

## Last names reflect students' backgrounds

By Natalia Ciesielska

No, it's pronounced, "Che-Shel-Ska!" As a person with a Polish last name, I'm used to the mispronunciation that comes with it. I wait for teachers to read the attendance and I'm used to the pause when they get to my name. My friends and I smile as the teachers mumble through it and then look up and ask me hopefully, "Was that close?" and I just shake my head.

I have gone through most of my school years with teachers and students repeatedly asking me, "So how do you pronounce your last name again?" And when I respond, they request, "Say it again!" I say my name bit by bit as students try to repeat it correctly, with much difficulty.

The attention that comes with being the student with the crazy last name is nice, but sometimes I wish they could get it right, just once. Though it's certainly not intentional, I feel humiliated when my culture is assaulted.

I'm proud of my beautiful ten-letter long last name—a name that I couldn't quite spell on my own until I sat down in third grade and taught it to myself letter by letter.

People with hard-to-spell and hard-to-pronounce last names are hard to forget. Delbar Mamedzade (Muh-Mehd-Zah-Deh), '13, said that the benefits of having a tricky last name are that "it's unique, and you will be picked out of the crowd with a name like that."

Although Mamedzade herself is Azerbaijani, her last name is Persian and means, "Son of." Unfortunately for Mamedzade, "There has never been one person in my life who is not Azeri and who has pronounced my name correctly." But she emphasizes that she is "quite" used to the mispronunciation. However, "mispronouncing

my name is like mispronouncing me," she said.

Richard Nguyen, '13 feels similarly to Mamedzade and also agrees that it may be harder to forget people who have intriguing last names, but he is a little more relaxed about the issue. His last name, Nguyen (Noo-Yin), is pronounced with a silent 'g', although most people don't know it.

Nguyen said that he is also used to the mispronunciation, because he knows it's not a typical or easy Asian name such as Li or Chen which are more common and easier to pronounce. He doesn't get mad at people when they mispronounce his name, "but I might roll my eyes," he said.

When asked if most of his friends can pronounce his last name correctly, "Yes — most of the time," he said. Nguyen explained that usually the people who pronounce his name correctly have heard the name before, and that's why many of his teachers get it right. It's the people who haven't met him before or have never heard the name who mispronounce it.

Mamedzade said, "Your name is who you are, and people can never get it quite right." She recalls how in first grade her teachers and peers had a class just on how to pronounce her name and how to spell it correctly. Although it might be irritating sometimes when people can't pronounce it, she still loves her name.

Nguyen said, just as

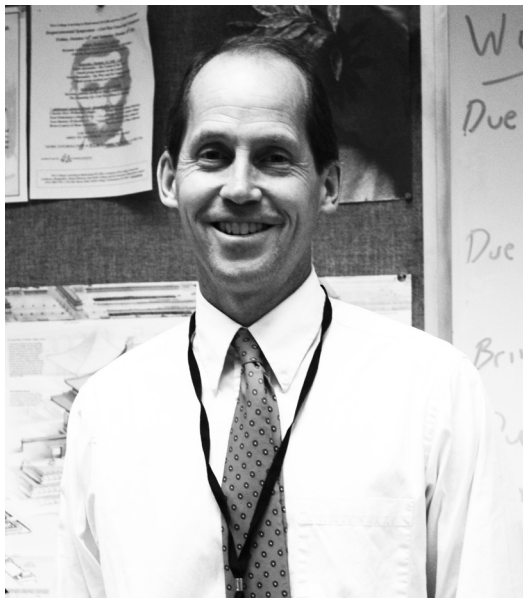


Photo by Rosie Black

**Mr. Gould enjoys making a connection to his students with their last names.**

Mamedzade did, that he wouldn't change his last name; he's happy with it, because "my name is who I am."

ARHS Social Studies teacher Christopher Gould is known for taking special interest in the names of his students. "I like to make an instant connection with people when I meet them, so having some sense of a name's history allows that to happen," he said. "I decided to pay attention to names and I tried to take a mental note or two about them when I began teaching. It has helped my understanding of language and culture while revealing unusual themes about family and parents."

Mr. Gould finds that, "the trickiest names are those that have changed over the years for one reason or another. They are harder to trace and often reflect a family's quick decisions rather than a cultural path."

Although some people may complain about their ridiculously long or hard to pronounce last name, some things can be quite beneficial. It might be a name that is hard to forget and that grabs people's attention. Or it might simply be a name that reflects who you are and your own culture and background.

## Dancing with strangers

*Students explore local Contra scene*

By Talia Levy

The Masonic Lodge is, "almost like the Leaky Cauldron," said Maya Karpovich, '14, referencing a pub from the Harry Potter Series.

My first contra dance, which began at 7:30 on a Wednesday night, immediately wrenched me out of the dull fog that is the middle of the week. Upon entry, an 83-year-old man asked Karpovich to dance the Swedish Polka with him.

The peculiar couple polkaed as the band warmed up. The band for the night consisted of ARHS science teacher Jim Fownes playing the keyboard, his daughter Kathleen Fownes, '12 playing the fiddle, and a guest musician playing the guitar. The regular attendees ranged from the 83-year-old contra dancing expert, to the talented and friendly UMass student Felix Alfonso, who didn't stop smiling and laughing for the entire duration of the dance.

As the first dance commenced, an old-fashioned country tune rang through the open room, and we began to move across the floor, swinging from one partner to the next. The people became familiar, and soon we were all smiling and laughing and repeating the dance sequence dozens of times, the movements becoming ingrained.

Karpovich was introduced to contra dancing by her parents when she was around seven years old. "The only thing the people have in common is that they love to dance, or they want to learn how," said Karpovich.

"You're basically thrown from one person to the next," said Karpovich. "It's chaos, but controlled chaos." She stated that the mood was infectious, and ev-

eryone is always smiling.

The New England form of contra dances are partner dances where you switch partners every song. By the end of a contra it is common to have danced with almost every person in the room.

No special outfit that is required for a contra dance, but many, both men and women, tend to lean towards long lightweight skirts, which look nice during spins and twirls. Many contra dancers dance barefoot, but soft soled shoes also work well.

As the dance started, the caller for the night, a young woman with cherry red hair, approached the small stage and took the microphone off its stand. She told the less experienced dancers to find more experienced partners, and told us the steps that we would use in the first dance.

The older people loved to show the younger people just how much they knew about contra dancing, with advice like, "lean back into it," and, "that spin needs to fit into four counts."

Alfonso says the contra dancing crowd feels almost like a family. People are friendly and accepting, and attendees range from young kids to elderly men and women. The only real connectors between these people are their interests. "Most of the time I find people who are very artistic, very into music," said Alfonso.

At the end of our talk I asked Alfonso if he had learned anything from contra dancing, anything that he could apply to the rest of his life. "I learned how to flow," said Alfonso, "like water." As I said my goodbyes and got ready to leave, I decided that I would most definitely return next Wednesday.