child I discovered a baby name book within our families library (tucked between my mothers diary and a book titled 'Sex: A Man's Guide'). Contained in its pages were hundreds of names including dozens with check marks, circles, and stars. Annotated on the same page as 'Brooke' was

the name 'Brandon'. A rather unremarkable name, this is what I was searching for. My time as 'Brandon' had a lifespan of 24 hours.

A freshman in college, sitting in my literature class focused on the voices of diverse authors, the professor reached my name for our first attendance roll. Earlier that day, I had committed to a personal renaissance, as most people do at university. The time had come to shed the shackles of my abuser. "Tony", I responded. "I go by Tony". Never in my life had I answered to 'Tony' but it seemed like a logical conclusion to my name problem. Ironically, I would still never answer to 'Tony'. Each class period my professor would call on me. Moments of silence would pass and she would ask again, with more irritation, "Tony?!". In a class with collegiate football players, whom many are unfortunately perceived as 'dumb jock's, I was clearly the idiot.

Tony died that day.

