

This Month's Editorial

Rotary and First Names

By Chesley R. Perry

THE use of the first name in conversation between Rotarians is very common in the United States, and the habit is not at all uncommon among Rotarians in other countries. There is no reference to it in the Constitution or By-Laws of Rotary International, nor is it an unwritten law or an obligatory custom. In Rotary we are supposed to become so well acquainted with each other—so friendly—so intimate—that we naturally use our fellow-Rotarian's first name. That is all there is to it.

Not so very long ago an alert American Rotarian made a point of the fact that President Donald A. Adams was referred to as "Mr. Adams" in something which I had written. The situation called for an explanation from me, which was in substance as follows:

The spirit of an absolute democracy of friendship in Rotary is very fine, but in the practice of it we must be practical. It is fine to have ideals of any sort, but we must make a practical application of them. There is no law of Rotary which compels the use of the first name, nor is there in the laws anything compelling the omission of the title "Mr." when referring to a Rotarian. There is a custom in this regard, but it is not universal in Rotary. We must not make the mistake of believing that every Rotarian thinks alike. In fact, Rotary stands for tolerance with regard to other men's views. Consequently, I would rather take a chance of jarring some Rotarian's aesthetic soul by not being informal enough, than to take the chance of shocking some other Rotarian by being alto-

gether too informal in referring to the man who holds the high office of President of Rotary International.

The use of the title "Mr." a couple of times in the biographical sketch of Don Adams was not premeditated, but slipped in, in the natural course of writing. That is the way that I think it should be in Rotary. Just let our respect as well as our friendliness slip in with perfect freedom.

Carrying this thought into the fellowship of the club or into inter-city and international fellowships, let me say that if a fellow-Rotarian refers to you as "Mr. So-and-So" or to me as "Mr. Perry," we should not feel offended, unless, indeed, he puts undue emphasis upon the "Mr." thereby directing attention to the maintaining of a barrier between him and us. Otherwise accept the title as a token of his respect. We may hope that he will become friendly enough with us to omit the use of the "Mr." but we ought not to try to force him in this regard. Friendship can not be forced.

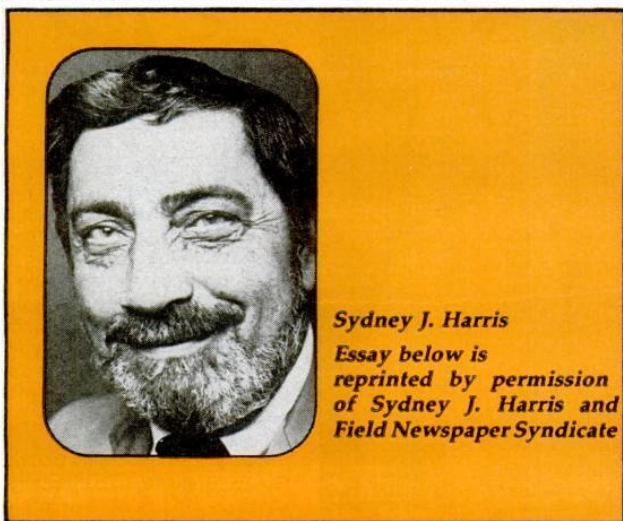
We have long rejoiced in the fact that in Rotary there is nothing in the form of a ritual. *Let us be careful that we don't make a ritual out of the manner in which Rotarians shall be addressed or referred to.* What we want is friendship and understanding. To accomplish these, certain terminology may be helpful, and at certain times very important, but it is not essential to the existence of friendship and understanding. If anyone says we are not good Rotarians because we do not call each other by our first names I shall be apprehensive that there is a form of ritual in Rotary.

First-name fellowship: friendly or phony?

WHEN ROTARY was a fledgling, and its handful of members virtual strangers to one another, any effort at breaking down formality was welcomed. Thus it seemed natural that the early members called each other "Paul" and "Ches" and "Charlie," just as they would have as boys back in their small U.S. home towns. Today, the custom of "first-naming" Rotarians has spread around the world. Many Rotarians like the idea—others consider it too informal, too "American."

It is true that U.S. Americans are largely responsible for the easing of the rules of etiquette so that total strangers of all ages may greet one another as "Marge" and "Millie" and "Jim" and "Joe" at first sight. Actually they never even have to meet in person. First-name familiarity often begins at the other end of one's private telephone.

