

What's In A Name?

In my family of origin, I believe that my mother agreed to let my father name any boys that were born to them. Years later, Mother admitted that she feared what the first-born's name would be since the defenseless child was male and my father's father was named Levi Elroy. However, my dad chose to give my brother the name of Roy which had always been the nickname used for my grandfather. So, my brother was Roy Luke Bailey where Luke was the name of some WWI aviator, Frank Luke.

Well, where did my name come from? Bill had always been my dad's nickname. Somewhere, way back, Pa had been a little chubby – a feature that he lost early as far as pictures show. However, Pa was nicknamed for William Howard Taft, 27th President of the United States, who was quite a heavy man. Taft weighed about 335 at the end of his Presidency.

I am happy to carry on Pa's nickname. The full name became William Harold Bailey. Having a first name, William, insured me of the "Bill" nickname – which I am hoping was Pa's intention. Harold was the first name of a friend of my dad. Harold Baer died either the night of or just before I was born. Someday I need to do a little research on Harold Baer.

Beyond being related to my dad's nickname, the name "Bill Bailey" was connected with the popular song, *Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home?* That song was published in 1902 and was written by a man named Hughie Cannon. Wikipedia says that "it is still a standard with Dixieland and traditional jazz bands." It appeared in the repertoire of many recent greats like "Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory, Patsy Cline, Bobby Darin, Aretha Franklin, Brenda Lee, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Jimmy Durante, Phish, Danny Barker, Harry Connick Jr, Renee Olstead, Michael Bubl , Sam Cooke, Al Hirt, Della Reese and others."

So, from an early age, I fielded many references to that song. In general, when I was young, the persons who would make remarks about my name and the song were generally my senior. This corresponded to the song's popularity in the 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s. One website referred to "Bill Bailey," as "the most popular ragtime tune ever written." [No evidence was given for that ranking of "most popular."] To me, the popularity of the name and the song has fluctuated through my lifetime. Granted, many younger persons meet the song name with dead stares. However, I believe there is now a greater popularity among my peers whose musical experiences have been varied over their years. Most recently, a nurse in her late 50s who I had at the final day of my hospital stay for a hip replacement was all agog because she had "Bill Bailey" as a patient and she said she couldn't get the song out of her mind.

Well, possibly because of the song, Baileys seem to name a lot of their male children, William. Hence, I have found that the phone book and other such lists are full of William Baileys. I have always said that although my name would be great for name recognition in a run for political office the chances are another Bill Bailey would be on the ballot as well. In signing documents, I never use Bill Bailey. That makes legal sense. However, I generally sign as William H. or William Harold Bailey so as to at least partially distinguish myself from other William Baileys.

Having the name Bill Bailey has spawned a number of interesting situations over the years. Back in the early 60s, there was a piano-bar craze. I remember that I felt popular when entering a piano-bar in Terre Haute one evening with a couple of friends. Someone from among the patrons showed "Bill Bailey's here. Play "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home." The pianist obliged. Everyone sang. Best yet, someone shouted, "Send him a pitcher!" so the first round was free. [Everyone wanted to go to the bars with me. (Joke.)]

After college, I went to grad school and got my first job teaching math at Buffalo State in Buffalo, New York. When I arrived on campus, I was among four new math instructors. The school expanded greatly in that Fall of 1963. The

department increased again in 1964. In fact, in that second year, my office contained four math instructors and one of the new-hires sharing space in my office was also named Bill Bailey. We were in the same department, same office, and teaching the same courses. Fun. At the end of 1966 when I was leaving to go to University of Minnesota, my former students told me how --- going through registration --- they would choose which of the William Baileys to take for a class. W. T. Bailey was the other guy. W. T. meant "with tummy." W. H. Bailey was me. W. T. meant "without hair." Ingenious these undergrads.

Another incident occurred probably in the summer of 1965. I had been going to Rutgers University (now the State University of New Jersey) during the summer. The National Science Foundation was still going strong and I attended a series of courses for college teachers. On a Sunday, I was heading back to Buffalo from the New Jersey school. I decided to take the scenic route through the "southern tier" of New York. Well, the travel elves were being mean. I started getting distributor problems. My old Dodge Lancer was prone to them. In this case, the points had been poorly installed. So, I was experiencing a lot of shaky driving. The roads were not busy, but that made it even more scary. I feared being stalled out in the middle of nowhere. In one small town, I found a garage man who seemed to be helpful and he attempted to tighten the loose points. On the road again, I headed north to the New York Thruway but I began experiencing the same issue as I approached Geneva, New York. At the Geneva tollbooth for the Thruway, I spoke to the man on duty and told him of my problem. I wanted to go to the first service area west of Geneva. However, that man on duty said that he could not let me proceed and possibly stall on the toll road. He said that there was a designated repair area in Geneva and told me how to get there. I don't remember much of the particulars, but I found the Geneva mechanic outpost. Several people were ahead of me. It was late -- probably midnight. When he did get to my car, he fixed the problem, I paid, and proceeded back to the toll booth.

At the tollbooth, I and the Tollway agent were old friends. It was at last 2 AM or maybe 3. No traffic. We talked -- probably about what my car repair had been. Then he said, "Guess what...? Do you know what was the name of that mechanic on duty in Geneva tonight? It was Bill Bailey -- just like in the song!" Again, I don't remember precisely, but I opened my billfold and showed him my driver's license. Now he had something to talk about -- as I did too. Leaving the amazed agent, I drove off west toward Buffalo.

Life continues on. I just wonder when the next name related coincidence will arise.