

My bus stop was only a block and a half away from my house. But on the 3rd of September in 1968 it may as well have been 100 miles.

I was sitting toward the front of the bus. The first seat actually. A very uncool place to sit. But, I knew what was coming, so I didn't care. Survival, at this point, was more important than coolness. The door to the bus opened much too slowly. Didn't the bus driver see the four guys in the back plotting my demise? I jumped off the bus and the four were on my heels. I lived on a dirt road, so while I was running they were trying to find rocks. I don't think I ever ran so fast. Apparently good rocks were hard to find. So by the time they found adequate weaponry, I was long gone. All they could do was make fun of my name. I had lived another day.

My given name was Pieter Kok. I was born in the Netherlands. My name is a common Dutch name. In the States – not so much. For most of my growing-up years, it was pronounced “Peter Cock.” I dreaded the first day of school. The teacher would read through the list of names in the class and I always knew when she had come to my name. There was a pause and then the hesitant pronunciation – then the giggles. I still wince when I think about it. Bus rides home weren't much fun either. Kids with funny names apparently deserve to be chased home with rocks.

I changed my name when I got married to a shortened form of my mother's maiden name. Consider it compassionate decision-making on behalf of my future kids.

Because I had a “different” last name growing up, I was often the brunt of crude jokes. I grew up with a battered soul. I tried desperately to be accepted, but never really fit in. Nothing seemed to work.

Unsettled – Chapter 1

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