



Bola Ties

Holy Smokes! For decades I have been mispronouncing and misspelling the name of my favorite neckwear. It is “bola,” not “bolo.” In the photo at left, snapped in my prime for a *Los Angeles Times* house ad, I am wearing a bola tie given to me by my daughter Keiko. When I came West from Kentucky in 1969, I tried out cowboy shirts but I looked stupid. Western shirts, hats and boots look best on tall, lean men. But bola ties were just right and became my fashion signature. And they look good even when pulled down two or three inches below an open collar. You can’t say that about pulled-down silk ties. I’ve got a lot of bolas. Yoshi seeks them out on our frequent trips to Japan. She likes wearing them, too. I’ve also got a lot of silk ties, which I almost never wear. Yoshi buys them as well. She wants me to be a gentleman, a hopeless spousal aspiration.

Good friend Morrine Sosnow, a systems analyst at The Times, straightened me out on the pronunciation and spelling of “bola.” She sent me a recent Associated Press story, greatly condensed below.

‘Jackson, I Thought of You When I Saw This on the Wire’

PHOENIX (AP) — If you’ve lived in Arizona long, surely you’ve seen a bola tie somewhere. But hardly anyone wears them anymore. That’s worrisome to the members of the Bola Tie Society of Arizona. After all, the club’s mission is to promote the wearing of the bola tie — a long cord secured around the neck by a distinctive slide — as the state’s official neckwear. The society may be obscure. But it has tenacity. The club has been in existence since 1966. Back then, a small group gathered at the Westward Ho Hotel for the specific purpose of trying to persuade the state to adopt the bola tie as an emblem of Arizona. It took five years and four bills in the Legislature before then-Gov. Jack Williams signed legislation on April 22, 1971, proclaiming the bola

tie as “the official state neckwear.” In its heyday in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Bola Tie Society was 400 bola tie wearers strong. Now membership has dwindled to a faithful few. To be a member in good standing, you must pronounce the word “bola” — it’s often mistakenly called “bolo.” Arizona Bola Tie Week hasn’t been held since 1983. When asked if she knew that Arizona had an official state neckwear, and if so, what might it be, Gov. Janet Napolitano paused, then exclaimed “bola tie” during the unannounced pop quiz. Correct pronunciation and everything. Next question: Would she consider reinstituting Arizona Bola Tie Week? “I don’t know,” Napolitano retorted. “Are there any strings attached?”