

A Symbol of Love; Past, Present, & Future

Gift at Birth

“Kristy Schwiderson,” try saying that five times fast. You may think my parents were cruel, but that was not the name I was given at birth; rather, I chose that as my name. Regardless of the difficulty with which it is spoken, that name has the same amount of, if not more, symbolism and love poured into it as the one on my birth certificate, Kristy Amber Howe.

I was destined to have those initials, KAH, from the moment my parents learned of my existence. My two older sisters have the names Kimberly Ann and Kasey Alleane, and my parents chose to follow the trend. The first names Kristen and Kristine were a couple of their choices, but Kristy won and the name chosen to be paired with it was Amber. Obviously, my parents were very fond of patterns, though not always consciously. According to my mom, when they chose that specific spelling for my name they did not even mean for my sisters and me to also have the same last letter in our names, it just sort of happened.

The decision to give their kids the same initials was not thoroughly thought out by my parents. Growing up, we could never decide whose toy was really whose. At the age of 6, I picked up a baseball mitt, noticed the initials KAH, and thought, *This must be mine!* Little did I know, it had previously been owned by both sisters (too bad they could not prove it). To this day, my sisters and I pull old pictures and crafts out of boxes my mom has saved over the years and have no clue whose they really are. However, even after these experiences, my sister Kasey decided to take my parents’ idea one step farther.

Often, people will name their first son after the father. Kasey and her husband did just that, but they also gave their next two boys the same initials as their father. As a result, James Edward, Jordan Edwin, and Jonah Edmond cannot use initials without the risk of their father commandeering their toys, on the premise that the object has his name on it. The family was also blessed with a baby girl, Kendra Ann. My immediate family has grown used to this trend, and it

seemed my sister Kim was even going to follow suit when her first son gained the suffix of not junior, but rather the third. Her second son broke the trend, but even so, the number of people with the same initials in my family is much higher than normal. Because of this, initials appear too common in my eyes; they do not have any special meaning or even the ability to be used as a way to identify someone.

Though my initials are not unique, my first name comes far closer. I could count the number of people I have met with the first name “K-r-i-s-t-y” on one hand. Most girls with this name spell it with the “C-h” beginning or end it with an “i” or “i-e.” I consider myself fortunate to have not been given one of these spellings, because I have always been what you would call a “tomboy.” The curly letter c and the letter i, often made with a circle or heart as a dot, appear far more feminine than the letters k and y, which are a series of straight lines and 45 degree angles.

However, these opinions may be a result of my applying the character traits I have to my name. I obviously think more mathematically; art and creativity are not my strong points. I also use logic when analyzing, unlike the stereotypical woman who often uses their emotions rather than their heads to make decisions. I often do not like thinking of myself as feminine due to this common connotation, among others. These traits are what give my name the strong, independent and, unfortunately, often stubborn connotation in my mind and the mind of anyone that knows me well.

My first name, regardless of spelling, also has a very personal meaning that was not assigned by me. After researching the meaning of my name in middle school, I found that because Kristy is a variant of the female form of “Christian” their meanings are the same: Christ-follower. Being a Christian, I am reminded, whenever I speak my name, of the call I have, to follow the example my Savior gave 2000 years ago.

The Moment of a Lifetime

After nineteen years of being Kristy Amber Howe, I married a man named Terry Schwiderson, and, partly because I am more traditional in thought and partly because of my faith, I took his last name. Shortly before the wedding, my best friend began to address me as “K-Howe” paused, then sorrowfully continued, “I won’t be able to call you that anymore!” Another friend had the realization at the wedding reception when she saw me and said enthusiastically, “Kristy Howe, you’re married!” Her face slowly turned to sadness when it dawned on her what she had just said.

My entire name had become as much a characteristic of me as my red hair and blue eyes. The name “Howe” was considered so humorous by my fellow students that its use rivaled that of Kristy. Though Howe is as English as afternoon tea, many friends would greet me with their hand raised, open palm towards me, and say a gruff, “Howe,” imitating the greeting people associate with Native Americans. These same friends, being very intelligent, realized that Howe is pronounced like a word that often begins questions. They would chuckle as they gave the greeting, “Kristy, *Howe* ya doin’?” or the favorite, “Kristy Howe are you,” which could be used in multiple scenarios. Soon, my last name was attached to my first in such a way that friends never thought they would have to separate it.

So why did I force them to do this? Many people would state that I did not have to take my husband’s last name; many women today do not. In fact, many argue that it is not right to have the woman take the man’s name because it is traditionally a sign of inferiority. I do feel both partners should treat each other as equals, because “the two become one” as husband and wife, but I also agree with the rest of the biblical perspective, “The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church...” This doesn’t mean that a husband can be tyrannical; on the contrary, he must love his wife and is expected to do what is best for her, because that is what Christ does for the church. It was out of honor and respect for Terry as both husband and friend that I accepted his last name for my own.

