

Myroslaw / Мирослав

I go by the handle “Marvin Marykuca”.

Actually, “Marvin” is not my real Christian name. That job goes to “Myroslaw”, as my birth certificate will attest, which document, by the way, establishes that I was never given a middle name. This no-middle-name fact is also true for my sister and brothers, except for my half-brother, Peter James Leochko, my mother’s son from her first marriage. I can only assume that this one-given-name only policy can be ascribed to some economizing on the part of our parents, perhaps understandable as most of us were born in the 1920’s and 1930’s, an era in which strict economies were necessary. And “Marvin” is what people call me now, although at various times of my life I answered to diminutives of Myroslaw, such as Myros, and less frequently Morris and Myrs, with spelling variations as Meros and Merc. It was even suggested over the years that I might be known as Slaw, or even Ross, as some Myroslaws other than myself had had their given name so foreshortened, but neither of those caught on.

I recall that when I started school, all of my scribblers were emblazoned with “Mervin”. This somehow morphed into Marvin, (perhaps because the congruence of “Marvin Marykuca” was appealing at the time), but many of my school-year acquaintances still call me Mervin or Merv, as do my nieces and nephews although they are kind enough to preface that with “Uncle”.

Also, for a short period in my younger days, my immediate family referred to me as “Slim”. This fell into disuse when its value as an accurate descriptor became questionable.

And so I became “Marvin”.

The only authority ever to question this was the Government of Canada. When I hired on with the federal government, I was required to submit documentation of all sorts for their records. This included my birth certificate, which identified me as “Myroslaw”, with no reference to “Marvin”, the name under which I had been hired. My high school, college and teaching credentials were all okay as they were issued to me as “Marvin”, as were my driver’s licence and provincial health care card, so my birth certificate became the fly in the federal ointment, so to speak. This engendered an exchange of correspondence which, towards the climax of the issue, had Canada insisting that I undergo an official name change to establish me as “Marvin” to avoid any discrepancies in their records.

At this point, my innate mulishness surfaced, and I questioned their authority to insist on this. My argument seems to have taken winning effect shortly after I had fired off a letter asking why there had been no insistence on some official “Marvin”-ization of my name when it came to accepting my income tax payments in earlier years. That seems to have been the right question to ask, as shortly thereafter I received a letter from Canada to the effect that I would henceforth exist in their records as “Myroslaw (known as Marvin) Marykuca”. The issue has not resurfaced since.

So much for my Christian name, except that it may be of some interest to know that “Myroslaw” in Ukrainian denotes “one who honours or esteems peace”, a kind of compound name from **мир**, pronounced “mir” (meaning “peace”) and **слав**, pronounced “slav” (meaning “honour” or, perhaps more accurately, “honourer”).)

So then “mir” + “slav” equates roughly to Myroslaw, and there we are. Not an expressly accurate “naming” in my case, but mine, nevertheless.

There is a bit more excitement in trying to plumb the depths of our family name. My delving into family history reveals that the Cyrillic alphabet spelling remains constant as “**Марикуца**” with one exception, of small variance, being “**Марекуца**”, a spelling which I cannot verify beyond its use in one document only and which in any case might have been just an error.

Upon the emigration of family members to Canada from Ukraine in 1906, the anglicized version of the family name was written as “Marykuca”. (Ship’s log, SS Lake Michigan, departed Antwerp, 22 April, 1906, for St. John, New Brunswick, Canada.) The only recorded departure from the “Marykuca” spelling found to date shows up in the Dominion of Canada Certificate of Naturalization, dated 29 September, 1907, where the family name is entered as “Marakucza”, in my reading of the long-hand entry in three spaces on the form.

“Marykuca” is the spelling in use by all of the descendants of Ivan Marykuca, the head of the Marykuca household that arrived in Canada in 1906. When Ivan’s brother, Hryn, and cousin, Kost, arrived in Canada with their families seven years later (1913), they, too, used that same spelling. However, all of Kost’s children who were born in Canada were registered by the vital statistics authorities of the day with the spelling “Markusa”, and they continue to use that to the present. While I do not know why this happened, I would guess that the “Markusa” spelling is a closer approximation of way the name sounds in Ukrainian: “ma-ri-koot-sa”, with the accent on the third syllable. The “Marykuca” spelling tends to call for the pronunciation of a “hard c”, resulting in an anglicized version that sounds out as “ma-ri-koo-ka” or even “ma-ri-kuke-a”. That may all have been best solved by using a “ç”, a “c” with a cedilla, to soften the “c” in Marykuca, as in the French “garçon”, but that would have been an unnecessary affectation for that time and place, I suppose.

And so now you know!