"Is this Tom Nelson?" the friendly salesman's voice answers your innocent "Hello." "We're having a wonderful sale of carpets this weekend at Rug-runners, Inc., and I wanted you to be among the first to know..."



Sydney J. Harris
Essay below is
reprinted by permission
of Sydney J. Harris and
Field Newspaper Syndicate

MR. HARRIS SAYS:

When we judge another person's behavior, we imagine we are reacting in personal terms, but more often we are responding in terms of our particular culture—for it is the individual society, not the person, that decides what kind of conduct is "stuffy" or "friendly" or "flip."

In my own case, it took me years to get over the annoyance of being addressed by my first name by peo-

Magazine subscription agencies extend "personalized" invitations to Frank Smith and Sally Jones to try their periodicals; and at U.S. hospitals, patients being admitted, even those in their eighties and nineties, are greeted cheerily as "George" and "Elizabeth" by nurses and interns barely out of their teens.

The voting public talks of "Jimmy" Carter and "Ronnie" Reagan as if they were old neighbors from down the street; and movie heroes and heroines are certainly never thought of as "Mr. Brando" or "Ms. Streep."

"After a while the entire country begins to sound like a singles weekend," wrote Lance Morrow in a recent *Time* essay, "A Nation Without Last Names."

When U.S. journalist Sydney J. Harris addressed the subject of the first-name custom in his syndicated newspaper column, your editors sent copies of his remarks to Rotarians in several countries, asking for their comments on it and on the first-name custom in general. Here is a reprint of Mr. Harris's column and the Rotarians' replies:

ple who scarcely knew me. I resented it as a piece of unwarranted familiarity, though recognizing that in the American culture it is more often meant as a sign of friendliness and acceptance.

When my mother arrived in this country from England, she was in her mid-30s, and I never heard her address an adult friend by a first name; her oldest acquaintance here, after a quarter-century, was still "Mrs. Pickwick" to others, and to her face. And she, in return, addressed my mother as "Mrs. Harris," both publicly and privately.

I have lived here since a little boy, and yet those childhood influences persist, even when we rationally and consciously know they may mean little in terms of personal relationships. I can't recall ever having used someone's first name until he or she has asked me to—which Americans generally do 10 minutes after they meet you.

Well, is the British attitude "stuffy"? I think a case can be made out that degrees of intimacy are important, and should be signified by different modes of address.

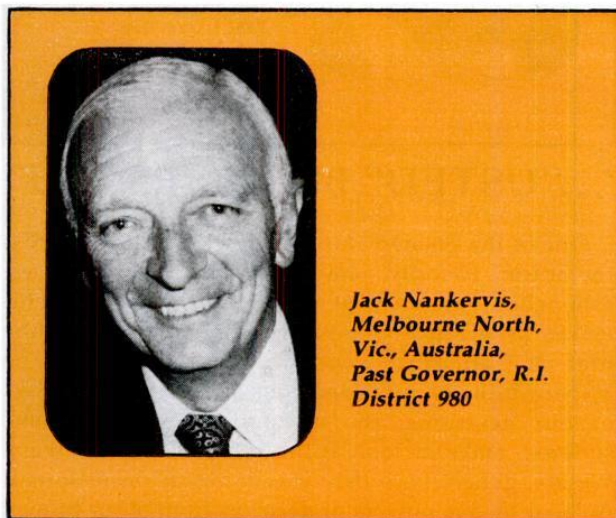
The paramount reason is that friendship becomes blurred and nearly meaningless if everyone is immediately on a first-name basis. We can clearly see the *reductio ad absurdum* of this habit in the Hollywood syndrome of promiscuous "dears" and "darlings" between people who hardly know each other's last

names well enough to spell them.

Most European languages have two forms of the second person singular—a “tu” and a “vous,” as it were. When two persons shift from the formal to the familiar form, it signifies a new closeness in the relationship. They are mutually ratifying a bond that did not exist before.

In America, anyone will call you “Jack” or “Bill” and then proceed to lie to you or stab you in the back (“Sorry, Bill, but you’re fired.”)—all the while exuding a hearty air of palliness, like the murmured “dahlings” between actresses who privately may hate each other’s guts.

