



MICHAEL JORDAN is a warehouse manager for Demma Fruit Company. The self-proclaimed Chicago Bulls fan said he gets a lot of flak for his name.

15 minutes to life

Famous names add spice to lives of average joes

Funny world we live in when Michael Jordan can't get a pizza delivered anymore.

Jordan, a 24-year-old fruit warehouse manager, would stand a better chance if he ordered a smart remark with a side of cackling laughter.

"They'll crack up because they think I'm kidding," he said. "I'll call back an hour later and they say: 'We didn't think you were serious.' And then they still ask me to pay for the pizza after all of that."

Like many other ordinary people with famous names, Jordan more or less embraces his inexplicable fate because it's all he can really do.

Jordan is a working-class Rodney Dangerfield; a man introduced to others in a luminous and ticklish shadow as if the real MJ had never enjoyed a well-processed apple or orange. No respect.

"When people meet me, usually the first thing they say is: 'You don't look like you play basketball,'" he said.

A social scientist doesn't have to tell you that Jordan's namesake is often feathered and tarred with humorous jabs because of our starry-eyed time of entertainment overdrive.

People just have more respect these days for those who are in the business of basketball instead of watermelon and cantaloupe.

Even though Jordan makes a fraction of his famous counterpart's salary and ends up screening phone calls, he could barely harbor a complaint.

"Mostly it's been interesting for the last 12 years," he said. "Although getting woken up at two or three in the morning and told how I kicked butt that night did get old."

Jordan is not alone in Lincoln, a city that supports many others who have monikers to grin and bear.

In fact, a 10-minute scan through the local phone book creates a list that tires the eyes on its own: Steve Martin, Bill Gates, Bob Barker, Jesse Jackson, James Joyce, Richard Simmons, Jerry Lewis and Jack Frost.

They're all used to catching flak, and their stories are filled with humorous, awkward and annoyingly redundant moments.

However, some are evidently more sensitive about their notorious names than others.

An attempt to contact Richard Simmons by phone ended almost immediately with a hang-up that followed a disgusted and gruff, "Huh."

Obviously the man on the other end was not paying homage to his well-known namesake by wearing a red tank top and striped short-shorts.

However, not all in this inconspicuous social group are as touchy and stonewalling as Simmons.

Steve Martin is a cardiologist for the Nebraska Heart Institute, a husband and a father of two. He said that during his college days he enjoyed dressing up as the "wild and crazy guy" on Halloween.

"Back in the 1970s, I could use it to my advantage," Martin said. "I had the white suit, the hat, the banjo and the whole bit."

Although he's far from being upset, Martin said a lot of the attention he gets now for his name can be tedious.

"I can't believe they think they are the first ones to come up with some of that stuff," he said. "Sometimes it's kind of hard not to look at them like 'Yeah, I've heard that before.'"

Bill Gates is a father of two teen-agers and a conductor for Burlington Northern Railroad. He said when people first learn his name, he often beats them to the punch line.

Gates said he'll notice when a smarty-pants is in the middle of an all-too-familiar smirk; at that moment he'll playfully cut off the oncoming attempt at comedy with "I'm not the rich one."

His coworkers often tease him by putting headline cut-outs referring to the software mogul on the employee bulletin board.

"Then they'll say: 'Hey Gates, what are you working here for when you're the richest man in the world?'" he said.

At least Gates doesn't catch an earful for turning cheeks and noses dark pink.

Jack Frost isn't as lucky. He said people gave him more grief as the weather chills in late fall than any other time of the year.

The brunt of the heckling has always come from children, he said.

"When I was younger and in grade school," he said, "all the kids would say to me: 'Little Jack Frost nipping our nose and painting our windows. Little Jack Frost get lost.'"

Some things don't change. Frost said school-age children in recent years have made phone calls to his house when the weather gets cold.

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STEVE MARTIN
Lincoln cardiologist

The 57-year-old assembly manager is stunningly appropriate for his role with his silver and gray mustache and rooftop-of-snow hair that is parted on the side with a classic sense of 1950s style.

Frost, who could never be mean Old Man Winter, smiled in appreciation when talking about the young pranksters.

"It's all for fun," said Frost, who has 13 grandchildren. "Although it does get a little old when people at work keep giving me a hard time about the weather."

The comments of Jordan, Gates, Martin, Frost and possibly even the silence of Simmons teaches us something: We all must make the most of whatever awkward characteristics we are born with.

Jordan said those who are often and momentarily caught between their name and reality have a decision to make.

"You either accept it or hate it," he said. "I just accept it and deal with it."

"Even if I am a short, white, poor guy who can't jump or play basketball, I guess I'm a yin-yang to the real thing."

Story by Christopher Heine
Photo by Lane Hickenbottom