

Wooring Wooo

by Rachel Crosby

She changed her name when she was nine. Not legally of course, but rather by telling everyone who would listen to call her “Wooo”. She had chosen her new name after careful thought and calculation. Knowing what she already did about life and the universe, she felt the new name was near perfect. It fit her in so many ways and really was much more suitable than Jane Chang, the name foisted upon her by Social Services. Jane was just not right for her. And Chang sounded like “clang”. She wanted a name that expressed who she understood herself to be. Plus, there were plenty of Janes in the world and she was, she knew, unique.

From then on, when asked, she would say her name was, “Wooo”.

And people would either say, “Wooo what?” or “How do you spell that?” or “Huh?”

Young Wooo answered all questions with patience and grace. People were most intrigued by the fact that she had designed the name herself. She would then tell them it was an acronym for a series of words that she felt captured her essence.

“What words?”, they would ask.

“Weird – Odd – One – Out,” Wooo would reply.

If they didn’t raise their eyebrows and excuse themselves, but instead wanted details, she would continue, “Weird because I am and because that is what my peers call me at school and because that is how my behavior has been described by adults. Rather than seeing this as an insult, I have realized its truth. Plus, W at the start adds strength to my name’s core meaning, which is the second, third and fourth words.”

To their confusion, she would add, “Wooo sounds a lot like the way the Chinese name ‘Wu’ is pronounced and, given my obvious Asian heritage, it seemed appropriate.” Here she would point to her almond shaped eyes that slanted slightly upward and to her glossy, mostly straight, black hair.

“And the other words, the core?”

“ ‘Odd’ because it reinforces weird. ‘One’ because I consider myself distinctly singular. And ‘Out’ because that is the position I find myself in relative to most of human society.” After a pause, she would add, “The common phrase ‘Odd Man Out’ refers to someone strange or eccentric and standing out from a group, which is what I am and do. I am not a man, so I changed the middle word to One, which has the added quality of being gender neutral.”

At this, people would glance to her clothing, usually a bland combination of baggy pants, sneakers, a plain black, blue or gray oversize t-shirt, and a non-branded baseball cap. They would then nod or smile, indicating they understood something, and the conversation would move on.

Her foster parents, a kindly, white middle-class couple who collected orphans or unwanted kids the way others accumulated cats, made no objection to the new name, though they still filed Social Service reports on Jane Chang, the name that agency gave to the infant taken from the dying body of a still- unidentified Asian woman found beaten near the San Francisco docks.

And Woo created few problems for her foster parents. She was always courteous, did her chores without complaint, and excelled in school. She had skipped two grades by age 10 and was to skip two more before 16. Her IQ, tested when she was nine, was initially in the 170 range, but when they retested her for confirmation, the score jumped another 15 points. And the time after that it went off the charts. The testers asked Woo about the increases and she told them that, like any test, one could learn how to score higher.

Labeled Profoundly Gifted, Woo was thereafter consulted about the direction of her education. Interestingly, she did not focus on only one discipline immediately, so she was not considered a prodigy. She did love science and math, but had an aversion to the social sciences. The creative arts – music, visual art, dance and drama tempted her only insofar as she could do them as an individual, not with a group.

At age 14, she enrolled full-time at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Two years later, having earned some royalties and licensing fees from a few patents and inventions, she changed her name legally. The judge overseeing the change insisted she have two names, a first and a last, so she chose Whois Woo as her full name, for what she considered obvious reasons.

She sprinted through the coursework at Cal Poly and was, after a year, primarily doing independent studies, with the occasional elective. She graduated after her second summer and decided her school-based education was finished. This was not an arrogant or discriminatory decision, but rather a pragmatic one, as Woo knew she could learn more quickly and completely on her own.

She kept determinedly to herself, absorbing knowledge and developing skills at a phenomenal rate. Not surprisingly, she mastered computers and technology with ease, including learning how to hack. It was then inevitable that she would sneak into the San Francisco Police databases and download everything she could about her mother (Jane Doe #7640) and her death.

Woo viewed the photos of her mother's battered body with clinical detachment, magnifying several to see details. Then she read the autopsy and the medical reports, including the one describing the emergency C-section performed in the emergency room as her mother was dying. Woo learned that ligature marks on her mother's body meant she had been held captive. The detectives reasoned that Jane Doe #7640 had escaped, but died from injuries suffered either before or after she got away. After much forensic research, traces of exotic drugs found in her system were identified as those used by experimental geneticists. They otherwise knew nothing about her, except that she had been in her 20s and had also been healthy. Her photo had been circulated nationwide, but her body was never claimed.

The police suspected a Chinese tong rumored to be doing illegal pre-natal genetic work for the wealthy. Young Chinese women who believed they were being brought to the US to become brides were instead held captive and artificially inseminated with sperm that had been genetically tweaked to produce custom children for rich couples. This saved the wife the physical discomfort of pregnancy and also avoided the complications if the infant was not “as specified”. After they gave birth, the young women were relocated to some unknown location, perhaps to be impregnated again.