I can’t find this an improvement over the European system, for familiarity can go as much too far in one direction as formality can go in the other. Taken all in all, I still prefer the mode of address in which you know where you stand with someone else, to the mode in which nobody stands anywhere that he can’t be suddenly kicked in the bottom by Jack.



*Jack Nankervis,
Melbourne North,
Vic., Australia,
Past Governor, R.I.
District 980*

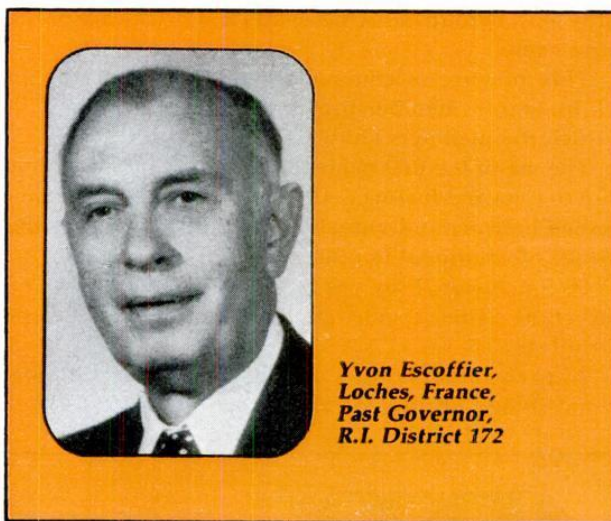
‘FIRST NAMES FAVORED’

The article by Mr. Sydney J. Harris makes interesting reading, but I was rather surprised and disappointed at the second last paragraph, which suggests, “In America anyone will call you Jack or Bill and then proceed to lie to you or stab you in the back.” Having visited America on a few occasions, I don’t agree with Mr. Harris, although I recognize that such happenings occur in all nations, but they are a minority.

As far as the use of a person’s first name is concerned, I can assure you it is the usual thing throughout Australia. Having lived in Australia all my life, maybe I have not been exposed to the British or European attitude which, of course, I know exists.

I feel the use of first names should be encouraged, and I believe Rotary sets a good example. The pocket badges with the first name boldly displayed make it easy to approach a fellow Rotarian, particularly when visiting clubs overseas. My point can best be shown

by the name badges at the international assembly in Boca Raton. The 20 Australian district governors-nominee who attended had not previously met their counterparts from other nations, but after eight days it was noticeable that first names were in use at all times.



*Yvon Escoffier,
Loches, France,
Past Governor,
R.I. District 172*

‘“VOUS” BECOMES “TU”’

Like Harry L. Ruggles, I think familiarity cannot be laid down as a principle nor used immoderately without losing the meaning of the feelings involved.

In France we have two ways of addressing the person to whom we are speaking. For the second person singular we use the pronouns “tu” and “vous.”

Propriety decrees the use of the “vous” form of you in all circumstances, even with our friends, and in certain families with family members and between spouses. The use of “tu” is popular in the milieu in which it is understood that the social or professional level, usually unpretentious, is shared.

But it can also be an indication of a close relationship established during a given period of life during which friendly, even affectionate, ties were made. Thus, students in high school and at universities and soldiers in the military use the “tu” form of you with one another. Professionally, those at the same level use “tu,” even in the highest echelons of the hierarchy.

This use of “tu” is therefore a sign of privileged relationships given absolute equality. In no case can it be unilateral. It must happen spontaneously from both sides. It creates a rapport between those who use it.

As to Rotary, being admitted to a club is to enter a world made up of friendship and brotherhood. It is to accept a total equality with one’s fellow Rotarians. It is to become a part of a whole, exceptional by its behavior and ethnics. Thus, nothing should stand in the way of the use of “tu” among members of a club who break bread together several times per month.

If there is some reticence in this practice, it can only come from those who have not completely understood the meaning of Rotary.

By the same token, the first name, the one by which our family members know us, should be used.

