The several versions of my name have sometimes caused confusion. People wonder if they refer to the same person, they are unsure of the pronounciation, and there is also the frequent question about any possible connection with the famous Rockefellers. Perhaps the following explanations will help.

Although my full official name is Ralph Tyrrell Rockafellar, I have always been called "Terry." There is a family reason. Tyrrell was the family name of my mother, and it had to be my middle name according to the tradition of my father (whose first name was Ralph). But my mother wanted a son named Terry. They decided that Terry could be regarded as a nickname for Tyrrell, a name from England (where spelling is unpredictable) which has always been pronounced in my family to rhyme with "barrel." In fact this name is often seen used by others with the more accurate spelling Terrell. There is a Tyrell in Shakespeare's Richard III.

Rockafellar is indeed a version of the famous name Rockefeller (which, by the way, has the same pronounciation as Rock-a-fell-ar in four syllables, not three as is imagined sometimes by French and Russian speakers who say "Rockfeller"). In America, it derives from two brothers who came from the Rhineland-Pfaltz region of Germany to the New York area in 1728. There were over 20 ways to spell it at the time of the American Revolutionary War. After one branch of the family became very wealthy in the late 19th century, most other branches decided to change their spelling to match that, but not my branch.

To get from me to a common ancestor of the wealthy Rockefellers requires going back seven generations. The name of the brothers at the time they came to America was Rockenfelder, but the family actually originated in Mediterranean France, where the name was Roquefeuille. They were Huguenots (Protestant Christians) who had to flee to Germany around 1680 to escape Catholic religious persecution under Louis XIV. There are still people living near Montpellier, France, with the name Roquefeuille.