



An American with an Italian Name. Hindrance or Advantage?

Darrell Fusaro (March 07, 2010)



Most Italian-Italians, the ones from Italy, that is, always seem to be curious as to how we Italian-Americans are perceived by others in America. With all the news they've heard of Italian stereotypes in America, like the ones put forward in "The Godfather," "The Sopranos," "Mafia Wars," and "The Jersey Shore," I understand what they expect.



Personally, I enjoy my last name. Some say “Foo-SAH-row” while others say “Fuzz-AH-row.” Even I go back and forth. Maybe if I were less American and more Italian, I’d know right from wrong. No problem - I answer to either. The problem is the lethal combination of “Darrell” and “Fusaro.” Some things just don’t go together, and my first and last names are a perfect example. Together they lose their punch. Darrell Fusaro sounds too rhyme-y and weak.

Maybe it’s in the pronunciation? In New Jersey, which is where I grew up, Darrell’s pronounced, “Daaaah-rel.” I don’t know. My father was James and so was my grandfather, which is a perfect compliment to Fusaro. But Darrell?! What was my mother thinking?



Recently, I asked her where the name came from. Her answer? “I don’t know.” Then she said, “Funny, isn’t it? I never knew of a Darrell before you were born. When you came out, it just hit me. Darrell! Maybe you named yourself?” Great. With only myself to blame, I guess I have to learn to accept it, because for some strange reason, the thought of changing it now seems sacrilegious.

Growing up surrounded by Tonys, Frankies, Tommys, Larrys, Mikes and Jimmys, it didn’t feel good to be a Darrell, but today, there is a bright side, sort of. Old friends and former nemeses have no problem finding me on Facebook. I would love to tell you I am the only Darrell Fusaro, but that’s not the case. If you Google “Darrell Fusaro,” you will discover there is one other, who is also American and approximately the same age. But that’s where the similarities end. The other Darrell Fusaro is a martial arts champion living in Minnesota. That Darrell Fusaro is probably calm, confident and able to defend himself against eighteen men using nothing but a paper clip. Me? I’m the guy who after starting an argument with someone bigger than me will mimic a karate stance I saw on some episode of “Kung Fu,” shout, “Hi-yah!” and then immediately turn and run for my life.



So at least in name, I'm not as unique as I thought, and my last name makes me even less unique since it is clearly Italian. This puts me into a large and well-known nationality. Most Italian-Italians, the ones from Italy, that is, always seem to be curious as to how we Italian-Americans are perceived by others in America. With all the news they've heard of Italian stereotypes in America, like the ones put forward in "[The Godfather](#) [2]," "[The Sopranos](#) [3]," "Mafia Wars," and "[The Jersey Shore](#) [4]" I understand what they expect.



Once people discover I'm Italian, their reaction is always the same. It goes like this: "Wow, you're Italian?" They seem surprised, most likely thrown off by the name Darrell. The next thing they say is, "I love Italian food!"

Disappointing, isn't it? No one has ever accused me of being in the Mafia, and in spite of growing up in New Jersey and spending every summer at the Shore, I've never been considered a Guido, either. Apparently, no matter what negative stereotype comes down the pike, it will always be overshadowed by the strength of Italy's most powerful and effective good will ambassador: its cuisine! So there's nothing to fear. And even with Italian food as my ally, I've always been judged more by my behavior than by name. Which is usually a good thing.



By the way, if you ever meet another Italian kid named “Darrell Fusaro,” let him know he’s not alone...

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