The tong was investigated for months, but nothing stuck – like an octopus, it had long tentacles that reached into many areas of San Francisco government and society.

Closing the computer files, Woo said to herself. “So, I am a genetic freak. I knew it.” The knowledge that she was a calculated product both offended and affirmed her. She wondered how many others there were and whether she would recognize them.

That her mother had been enslaved and murdered made her angry and sad with an intensity that was new to her. She had always assumed she was above simple human emotions, both good and bad, that her ability to find new and unique ways to deal with problems made such feelings irrelevant. She was shocked at her strong and sudden desire to take revenge on those who had used her mother like an animal. But, after entertaining images of finding the perpetrators of a crime now more than 20 years old and of hurting them as they had hurt her mother, Woo’s cool intellect at last kicked in.

What could she do? The police had conducted a diligent and thorough investigation and had not been able to name any individuals. For Woo, revenge would be very time consuming and probably not lead anywhere. She had never known her mother and she understood that her imaginings were fantasies. No, it would be messy and would involve working with strangers. Woo decided revenge was not her way. Perhaps someday she would reexamine her anger, but only when she could be truly dispassionate.

While Woo avoided most human interaction and avoided any kind of emotional connection, in her late teens she had begun extensive personal experimentation in sexual behavior. Human biological and genetic research was becoming her focus and she realized her body was a perfect test subject. Despite her androgynous style, she was not unattractive. Her olive skin was clear, her facial features regular and her lips full and sensual. She was tall and slender and moved with a feral sleekness. Woo became a bit of sexual predator, picking out partners from a distance, stalking them and igniting interest in both their bodies and their minds.

She found sex relaxing and, reveling in the post-orgasmic lassitude, even found the eventual cuddling and pillow talk amusing. Her lovers – there was only one at any given time – came in all shapes and sizes, but were always known for their intelligence. Beyond that, she had no definite criteria, learning as she did through experimentation that somehow the simple presence of another human when she climaxed made it so much better. Men, women, young, old, overweight and thin all spent time in Woo’s bed. She almost never invited anyone back a second time.

As she grew into young adulthood, Wooo became wealthy without much effort or fanfare. Her intellectual reputation led to her being courted by several biological research firms, all of whom offered salaries in excess of a quarter million dollars. She chose a company near San Francisco that had a strong genetics program and offered to establish her in her own lab. She was happy in her work and her sex life was satisfying.

Then the morning came when she woke, got out of bed, stretched, made a cup of tea, took a sip and suddenly felt a spasm of nausea. She tried to fight the urge and wound up vomiting all over an expensive, hand-made wool rug. She ran to the nearest bathroom to get a towel to wipe up the mess and stopped to look at herself in the full-length mirror. She realized her breasts looked bigger and, when she reached up and touched them they hurt. Abruptly she felt exhausted and slid down the wall to lie on the cool ceramic tile floor.

How could this have happened? She always took precautions, relying on a combination of diaphragm and the morning after pill. Then she remembered the wild night with her last lover, Ri Yang, about three weeks ago. Ri was a man she had pursued at every possible opportunity, but who had without insult sidestepped her overtures. They met at a conference, where he led a workshop on his work in evolutionary genetics and for which he had recently received a MacArthur Fellowship. He was a few years older and very handsome, with longish black hair and unusual amber eyes. But he came from a Chinese Bay Area family of privilege and moved in social circles foreign to Wooo. Despite his polite rebuffs, she persisted, until, when she revealed that she was a product of genetic manipulation, his interest sharpened. The sex had been transcendent and, for the first time, Wooo felt something more than physical satisfaction.

He left after she fell asleep and she awoke feeling dazed and floaty. She realized she was going to be late for a big meeting and rushed out the door thinking she would take the pill later.

But she had forgotten to take it. And now she knew she was pregnant.

Lying on the bathroom floor felt so good, she just gave in and was asleep for another hour. When she awoke she knew she was going to have the baby and keep it. She also realized this was one of the few decisions she had ever made that was not calculated and was not based on her insistence on doing the strange, odd, or even wrong thing. She quieted the doubts by convincing herself this was just another experiment. And it could even be called a genetics experiment, given that she knew who the father was and was confident he, too, had been a product of pre-natal genetic modifications.

She called Ri Yang, intending to tell him she was pregnant, but instead asked him to come over that evening. He did and they again had wonderful sex. Afterward, as they lay in each other's arms, she, with a mischievous smile, asked his opinion about committed relationships, marriage and children.

"I think they are all great," he said.

“Really?”, Wooo said, rising up on one elbow to look into his eyes, thinking how right this was.

“Oh yes! In fact, I am engaged and will be married in three months.”

Wooo stared at Ri for a long moment, then shook her head as if clearing it of sleep. She smiled and said, “How nice for you,” and began kissing him again.

Eight and a half months later, Wooo gave birth to a healthy, bright-eyed girl with whom she fell into deep and unconditional love and cherished for the rest of her life. She never saw Ri Yang again. She did not give the baby a first name, reserving that choice for her daughter, and the birth certificate simply read “Child Wooo.”