



"They call me..."

A look at nicknames
on the Caribbean
island of Grenada

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by Shirley Anstis

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foreword

One of the first women to sit on the Grenada Legislature, Gert Protain, had some difficulty getting hold of her biographer. When she finally made contact she said to her “Child you are so hard to find I am going to call you Firefly” – immediately another nickname was born.

Being asked to write the foreword to this publication led me to a detailed reading which gave me many laughs and a clearer understanding of the origins of nicknames.

The author has taken great pains to place her narrative in the context of the “Spice Island” by including descriptions of the people: its beginnings, its customs and how she fits into the story – all of which help to bring the characters to life for the reader. As a Grenadian living abroad I learnt more about nicknames and how they came about.

From reading this book you will gather that the writer captures the spirit of nicknames in Grenada. As the reader will experience, from enslavement to belonging, nicknames tell a story of Grenadian communities and the relationships between people.

Read it.

Baroness Howells of St. David’s, OBE

Introduction

“Diggit”, “Scrubbin”, “Rope”

These are just a few of the nicknames you might hear in Grenada. From streets to homes and workplaces, nicknames are everywhere. For years I’ve thought nothing of this but all this changed when I was doing a counselling course. We were talking of the difference between how we see ourselves and how the world sees us and I started to wonder how much more complicated that would be if the world gave you a nickname. This idea only came to me because I spent my childhood in Grenada and know the prevalence of nicknames on the island. I became very excited and curious. I wanted to find out how people with nicknames feel about their nicknames and if this affects their thoughts and behaviours.

Uniquely for a book on nicknames, I speak directly to people with nicknames. It is looking at the individual and their experience of these names in their community. In this book you will read real life stories that will inform and entertain you. You might also begin to wonder about the impact of nicknames on the people you know.

This book is entitled “*They call me...*” because this was the recurring phrase that people used when I asked them about their nickname. It surprised me at first but it makes perfect sense. It is not that they choose to be called this name but that the community call them by it. It is very much about accepting the name that is given to them. It is not “My nickname is...” but more “They call me...”

History and Politics

In the beginning Grenada was settled by successive Amerindian groups from about 2000 BC. The Kalinago and Galibi peoples were the last two groups to make Grenada their home. The Kalinago arrived in Grenada about 1200 AD, and called the island “Camahogne”. It was these peoples that the Europeans met when they arrived on these islands. For his own purposes, Christopher Columbus decided to call the Kalinago “cariba”, which meant cannibal in Spanish. So here we have a people being called by something other than their real name to suit the purposes of someone more powerful than them. Today there are only a few traces of Grenada’s indigenous people, and their way of life.

Christopher Columbus is thought to have sighted Grenada in 1498, naming it “La Conception”. Shortly after that, it became known as “Granada” by the Spanish, named after the Spanish city. The island was renamed “La Grenade” by the French, and eventually became known as Grenada. For a brief time this island was also called “Mayo”.

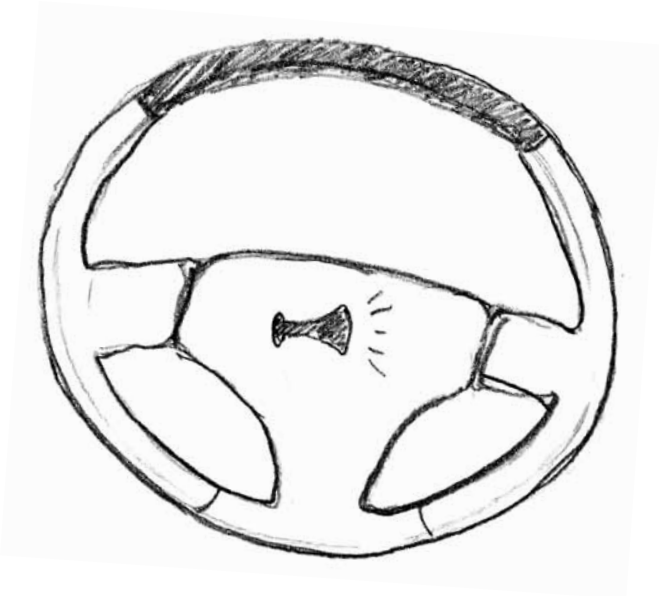
Although known to European explorers, there were no European settlements on Grenada until 1609, when English settlers unsuccessfully attempted to establish a foothold on Grenada. In 1638, French settlers arrived and established a base in the present-day area of St George’s. The French fortified their settlement, built several more throughout Grenada, and from these bases proceeded to wage war against the Kalinago. Rather than surrender to the French a number of Kalinago committed suicide by jumping off the sea cliffs near Sauteurs in the north of the island. The event is commemorated in the name “Sauteurs”, which means “leapers”.

