

Finding a Name

Written by Vivian Bikulege



I have been thinking a lot about trees lately. Actually, I think about them almost daily. I love them. Pine and palm, crepe myrtle, Southern magnolia, Eastern redbud, flowering dogwood, American holly, and oaks of every kind – live, laurel, water and chestnut.

I cannot identify every tree on my morning walk with Toby and Trooper, but I came across a publication by Clemson Extension entitled “Familiar Trees of South Carolina” – with pictures! – and maybe I will get better at naming these stoic soldiers that frame our lowcountry. Hopefully, attaching a name to the trees I encounter will not diminish my awe of them.

Recently, my daily reading was about names. The snapshot lesson said our names mean something, that possibly God has given each of us a name we have yet to discover. Out of curiosity, I looked up the meaning of my three names – Vivian Irene Veronica – and if I translated my actual name into my meaningful name it would read: Life Peace Honest Image. Seems like an awful lot of responsibility for one person to handle. Maybe this is the name I am meant to discover, the qualities I am destined to possess.

Just yesterday, I received a text from my dear, dear friend Mercedes asking me to call her, she needed to talk. This type of request is rare from her and as quickly as I could, I found a shaded spot in the Piggly Wiggly parking lot and called. She told me she has breast cancer. Later that day, I received another text from her qualifying the invader as Stage II. Now, the lump has both a name and a classification. The days ahead will prove to be challenging as she ventures into the unknowns of surgery and radiation but Stage II has a 93% survival rate and she wrote, “If I had a 93% chance of speeding 100 miles per hour and not getting caught, I would do it. I like those odds.” You have to meet Mercedes. Her name mirrors the speed and confidence with which she handles life. Cancer, one of the ugliest names I know, has no chance with Merce.

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My work colleague is expecting his second child this month. In his Hindu culture, names are selected to inspire the child to follow a righteous path. One of the most common ways of naming a baby is according to the *Nakshatra* or the sign of the Zodiac at the time of birth of the baby. It is believed that certain planets govern certain days, for example Mars governs Tuesday and the naming is linked to planetary calendars. Rishabh will be watching for the moon, sun and planets but the twinkle of stars will be in his newborn's eyes and in his but it will all be secondary to the mother and child's health and the family's future.

A few weeks back, I attended a writing seminar and I came away with a good lesson for writing and for life. Our teacher taught that "you cannot resolve what you cannot name." Whether it is fear, love, or faithlessness – you have to name the thing to be able to come to some knowing of what it is you are facing. For my friend Mercedes, it is fear. The expectant father will not be able to "resolve" another human being but he can name what he loves. For me, I still cannot name what keeps me from being my best self. I cannot name the thing that keeps me from taking risks or maintaining discipline.

Instead, I focus on trees most mornings. When I walk along the marsh forest path, I see downed trees, disintegrating bark, and new growth sprouting from decaying pulp. Looking up, tall pines flex in the silent wind and Spanish moss clings and tugs in a struggle to pull limbs to the earth. Lichen tattoos the base bark of some trees while mushrooms extract moisture hidden in the crevices of discarded stumps. And all around is the sound of birds – cardinals, chickadees and squawking heron.

I cannot put a name on every feeling or phenomenon I encounter and I don't know if I want to know trees on a first name basis. Sometimes, I just want to accept things as they are. No questions asked. No resolution. No fear. No name. Just an Honest Image. Just things as they are. Just a walk, another pine cone, a tree branch to remove from the sandy path. Quiet. Peace. The occasional tapping of a woodpecker. Always in the silence is when your name is called. A life-filled answer lifts from under decaying leaves. It was there all along. It just needed a name.