

The Leacock Medal for Humour

Canada's Award for Literary Humour

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A Samosa By Any Other Name

by

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The dreaded first day of school, the most painfully wasteful day of the year, where teachers display their fresh Minion memes and recite the same five rules that always end with the cheesy cliché “*Respect is the most important rule of all*”. Most kids detest this day for the simple fact that they have to show up. Others despise the timeless, yet completely useless, game that teachers insist on playing where you have to share a fun fact about yourself with the class. Seriously though, I think we all understand that Tyler plays football, we don't need to be reminded every single year. I, however, fear the first day of school for another, more vexing reason. Every September, I prepare myself to face the most abominable and awkward question from all of my teachers.

“Can you please share your name with the class?”

Okay, this seemingly harmless question that a toddler could answer does not seem as life-threatening as I depict it to be. To be fair, it is not this question that I fear, but the barrage of follow-up questions that are strewn at me following my answer.

Let me preface this by explaining that I am a third generation Indo-Canadian woman--but, more explicitly, I am *brown*. Oh, and probably most significant, my name is Bethany Robert. So, I am a brown girl with a stereotypical caucasian name. Apparently, according to most people, this occurrence is impossible, as the next question that people almostalways ask is:

“Is that your *real* name?”

Now *that is* the question that causes my last nerve to pulsate. People cannot fathom that a

minority could possibly have an unexotic name. So, the first conclusion they resort to is that I must switch to a fitting stage name when I am at school, as if I'm on *Rupaul's Drag Race* or something. The worst part is even after I break it to them that this easy to pronounce name truly is my *real* name, they continue to insist that I am lying, or at least, bending the truth just a bit. Why the deceit? Do they think that I am part of a witness protection program concealing my identity as a refugee fleeing a foreign country with an American name? If so, that is not the case and honestly, I couldn't really tell you even if I was, but I am assuring you that I am not.

Eventually, after refuting their ridiculous speculations, people start to realize that I may not be lying. You would think they would stop pestering me and leave me alone -- wrong! Incredibly wrapped up in the mystery, people feel the need to pick apart and analyze my whole life's existence, like I'm an alien specimen under a microscope. Their first strategy to unveil the secrets behind my name is to figure out why I have so much melanin. Now, they don't want to come across as racists and directly ask this question because God forbid they acknowledge that the reason they are partaking in this investigation is due to my brown skin. Instead, thinking they are being clever and discrete, they ask me where I am from. To which I enthusiastically respond with, "*Ottawa, Ontario, born and raised!*" Of course, I know this is not the actual answer they are searching for, but I cannot possibly give them the satisfaction of reinforcing their duplicity. Needless to say, these wannabe Sherlock Holmeses are too far in their interrogation to give up, so they hit me with every minority's favourite question:

"But, where are you *really* from?"

Again, I would sincerely prefer to be straight up asked if my family came from such and such country, instead of being micro-aggressed, but how could I forget that they "*don't see colour, just people*". Most people don't realize how problematic this question is. To be honest, I didn't realize how offensive this question is until my freshman year of high school in French class. We were carrying-out one-on-one interviews with our teacher so she could assess our oral fluency in the French language. Eavesdropping on several other students' interviews, while scribbling down random verbs on an inconspicuous piece of paper, I noticed a contrast between the questions my teacher asked the students of colour and my other classmates. Now, I know what you're probably thinking, I should have just kept conjugating my verbs, minded my own business, and provided my peers their privacy for these torture sessions. What you must keep in mind is that I am part of Gen-Z; a generation that feeds off of infiltrating others' lives and offering our input when it wasn't solicited. In fact, the only thing that is currently keeping me afloat are the profusely personal details that surfaced about the Royal family (I'm sure it is Charles that made those remarks).

So how *do* I answer this question? Well, as much as I would like to lecture the ignorant person who posed the idiotic question on its racist connotations, that's definitely not the best way to make a good first impression. Instead, I try to give them the benefit of the doubt and assume

they are asking me where my parents are from. That's when I tell them about the unique and outlandish place where my parents journeyed from to get to Ottawa. A place with weather so treacherous and unbearable that only a true native could withstand it. A place with unbelievably flat ground that is dwelled upon by the most mysterious of beasts. A place where mosquitoes are as abundant as the copious amount of wheat it produces. That far-away land is...Winnipeg, Manitoba!

At this point of the cross-examination, I see the fury raging behind the eyes of the person questioning me, as they futilely attempt to expose my non-existent deep-dark secret. I'd say, mission accomplished! Wanting this trial to be dismissed, so I can get back to my valuable education, I do give in a little here and explain that my grandparents were indeed born in India, hence the brown skin. This valuable information finally explains how I retained this flawless, chocolate complexion.

Yet, something still isn't adding up to them. How could this minority have a name like Bethany Robert!? That is when a sudden epiphany falls upon their face as they announce to me: "Oh! You are only HALF Indian!"

I am saddened and ashamed to admit that this is when they have finally caught me. It's true, I am only half Indian. My father's family is indeed not Indian, they are actually Pakistani. This doesn't change anything because for one, most people don't even know the difference between Pakistan and India, and all that confirms is that I'm one hundred percent ethnic.

This is the last straw. The detectives have no choice but to drop their magnifying glasses and accept that my name really is Bethany Robert. As they walk away, I watch them drawing conclusions in their heads. They deduce that my parents grew up miserably, with long ethnic names that nobody could pronounce. So, wanting a better life for their daughter, my parents chose the name of the infamous girl who was mauled by a shark, plus the name of a middle-aged caucasian man, and BOOM, they were left with *Bethany Robert* as the final product. Of course, this is far from true; my mother's name is Serena, her siblings are Elton and Darlene, my grandparents' names are Pamela and Dennis, and my family tree continues with 'conventional', pronounceable names. My name is actually biblical, which is another shock to people when they find out that I don't in fact "speak Hindu". But, that's another story...

Naturally, over my years in school, I have equipped myself with some interesting comebacks to make all these questions sashay away at once. For example, I simply explain to my teachers that my real name is actually '*Yuri Null*'. A name that unfortunately sounds very similar to the porcelain contraption that men use to stand and relieve themselves in. As such, I gave myself a less embarrassing name. This seems to get a lot of sympathy from my teachers, and it is quite entertaining to watch the traumatized look on my teachers' faces as they play back sixteen years of bullying for having a name that sounded like 'boy's toilet'.

Hopefully, I don't come across as a privileged girl complaining about something so silly as her name when there are children starving in the world. As a matter of fact, I acknowledge the advantage I have as a minority with a sort of western-assimilated name. I know how fortunate I am to not have to deal with the anxiety of having substitute teachers continuously butcher my name when they take attendance. Although, I could do without their look of doubt when they call my name and I raise my hand. Next time, I think I'll just bow and *Namaste*. That will fix everything.