Baby



is also known as Crazy 8 & Little Beck Beck. He was nicknamed Baby when he was 16 because people felt he still looked like a child and had baby soft skin. Beck Beck came from a combination of a corruption of his surname and the name of a girl he fancied. He was only around age 9 at the time so it was kid's play that was overheard by adults and embellished. Crazy 8 came about as he is one of 8 cousins and he was the youngest and most disruptive. There are times when he did not like any of these names but they are all a part of him and have a special place in his life. Over the years Crazy 8 has helped him to feel able to speak his mind "not afraid to tell anyone anything". Mostly the nicknames are about memories but Baby is still used and he has no problems with it now.

Beep



got his nickname around age 6 as he was always pretending to be driving and continuously saying “beep”. An older member of the family gave him the name and he finds it fun. As the whole community caught on to it the name spread quickly. As someone who likes driving Beep is still comfortable with his nickname. He is very happy behind the wheel of his jeep. Beep is also called by his real name so he is able to have a range of relationships within the same community.

Big John



loves his nickname. He has had it since he was 8 years old because he was perceived to have broad shoulders. Although he shares this nickname with another local person he has no problem with it. He says, “I don’t like to tell people my real name” so the nickname is very handy. He feels being called Big John or BJ has had no impact on how he sees himself. He likes that everyone refers to him by his nickname. It might also have something to do with the fact that he does not like to tell people his real name.

Bobby



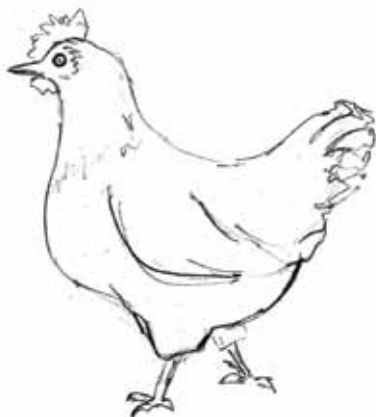
got his nickname from playing quality cricket over 15 years ago, and reminding onlookers of the cricket player Bobby Simpson. He also has pet names given by family members and these stay inside the family. He says his nickname does affect him when playing cricket as he feels the “need to try to emulate that person. It takes more out of you because it’s a standard you got to keep”. This name is mostly known in his family and friendship circles whilst his colleagues use his real name. As such it only affects his leisure activities.

Boney



says he was “small when I was younger”. He has no feelings about the nickname either way. He is known as Boney by everyone – no one uses his given name ever. He says that with regards to nicknames people just have to “get acceptance, you have to like it” because “there is no way out”.

Chicken Hawk



got his nickname because of an episode at sea. On that day he saw a bird dive behind his boat and remarked that it resembled a chicken – the name has been with him ever since. The nickname is a combination of the chicken he thought he saw and a kind of bird he might have seen. He is also called Plumb-it from a period when he was chasing a particular girl and the name is around sexual conquest. Main Lift is the nickname given to him by his colleagues, since they see him as physically strong and the main man when heavy lifting needs to be done. When asked how he feels about his nicknames he says he doesn't "feel no way, they call me and I answer". Although he knows people who get angry about their nicknames he prefers his many nicknames to his real name. From what he says it seems more about not wanting to have his whereabouts known than any strong feelings against his real name. Only his family uses his real name, occasionally.