Even deeper than the feelings of honor and respect is the feeling of being united as one. We each still have our own personalities and faults, but in this special relationship we are to act as one. There are to be no barriers between us due to the trust and honesty we share with each other; having the same last name symbolizes this special bond we now share. Every time I see my new name written on a page, I am reminded of the love and commitment my husband and I vowed to keep, “til death do us part.”

Converging Family Histories

The vast differences in families, both past and present, became far clearer to me as I began to learn more about both my biological family and the family I married into. My husband’s side does not have a lot of information about their ancestry and family history, mostly due to the fact that his grandfather on the Schwiderson side passed away. This left little family with any knowledge of more than a couple generations back. Meanwhile, the Howes take great pride in their family history, because many have been blessed with long lives, like my grandmother, age 97 and counting, who has had the opportunity to meet her great-great grandchildren.

Taking pride in their history has led some of the Howe descendants to research and record much of the family genealogy. We know that the Howes originally came from England, but the exact date of our arrival has been uncertain even though one of my second cousins has found ancestors as far back as ten generations before me. She even found that my great-great-great grandfather’s grandfather was a Reverend; the faith he held must have been passed on, because my grandparents and father grew up in Christian households, as I did.

The earliest Howe ancestor documented so far had the name Joseph, was born in Marlborough, Massachusetts, February 1696, and, some years later, married a woman named Ruth, her last name still unknown. Oddly, Joseph and his wife died the same year, 1775, and I

was hoping to find a possible cause of their deaths while searching for records involving the town of Marlborough. Instead, I found information about his possible military service.

According to a book printed in 1862 (Hudson 8), a Joseph Howe from Marlborough was a captain in the French and Indian War. However, it may or may not have been him, considering the fact that Joseph was a common first name and there were many Howe families in this town. The same book also has an example of a letter which uses the name "Joseph Howe, Jr." for the constable of Marlborough, but the author does not indicate whether this was a historical or fictitious letter.

Ten generations is too far to go back without extensive research, and even then the results could be questionable. However, dating back to the late 1800s is fairly simple, thanks to the US Census now being searchable through web sites such as Beta Family Search (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 8). I found that the Howe family I descend from used to be farmers in Illinois. My great-great-great-grandfather was a farmer in Iuka. The Howe family did not move completely out of the country until my dad was 11 years old; he still has memories of the farm his father, my grandfather, had bought in Iuka. I was taken there this past year, but sadly the old homestead my dad and grandparents lived in burned down years ago.

Schwiderson is less common than Howe, but researching it seemed impossible. Yet somehow, my husband stumbled across something we both found very surprising. A woman named Sarah Gura posted a Schwiderson genealogy online (8), and he quickly found the names of his grandfather, grandmother, and their children. Mrs. Gura is obviously related to the same line of Schwidersons that I am. My husband had previously been told that in the past his surname had been even longer, so it was no surprise when the man the family traced back to had the name Bernhard Schwidessen. We finally had confirmation that the last name had been changed, most likely after coming to America.

But where had this Bernhard lived? His date of birth is unknown, but his son William was born in the 1830s. Armed with this information, I searched the 1870 US Census in hopes that the Schwidessens had already made it to America. The search revealed a William Schwidessen (one s had already been dropped from the name) living in Iowa with his wife and children. He and his family were from Prussia and had immigrated to the United States less than 6 years prior, when their youngest son had been born. William was only a laborer with no recorded real estate and only a hundred dollars to his name, but all three children were attending school. The only person in the family who could not yet read and write was the youngest, Frank Schwidessen, who would become my husband's great-great-grandfather.

Tracing back my ancestry at least five generations, with confidence, for both my maiden and married names revealed some interesting contrasts between the two families. The Howes are of English descent, while the Schwidersons are from Prussia. The Howe family came to find a new start in America at least one hundred years before the start of the Revolution, while the early Schwiderson's came to America in the 1860s, almost one hundred years after the Revolution. At the time of the 1870 US Census my great-great-great grandfather was a farmer, meanwhile Terry's was just getting started in the US as a laborer. But, in spite of these differences, both only had one hundred dollars in assets, no documented real estate, and lived only one state away from each other.

The few commonalities seem to be outweighed by the differences, yet these two families, from opposite sides of Europe, came to live in the same part of Michigan five generations later. Each individual ancestor and their choices affected the chances of this coming to pass; one more early death in the family, one less move, or one less marriage is all it would have taken to keep my husband and me from having the opportunity to spend a lifetime together. Likewise, if my husband and I were to move across the country or change careers, this would change the future for any children we raise, and it could be for either better or worse. In truth, each individual, no

matter how insignificant they call themselves, is creating the history of future generations with his or her life. For my generation, I found a history of hard work and integrity, but what kind of history will the future find?

Works Cited

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