

CHAFFEE DUCKERS

I think the most tragic part of my childhood originated from my sheer inability to find anything engraved with my name. I never had a CHAFFEE license plate on my hand-me-down red Schwinn. No one ever gave me a key chain or coffee mug with the beautiful loops of those double Fs and Es. Alas, I was destined to search through the names; longingly staring at the space between CHAD and CHARLOTTE hoping one day a miracle would occur. Fortunately, this is one of the few negative aspects of a name like “Chaffee Duckers.”

My name has always been an integral part of my identity. Sure, it sounds a bit like my parents created it from a bag of Scrabble tiles, but it comes from a long-lost ancestor, Comfort Chaffee. Now it’s all mine. In my opinion, a name can make or break a person. The ability to embody a name depends on the individual. My greatest goal in life is to be the kind of unique person deserving of a name so utterly random and absurd.

I began my journey in preschool. Nothing about me screamed normal. I was not prim, proper, and poised. I preferred sneaking away from my preschool classroom, barefoot, in the purple velvet dress I wore every single day to resting obediently during nap time.

I grew up in a family akin to a modified *Brady Bunch*. Stepsisters, half sisters, stepbrothers, and stepparents joined my previously miniscule household. But in a family of plain names like Chris, Bill, John, Liz, Katherine, and Mark, I was still the only *Chaffee*.

I was a bit of a reverse black sheep in my family. My name helped me carve an identity separate from my myriad of siblings. Instead of enriching my brain with *Grand Theft Auto*, I preferred begging my parents to take me to the bookstore. While my parents mandated homework time for my brothers, they never questioned my work ethic or wiretapped my assignment notebook. The thing that set me apart from the herd was that I was self-disciplined enough to take control of my own life. From the very beginning I never depended on my parents' help or motivation to finish my schoolwork. Putting school first came naturally to me, much to the distaste and confusion of my siblings. My work ethic became known as the patented "Chaffee Method."

As I got older, I began to embody my name more and more. I didn't want to be that girl with the weird name in the back of the class eating her hair, so I learned how to project my ideas in both written and spoken forms. I was often picked to lead classroom discussions and my complete disregard for making a fool of myself bolstered that skill. The manner in which I operate academically is perfectly described as *Chaffee*-esque; including but not limited to elaborate study songs, complex pneumatic devices, study forts, and the occasional John C. Calhoun costume.

I take pride in the confusion on a person's face when they first read my name. Seeing someone struggle over those

two unfamiliar syllables fills me with glee. I feel as though I am adding a new word to their vocabulary. So on my last day as a page in the U.S. Senate, I prepared myself for the anticipated awkward stumbling as Senator Harry Reid thanked me by name in his closing address. But the stumble never came. I felt very humbled by his perfect pronunciation. Perhaps *Chaffee* is actually catching on!