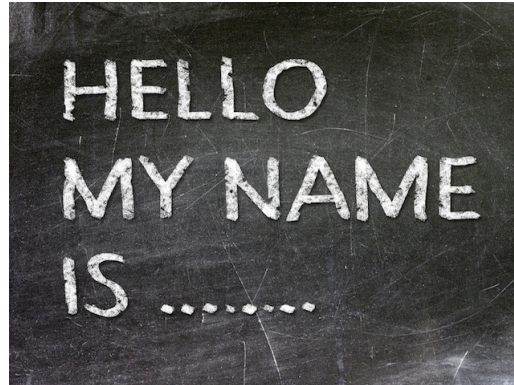


## What's in a Name

By Arthur Shapiro



I'm famous for something I didn't do. I keep thinking the excitement will die down and the attention will fade, but..... I'm beginning to like it.

It all started with the OJ Simpson trial and the other Shapiro, Robert. You know, of course, he is a famous lawyer who defended many athletes and had celebrities as his clients.

But his claim to fame is based on the OJ trial and being a member of the legal "dream team," along with F Lee Bailey and Johnny Cochran. He even wrote a book about it.

I did a lot of traveling in those days, and many of the places I went to didn't know much about the name Shapiro. Never mind that the name is as widespread as Smith or Jones in some areas. So, checking in to board a plane or getting a hotel room, I almost always got the question, "Are you related to Robert Shapiro?"

At first, it concerned me. It was a controversial trial, and the verdict angered millions. I was concerned that a punch in the face would accompany my answer if I said yes or even if I said no. Fortunately, that didn't happen. On the contrary, the question about my relationship with the other guy was frequently met with a hopeful look and a smile, and I could swear they were about to ask for an autograph.

America's worship of famous people is laughable. All it takes is fifteen minutes of fame, regardless of whether the person is good or evil (probably more desirable than good).

The more I got that question, the more I liked it. Most of the time, I smiled, shrugged, and said, no, we are not related. I could see the disappointment when they couldn't come home and say, "You'll never guess who I saw and spoke to today?"

The first time, I said yes and added, oh sure, Bob is my cousin. The desk clerk upgraded my hotel room. Hey, this is cool, I thought.

What followed was a golden ticket to the world of hospitality and travel. Requested upgrades on flights came through with the magic words, "Yes, he's my 1st cousin." Followed at hotels with, "We have a suite available for you at the same price." My favorite is at restaurants and getting a reservation when they are full, or "No need to wait, Mr. Shapiro. Please follow me."

While I loved all of this, a few things happened over time. First, it depressed me to see this foolishness and how stupid and childish people could be. Second, and more importantly, the questions and resulting benefits stopped happening over time. Ah, the fickleness of celebrity focus.

I missed the attention, but most of all, I missed the perks. I found myself saying things like, "Do you know who I am?" or "I'm Robert Shapiro's cousin." The latter was met with blank stares and a facial expression that read, "Who gives a shit?"

The expression fifteen minutes of fame is right on the money.

Do you think people will believe it when I say, "Did you know my second Cousin Taylor changed her name from Shapiro to Swift?"