

The Italian Stallion Would Like to be Your Friend

by Joe Pagetta

Camel Jockey. Big Nose. Freckle Face. Doughboy. Nigger George. Purgatory. Downtown. Those were the names of the kids in my neighborhood. Me, of course, when I wasn't being called a guinea, was called Spaghetti, or Spaghetti-head, or some variation on the spaghetti thing, which, considering my last name, was quite inspired. The same could be said for the creative energy that went into Big Nose and Freckle Face's monikers. None of us made up our names. I would have preferred DiMaggio, or Broadway Joe, or the Italian Stallion, but things didn't work that way. Your name was bestowed upon you at some point -- based on your real name, your ethnicity, your physical appearance or something dumb you once said or did -- and it stuck.

Whether you liked your name or not didn't matter. The most important thing was that you had a name. It meant you existed on the block, were part of its concrete and tar. You belonged. If Camel Jockey threw deep in a game of touch football in the street and called out to "Catch it Spaghetti!!!" you knew you better. When you did, it was thrilling. The names were strange urban terms of endearment. How else do you explain being able to call someone who could have easily kicked all our asses Nigger George? Camel Jockey was no slouch either.

Back then, reality wasn't a concept so much as a locale. Reality was one place when you were on the corner, choosing sides for stickball or wondering if the blacktop was hot enough to carve in a bottle caps board. It was a completely different place in your house -- one usually the inverse of the other. Freckle Face was one of the leaders on the block. Someone you didn't want to fuck with if you could help it. But within the confines of his apartment, it was clear he was scared shit of his parents and hated being home. His entire body language would change when he walked through the front door of his building, as if the vestibule was really a telephone booth with one way in and another way out. Superman always used the door that faced the street. Clark Kent the hallway.

In between these two states, you lived in your head. In my apartment and around my family I was the youngest, the goofiest, the nerdiest and the "good one" trying his best to avoid a house overrun by gamblers, abusers, yellers and thieves. On the street I was the smart one, the fast one, the nice one who got along with everyone and, on one occasion, the one who hit the farthest stickball shot in the history of the neighborhood (three sewer plates!). In my head I was Don Mattingly's younger brother, or Jets wide receiver Wesley Walker if he were white, Italian and lived in the Jersey City heights. I was Huck and Jim's rafting partner, WNEW DJ Scott Muni's sole confidant and Go-Go Belinda Carlisle's soulmate. If I had time, I might have even been St. Francis reincarnated and saved all the animals in the world.

Sometimes, I would close the door to my bedroom and spread my head out a little. I'd listen to "Scotso" on my headphones, tear a picture of Belinda Carlisle out of Hit Parader and tape it to my wall, read Mark Twain or dive for a catch onto the bed. Sometimes, being home wasn't so bad.

If I ventured out to the living room, I'd occasionally join my mother or father (they rarely sat together) watching the news on television. Everything would aggravate my father, and he'd curse at the television in Italian and proclaim how fucked-up America was. "Eh. Can you believe-a dis shitta," he'd say. "Jizzoo Greest. A-only in America. You no see-a people killa each other, stabba, shoota in-a Italy."

"Den go back to It-Lee," my mother would yell from the other room in her high-pitched Jersey City accent. "Who told ya ta move heah? For Christ's sake, awl ya do is friggin' complain. Get back on the god damn plane a-ready."

"You shadduppa woman," he'd retort. "I tinka you do-a real-a good since I come-a to dis country..." and so on and so on until I'd calm them both down. It was a nightly ritual. My father would eventually change the channel to the Italian station, where the news was apparently less perplexing to him. I couldn't say I disagreed with him. Someone riding a scooter down a street; the Pope blessing a crowd of people; a soccer player running around the field. I didn't understand anything being said, but it definitely looked less fucked-up than, say, a guy going ballistic with a handgun on the subway, or a dog getting shot because it wouldn't stop barking.

The Pope seemed real nice.

My father might change the channel, but he knew you couldn't change the world just as easily. The news from Italy might have been less disturbing and violent, but the fact remained that my father had indeed chosen to move here. Maybe that was why he always watched the American news first. Back then, there weren't a lot of choices of where to get your news. He'd watch the local and maybe one of the major network nightly news shows before switching the station. Knowing some really strange shit was going on just a few miles from where he and his family lived must have made him long for his homeland a little, and understandably. This was the world in which he lived and in which his children were growing up. That was his reality.

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From: "MySpace Friend Request"

To: yankeesfan2317@aol.com

Sent: Friday, September 22, 1983 6:01 PM

Subject: The Italian Stallion would like to be added as one of your friends!

Hi,

The Italian Stallion would like to be added to your MySpace friends list.

By accepting the Italian Stallion as your friend, you will be able to send The Italian Stallion personal messages, view The Italian Stallion's photos and blog, and interact with each other's friends and network!

Click the following link to view The Italian Stallion's profile and accept or reject this user as your friend:

The Italian Stallion

"The Jets all the way!"

Male

12 years old

Jersey City, New Jersey

United States

Last Login: 9/22/83

View my: [Pics](#) | [Videos](#)

The Italian Stallion's Interests:

General: I love the Yankees. Don Mattingly is the greatest hitter ever and Dave Righetti is the best pitcher. The Jets are my favorite football team. The Sack Exchange is the best. I like Joe Klecko better than Mark Gastineau, but he's cool too. Richard Todd is great. My favorite is Wesley Walker. He's blind in one eye I think.

I like stickball and am one of the best hitters in my neighborhood. The Heights rule! I like Wiffle ball and am a pretty good pitcher. The only person I can't beat in the neighborhood is Frankie but someday I will. I like playing bottle caps in the street and have a big collection of caps that I made myself with crayon wax. I make them real good and all my friends want me to make theirs too. I'm the fastest runner in the neighborhood. I'm usually the wide receiver when we play football. I like riding my bike and can hop on my back wheel for a long time. I sometimes ride out to the meadowlands to look for frogs but my mother doesn't know.

I'm Italian and Catholic. My grandfather says everyone that's not Italian wants to be Italian, that's why we get so much respect.

I saw Return of the Jedi a few weeks ago and it was awesome!

Music: I like the Go Go's, Queen, Led Zeppelin, Foreigner, The Who, AC/DC, Van Halen

Movies: Return of the Jedi, Star Wars, Empire Strikes Back, King Kong, Rocky III, Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan, Flash Gordon

Heroes: Luke Skywalker, Rocky, Wesley Walker, Don Mattingly, The Pope, Brian May, Eddie Van Halen, Belinda Carlisle's boyfriend

Groups: The Heights, The Sack Exchange, Yankees Rule, God Bless the Queen, Catholicism Rocks

The Italian Stallion's Friend Space:
The Italian Stallion has **43** friends:

Arabian Knight Handsome Man Kiss Me I'm Irish Food Lover
Dark Prince Bruno Sammartino 2 The King of Downtown The Jedi Master

The Italian Stallion's Friends Comments:

Displaying 2 of 23 comments (View All | Add Comment)

Dark Prince: Thanks for the add!
Kiss Me I'm Irish: What's up Spaghetti!

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Belinda Car ...

(END)

Any resemblance in this essay to real e-mail addresses or MySpace monikers is purely coincidental.

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