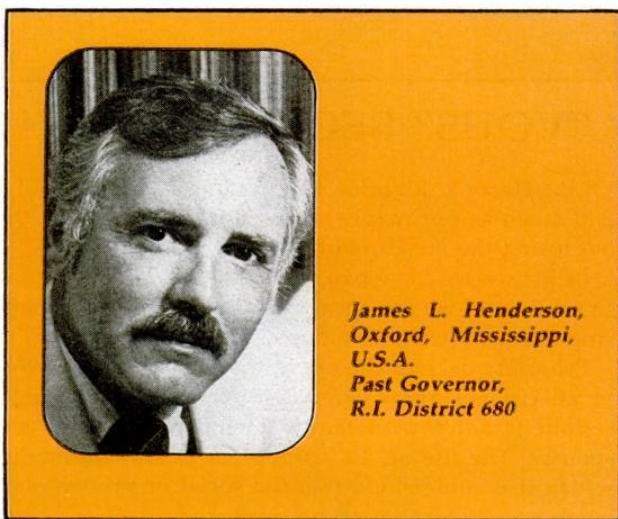
In his club, a member must cease to be what he is in relationship to those who in everyday life address him as "Monsieur." A new personality is taken on, exclusive in the group, which is evidenced by the use of the first name.

This practice is common in France, especially in clubs whose memberships are not too large and in which the members know one another well.

The use of the first name to the use of "tu" should be left to time and feelings. As friendly feelings are established between individuals, the use of "tu" will be the result of emotional impulses.

In conclusion, I say yes for the use of the first name in clubs. This should be imperative as a Rotary privilege.

As to the familiar form of you, "tu," Rotary brotherhood should be allowed to give birth to it.



'CALL ME JIM'

Everyone on a first name basis in Rotary? Sounds good. A leveling, democratic way to relate to one another. A Rotarian banker and a Rotarian small-business owner can visit without any class or caste distinctions. No "Mr." Joe Banker talking to "Bill" Merchant. Simply Joe talking to Bill.

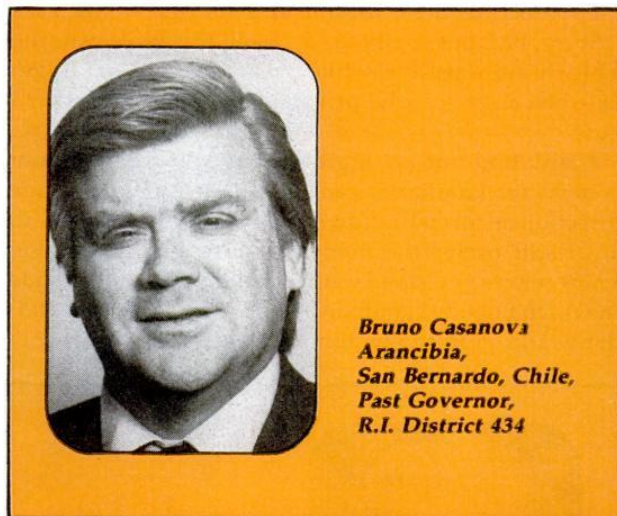
To do otherwise would, an author once said, be "putting others' heads higher than our own" and thus be a contradiction to the fellowship/friendship beliefs of Rotary.

Acknowledging the discomfort that a young member might feel when calling an older man with whom he had grown up by his first name and, realizing that there are those toward whom we wish to pay our respect, I still believe the calling of one person "Mr." and another by his first name implies a distance—maybe a barrier—that need not exist. That is, in my opinion, unconstructive.

Older men, wealthy men, prominent men, if they

are secure in themselves, do not need to be addressed by a title. To insist otherwise implies they do not feel that confident and thus want some means of acknowledging their superiority by putting another at a disadvantage.

Everyone on a first name basis in Rotary? By all means!



'...“USTED” BECOMES “TÚ”'

One of the greatest things that we have in Rotary is the warm, friendly, almost familial atmosphere we find when we arrive at our weekly meetings. This makes us discard—almost without knowing it—the protective armor we wear during our daily lives. The responsibility of our professions or functions, the risks of our decisions, the disappointments we have suffered, make us look at life somewhat defensively. We are, generally, lonely executives or professionals isolated by our powers of decision from other human beings. This reduces our contacts and our knowledge of certain realities.

