



# A Rose By Any Other Name

By: Rosie Fernandez

I've always been a little uncomfortable with my name. Officially, it is Maria Rosario, but everyone knows me as Rosie. Born in Canada in a place where the majority of people I knew had English names, I thought mine sounded w-a-a-y-y too ethnic. I felt that my name was an obvious sign that kept me from completely blending in. Growing up, my brothers would call me "Maria" to make me angry, and it always worked. According to a *Think Baby Names* website, Maria ranks #7 in popularity out of 4276 names for women. Whoever I was, I knew with all my heart, it was not a generic "Maria."

As a playwright, I dedicated my third play to this topic. It was a comedic look at my personal issues with identity called *A Girl Named Maria*. It was produced at Harbourfront Theatre in 2002. The play was a success, and people who knew me were surprised at the struggles I experienced, but none more than my mother, who when she saw herself portrayed on stage, shook her head at me in laughter. "Was I really that bad?" Of course not. But from my character's distorted teenage-angst ridden perspective, anything that smacked of difference was suspect.

After the production of that play, I thought to myself, "There, it's done. I've made peace with my name." But it turns out I wasn't. Far from it.

A few years later, in my work as a producer for CBC Radio, I interviewed Wendy Morton, a poet from Sooke, British Columbia. When I introduced myself she immediately jumped on my name. "Rosie," she smiled through the phone, "I think your name is a poem."

"Oh God no!" I protested and went on to tell her how much I didn't like my name. But undeterred, Wendy told me she was going to write me a poem. And two days later she emailed me this:

## *IF I HAD A NAME LIKE ROSIE FERNANDEZ*

*I would wear gardenias and orchids*

*In my hair.*

*I would buy some hot sauce  
Called "Jump up and kiss me."*

*I would offer it to strangers.*

*I would know how to tango,*

*I would sing anywhere,*

*I would tap dance on sidewalks,*

*I would fall in love insistently,*

*Spend hours in cafes*

*With a broken heart*

*And good coffee.*



Rosie & Wendy at the launch.

Photo Courtesy: Southbrook Vineyards

*Oh, if I had a name like Rosie Fernandez  
I would know it.*



Wine Label Design: Laura Wills for Southbrook Vineyards

Needless to say, I was blown away. It was a wonderful poem. I loved it. But I couldn't understand how she found inspiration in my name. And the poem was eerily correct. It's true that I love to sing and dance, and though I have been known to break into foot-tapping while waiting for an elevator, I honestly didn't think anyone was watching! When I first read the poem over the phone to my parents they asked the same thing I did, "How did she know?" I had spoken to Wendy for about five minutes from across the country. And already she saw right through me.

She posted the poem on her official website and would read it as the finale to her poetry readings. In workshops conducted in Canada and the US, she gave her students an exercise - to write their own poem with the title, *If I had a Name Like Rosie Fernandez*. I was embarrassed when she told me this. How many people would be subjected to writing about my name? What is it that they could see in my name that I could not?

It was around that time that I met the man of my dreams. A tall, blonde, quiet man who happened to be Spanish too. So Spanish in fact, he had only been in the country for a few months before our paths crossed. We clicked immediately and suddenly my whole life flipped over into Spanish. My mother was beyond thrilled when I finally asked for her Spanish recipes. In fact, he teases me now about being too "North American" with my predilection for baseball caps and barbeque sauce.

It felt like the whole universe was conspiring to remind me what that great poet Shakespeare once wrote:

**What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet;**

Then last year, Wendy called me to tell me that the poem was going to be on the label of a bottle of wine. Southbrook Vineyards of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario was creating a limited edition line of wines called *Poetica*, and they had chosen *If I had a Name Like Rosie Fernandez* to grace a bottle of a delicious 2006 Cabernet Merlot. Well, this was just too much! It was released last fall and we were invited to the launch where Wendy read the poem aloud, while we both wore orchids in our hair. People warned my newly-wed husband that I could never change my name *now*. I was stuck with *Rosie Fernandez* forever.

Later, when I opened a bottle to share with my family, my brother stated, "This is the best wine I've ever tasted." And yes, with all my heart, I can completely agree. Nothing tastes as good to me as being Rosie Fernandez.