‘A rose by any other name would smell as sweet’ is a common Shakespeare reference from Romeo and Juliet. In the play, Juliet tells Romeo that his family name is not important. Their love is what matters. To many soon-to-be mothers and fathers, names do matter. Young parents spend countless hours trying to find the perfect name for their baby. Many research studies have fed the belief that names can affect children’s futures. A 1948 Harvard study looked at 3,300 graduates and found a connection between their names and their academic performance. Students with more common names were found to have done better in comparison to those with more unique names. Similarly, a study looking at students at the University of Oxford found that people with certain names were much more likely to attend the elite school. After controlling for name popularity, they found that a student named Eleanor was 100 times more likely to get accepted than a student named Jade. Another study has shown that female company CEOs were also more likely to have common names, but male executives were more likely to have unique names. Whether this is a case of people growing into expectations that society places on them or whether it’s a result of people discriminating against others with certain names isn’t clear. Further studies have shown a connection between names and who people marry, and even where they live. Strangely, researchers have found a higher rate of marriage between people with similar sounding names. Another study found a higher rate of people named Virginia living in Virginia, Mildreds living in Milwaukee, Philips in Philadelphia and Jacksons in Jacksonville. Some psychologists think this is a form of egotism where people feel attracted to people and places with similar sounds to their own names. While many parents have sweated over finding the perfect name, New Yorkers Dalton Conley and Natalie Jermijenko have bucked the trend. When their daughter was born two months early, they found themselves still debating between a handful of names that started with the letter E. Not being able to decide, they chose to just name her E until she was old enough to make the decision by herself. At the age of 16, E hasn’t yet felt the need to change. Her brother Yo Xing Heyno Augustus Eisner Alexander Weisner Knuckles has taken his parents up on the offer to change. He chose to add Heyno and Knuckles at the age of just 4. His parents, respecting his wishes, officially changed his name. Dalton Conley says, “I have been called a child abuser online….I don’t think I’ve saddled them with some horrible burden. They like the fact that they have unique names now.”

Creatures of all shapes and sizes have played a pivotal role in humanity’s history. Animals such as dogs and horses have transformed the way we live and work. Partially blind Mohammed Salim Patel has a phobia of dogs. Yet he needs help to navigate his way through his daily activities. The BBC journalist will receive assistance from an eight-month-old miniature horse called Digby. Digby will be serving in a role usually associated with guide-dogs. It’s not the first time another species has worked to help human beings. Oysters are another creature which has been put to work helping humanity. The magical mollusk has an amazing ability to filter out water pollution. On the East Coast of America, they plant many oyster beds for that very reason. And then there are the dolphins which are in the employment of the U.S. Navy. These aquatic mammals are trained to patrol the coast. Their job is to identify, tag, and in some instances, trap enemy divers. These daring dolphins are also trained to sniff out explosives and mines. Rats often get a bad rap for being disease-carrying vermin. Yet in war zones, these remarkable rodents are sometimes used to save lives. Their keen sense of smell allows them to detect buried landmines. And their small feet will not detonate the explosives. In 20 minutes the rats can clear an area of 2,000 square feet. A human-being would need four days to do the same task. Hats off to the rat folks! Famed for its flexibility and fleetness of foot, the ferret has not gone unnoticed by the human eye. The lightning-quick creatures have been used for over 50 years to lay electrical cables and more recently, internet cables in hard-to-reach places. Humans have long relied on the cooperation of other species to keep their place at the head of the table. But will our position as top dogs in the pecking order be one day threatened? Will dogs and cats one day call the shots? In some cases they already have. In 1981, Bosco Ramos defeated two humans to win the mayoral election in the town of Sunol in California. The dog served as mayor until his death in 1994. A statue of Bosco now stands in front of the town’s Post Office. Our feline friends also refuse to be outdone. Stubbs the cat was honorary mayor of Talkeetna in Alaska for 20 years. Rumors say he was ‘purrrfect’ for the position.