In Rotary we find a haven of peace. We are no longer the faraway Don Carlos or Don Luis but simply Carlos or Lucho. We are received affably; we smile and joke together. We talk about different situations, and we receive sincere opinions from angles we would not otherwise have considered or understood. We are aware of different community problems and needs and we work together to solve them. We think of ourselves as a family, with no one objecting or feeling strange when we call each other by first names or personal nicknames. On the contrary, the informal treatment, sincere and affectionate, together with the use of "Tú" in place of the formal "Usted," contribute toward the warm, friendly atmosphere that we find in Rotary. It makes us feel closer together among ourselves, as is recognized in Mr. Harris's article. The difference is that Rotarians never think or believe that behind this closeness could lie hypocrisy or lack of respect. If we were to compare ourselves with the Hollywood per-

sonalities that he mentions, we would see that those "dear" and "darling" actors work in the same medium, trying to *out-do* one another; in Rotary we work *together*, united by one common objective: to better the social development of human beings, in a better world.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Harris never knew Rotary.



**Romeo "Romy"
Gonzalez Pasay,
Rizal, Philippines
Associate Editor,
Philippine Rotary**

'FIRST NAMES, NICKNAMES'

Philippine culture, considered in a light vein, may be compared to one of our favorite desserts, the "Halo-Halo." The "H-H" is a kaleidoscopic masterpiece we usually enjoy as a light repast during hot summertimes at about four o'clock in the afternoon. It is a hodgepodge of diced fruits—candied purple yams and sweet potatoes, preserved nangka (breadfruit), caramelized boiled bananas, boiled corn kernels, white and black beans in syrup, and gelatine in various colors—all mixed in finely crushed ice and topped with milk, sugar, and puffed rice. This incongruous mixture is served in a huge glass with a long teaspoon.

Our population is an "H-H" in human form. At one time or another our country has been occupied by the Chinese, the British, the Spanish, the Americans, and the Japanese, but our heritage is intrinsically Malay. The Filipino manifests a bit of all these cultures.

A good number of Filipinos speak English well, in addition to two or three languages in the vernacular and a little Spanish. We have the sensitive feelings of the Chinese and do business like them. We have the open camaraderie of the American, the easy smile of the Malay, the dignity of the Spanish, and the courtesy of the Japanese.

Filipinos usually address each other with first names and nicknames, but behind that custom is the H-H synthesis. Take "Jose," for instance—one of the commonest names given to our countrymen.

The Malay bloodlines show up especially in the rural areas where Jose becomes: Pitong-tankad (tall); Josedaga (mousy); Manong-Jose (older brother); Ninong-Pingoy (godfather); Tatang-Pitong (father, un-

cle, or as a term of respect); Pepeng-campaneru (the bell-ringer).

The soft idioms of the Chinese show up in: Joseling, Ping, Liloy, Ling, Pits, or Jay-ling.

The Spaniards who introduced Christianity to the Philippines are somewhat more formal, but gave us: Don Jose, Pepe, Señor Jose, Joselito, Pepi, or Pepito.

The Americans gave us the public school system resulting in: Joe, Joji, Jovit, Jun, Jody, Mr. J., Jos, in addition to the status symbol initials of J.J., J.M., J.R.T.

We even have a quick remedy for those who have forgotten the name or nickname of an acquaintance. We simply dodge the embarrassing issue by using such names as "Inday" (usually reserved for the favorite daughter of a family); "Pare" (once reserved for godfathers, but even used by and among children); "Boss" (used by anyone for anyone); "Among-tunay" (ditto). The Russian orientation of a few decades ago introduced "Ka," meaning comrade. So now, we also have Ka-Luis and Ka Mameng (for Carmen).

The result is confusing—and delightful.



**Tsutomu Saito,
Tateyama, Japan,
Past Governor, R.I.
District 279**

'IT'S UP TO THE PERSON'

Rotary International agrees to eliminate nicknames from publications, and I think this is very pertinent. I think each country has its way to express friendship.

In Japan there are several ways to call friends. It's up to the person to address you in any way he wishes; it's up to the individual's discretion.

"If your club levies a dime when a member addresses another as 'Mister,' it goes right back to Rotary's beginning. Most of us were strangers and it seemed natural to use first names, just as we had as boys."

**Harry L. Ruggles
THE ROTARIAN
February 1952**