



Prison is, among other things, a place of nicknames. Some people come in with a "handle" from their lives before prison, maybe from their neighborhood or gang (think Sleepy, Droopy, Taz, Dolla...). Some people give themselves nicknames inside for various reasons, often to hide something but many times just to reinvent themselves, too. And whether one comes in with a nickname, creates his own moniker, or has no special sobriquet at all, very few inmates will escape getting a nickname from others, whether they want one or not. The names don't always stick, but if you spend any significant time behind bars, you can bet you'll end up being called something you never imagined (and that's totally apart from all the not-nicknames people get called in prison, things like dipshit or fuckface, and plenty of others — often by cops — which we don't need to explore for now.)

Myself, I've had a lot of nicknames since I was first kidnapped as a bleached-blond, 14-year-old BMX & skaterboy, many moons ago. It's hard to remember the earliest ones, and besides my own name I mostly just got called "kid" or "youngster" a lot. But over time, some nicknames became recurring themes. For instance, it's still rare for me to go more than a year or so without being called "Harry Potter" by someone who thinks he's being original. That nickname has come around at least 8-10 different times over the years; less these days, but it still pops up, and now I actually appreciate the implication. It's certainly better than Snape, Hagrid, or Dumbledore, right? ☺

Even nicer was when someone once called me Macaulay Culkin. I don't see much resemblance, but since I was a HUGE Mac fan when I was younger (completely smitten, actually, if I'm being honest), it was a great compliment to me, no matter how the name-caller might've intended it.

A couple unique nicknames that made more sense were "Encyclopedia" and "Young John", the latter because some said I looked like "a young John Lennon", and the former... well, do you remember an early 90's commercial for Encyclopedia Britannica? "Hey! I always wondered where my mandibula was!" No? OK, but there were a few in which the star really did bear a striking resemblance to 16- or 17-year-old me. So, those happened.

About 5 years ago I picked up the name "Bumpstock" from some wag who thought I looked like a stereotypical school shooter. I actually took that as an endearment, especially in prison where a violent streak is seen as an admirable quality. Plus, again, this wasn't long ago, so to be compared in appearance to Eric and Dylan, or to Nikolas Cruz (and now I'm wondering... are any school shooters ever ugly? It's odd, no — so many are really attractive!), that's pretty flattering, especially at my advanced age.

That said, probably the most gratifying nickname I've gotten, and not just once but three different times, is Ned Flanders. Ned, you may recall, is Homer Simpson's goody goody neighbor, always jolly and clean-cut with his suburban nerd-chic glasses and sweater... but for all that stereotypical softness, when he ditches that sweater — dude is RIPPED! So, I got the name because I don't scream "muscles" when

you see me: People tend to assume I have twiggy little arms underneath my customary long-sleeved shirts, and my demeanor is a little too smiley for most prison-types to take seriously. But, eventually, someone catches me after exercise or a shower, and they're often taken aback. "I had no idea!" is something I've heard more times than I can count. But even before prison, my best friend, Darrell Coleman, always insisted that my body — that is, my physique — "doesn't match (my) face". Hence, Ned."

Which brings me to now. It's strange... I've NEVER had so many nicknames as I've gotten just since arriving at Chino. It's only been 4 months, and I've already been called:

- Tarzan
- Waldo (as in, "where's Waldo")
- Tony Hawk (He looks old these days, but I think it's more about my vibe and haircut?)
- Peter Parker / Spiderman
- Clark Kent (but not Superman, unfortunately. Lol.)
- Dennis the Menace
- Rocky
- Shaggy (of Scooby Doo fame)
- "Bruce Banner before he turns into the Hulk"
- Hollywood (Because I supposedly look like I own a nightclub??)
- and maybe my favorite of all ... —
- Gil Bang / Porno Gil (Lol, if you know the show Curb Your Enthusiasm, you might catch the reference. ☺)

Some of these, TBH, are almost throat-lumpingly kind and endearing (even Shaggy and Waldo aren't names that make me feel bad about myself, which isn't hard to do with my current level of self-consciousness and not-stratospheric self esteem ☹). I can't explain the Cambrian explosion of nicknames here, except maybe as a consequence of being somewhere entirely new after 15 years in the same shithole, so instead of being a familiar face, I'm now a bit of a wildcard? And really, I don't look or act much like most other inmates, so I suppose that draws attention. Mostly good, so far.

That said, I need to bite the bullet and reveal 2 other names I've gotten here. Thankfully, neither stuck: Jamie Lee Curtis and Ellen DeGeneres. Lol, ok, I admit... it is funny cuz I can see (sadly) why they landed on those names. I get it — I'll leave it at that. But at least I think it also shows that flattery or bullshit wasn't necessarily behind those other names, that people more or less just called it as they saw it. Sometimes a nickname can be a way to more accurately see yourself through others' eyes, and I suppose it's one of the few things about prison I can't really complain about.