

Occasionally, certain things rattle around in my head and I'm unable to dislodge them.

Generally, the more esoteric the information, the more difficult it is to forget about it. Thus, I can quote movie lines for days on end but can't remember what I did two hours ago.



In the spirit of having truly stupid things on my mind, I got to thinking about names, nicknames, kid's names, all kinds of names. Don't ask me what put this in my head; I don't know. Rest assured I am not seeking to name a child anytime in the near future, nor am I soliciting a nickname for myself. I just notice some things sometimes, and it makes me wonder. Then it makes me crazy.

I think I know what kicked this one off -- it was probably one of those online polls you see on your Internet home page -- "Look at the top ten Baby Names for 2007," or some such. And if you're like me -- that is, easily distracted and easily amused -- then you'll immediately click onto this poll, just in case you actually need this offered information.

The first thing I notice, after all the precious, high falutin' things people are calling their brats these days, is that almost no one ever names a kid Norbert or Ernestine anymore. Granted, that's probably a good thing, but still, you just don't see it.

On the other hand, you can still find those folks whose names immediately beg the question, "What on earth were their parents thinking, anyway?"

There was a Senator Hogg from the Lowcountry, for example, who is purported to have named his daughters, Ima(Imogene), and Ura(Ura Mae). This is a well-known tale in these parts, although granted, it could be an early form of urban legend.

Of course, you always hear urban legends about people who name their kids things like Orangelo, Lemongello, and Nosmoking. These are documented on www.snopes.com as pure urban legend, absolutely not true, but the stories persist anyway.

But what about people we know? We've all met folks who have been saddled with terrible monikers throughout our lives. And somewhere out there, there really is a Harry Butz, Semour Heinie, Amanda Hugginkiss, and Claude Cheeks, and these people undoubtedly exist beyond those roll lists you used to turn into a substitute teacher, just to see if she'd actually call the roll out loud.

My favorite one I've heard recently came from a friend of mine who swears she went out two or three times with a guy named -- and I swear I'm not making this up -- Ben Waugh.

I don't know how anyone could keep a straight face during a conversation with poor old Ben, anyway.

Then there are those dreaded monikers we all somehow earn. For instance, before I was the handsome, stalwart, rock and roller/journalist you see before you, I was a skinny kid with a face that hadn't grown into my nose. Soon, I became "Beak."

I've noticed, too, that generally, the farther into the country you go, the weirder the nicknames get. I've known a "Donk," a "Bad Eye," a "Splinter" a couple of "Cooters," a couple dozen "Bubbas," and at least one "Ayatollah."

That was my cousin, the late great lola, a teacher down in these parts, whose students

universally referred to her as “The Ayatollah lola,” although probably not to her face. The worst one I ever heard, though, was hung on a rather inoffensive fellow I knew slightly in Atlanta. He was called “Cricket,” and you’ll just have to figure out for yourself how one might get saddled with a nickname like that.

Of course, there was “Scatterbrain,” a legendary old reprobate, long dead now, who once owned the old Esso station in metropolitan Pickens, up in the foothills. He was famous for, among other things, constantly wearing a .45 caliber revolver on his hip. As his place served as not only a filling station, but the only bar in town for many years, a lot of interesting things happened there.

One night, they say, Scatterbrain, seemingly apropos of nothing, suddenly snatched his pistol from his holster and blew the television to smithereens, causing the local landed gentry to hit the floor cussing, beer bottles, moonshine jars, and tiny pieces of Zenith color television raining down like some surreal alcoholic barrage.

“What the hell did you do that for!,” one of them finally yelled. As it turned out, the group had been watching “Gunsmoke” on TV, and Scatter had always wanted to know whether he could out-draw Matt Dillon.

So speak to me, my good citizens. Have you ever had the pleasure of running across such names and such characters? Do tell!