What's in a Name?

In the Intensive Care Unit

It seems that I have always had a job. I began to deliver newspapers after school at the age of 10 years. The newspaper dealer and his wife were European immigrants and had a store across the street from my home. When I was 10 years old, they seemed to be the oldest people in the world. They worked very hard, making a good life for their 3 sons.

Thirty years later, I became the director of critical care medicine at the local hospital in the same town where I had delivered newspapers. One morning as rounds were beginning in the intensive care unit, a new patient had a cardiopulmonary arrest. He was found to be in ventricular fibrillation, stooped over and unresponsive in his chair. He was gently slid to the floor and was successively defibrillated with 1 or 2 shocks without intubation. I thought I knew this elderly man but was unsure. I asked the staff for his name, and when the nurse told me, I realized it was my former employer, whom I had not seen for more than 35 years.

He was very apprehensive, thrashing about and trying to get up. We were surrounded by the intensive care unit staff, as well as other physician staff and onlookers. I leaned over to him and spoke loudly, "Mr. Friedman, relax. I'm here to help you. It's me, Dr. Oriscello." Instantly, he stopped struggling. He looked up, smiled, and said: "It's not Dr. Oriscello, it's Snooky."

After a momentary delay, there was a round of hilarious laughter, and I was forced to confess. I was Dr. Oriscello to my colleagues, but to my family and friends, I once was and always would be "Snooky."

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