

This story was the last one in my second book, “The Stories My Father Told”:

Story #45

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

This last story is a very personal one for me and I feel comfortable now in sharing it with you. Please excuse the language used. I could not have written this story without using that word! This story is about my Chinese name.

My English name is Tony Yep. And yes, I do have a Chinese name given to me by my father. It is Yep Fook Hin. The Yep is pronounced like “yip” and it means “leaf” in Chinese. Fook is pronounced like “book”, but with the “f” sound instead and “Hin” rhymes with “wean” with the “h” sound. The “Fook” character is a very prestigious and important word in the Chinese culture. This symbol 福 is used everywhere to denote prosperity, happiness and good fortune. Because my father was a farmer back in China, “Hin” means field. Literally translated, Fook Hin means “Bountiful Fields” or “Fields of Plenty”. This is a very good name in China.

However, I was never really conscious of what my Chinese name meant to me, nor did I use it while I was growing up. I always used my English name, Tony, and I didn’t think about it too much until later in my life. My mother, who only spoke Chinese to me, always called me “Hin”, which I accepted as normal, until one eventful day.

It occurred years ago during a car trip I had with my first boss when I had graduated and started to work as an engineer. He was of German descent and he knew little of Chinese customs. We were driving to a jobsite and we got to talking about different nationalities and customs. He asked me whether I had a Chinese name.

“Yes”, I said. “It is Fook Hin. It means Bountiful Fields.” He glanced at me and I could see some puzzlement in his eyes. “Say that again?”

“Fook Hin”, I replied again speaking as phonetically correct in my Chinese dialect as I could.

“What? Say that again!”

“Fook Hin”, I repeated loudly, now somewhat irritated that he had such a hard time remembering this name.

“**Fook Hin!**” I said one last time, almost shouting.

He looked over and I could see a twinkle in his eyes as he said to me in a very straight face. “Well, I don’t know about you, Tony, **but it sure sounds like a lot of fucking to me!**”

He then turned away, grinning as he continued to drive. I was dumbstruck as I never ever considered my Chinese name in that context. This means that I have been a fucking person all my life?! I was speechless and flabbergasted.

Since that day, I have never purposely told any non-Asian person what my Chinese name was. They simply would not understand and then they would have a hard time trying not to make fun of my name. But now if they asked, I would tell them this story. On the positive side, there was one good thing about all this. I was extremely glad my father didn't name me "Fook Yue" as I would have insulted a lot of people in my life!

So, what's in a name? In my case, it's "Fook Hin" plenty! Please excuse my language! I can't help myself! As I get older and my skin gets thicker and more wrinkled with age, it doesn't matter anymore what people call me as long as they remember me even if it happens to be for my phonetically incorrect Chinese name!