

"If I had been called Sabrina or Ann, she said"

By Marge Piercy

I'm the only poet with the name.
Can you imagine a prima ballerina named
Marge? Marge Curie, Nobel Prize winner.
Empress Marge. My lady Marge? Rhymes with
large/charge/barge. Workingclass?
Definitely. Any attempt to doll it up
(Mar-gee? Mar-gette? Margelina?
Margarine?) makes it worse. Name
like an oilcan, like a bedroom
slipper, like a box of baking soda,
useful, plain; impossible for foreigners,
from French to Japanese, to pronounce.
My own grandmother called me what
could only be rendered in English
as Mousie. O my parents, what
you did unto me, forever. Even
my tombstone will look like a cartoon.

"Untitled"

By Bakari Chavanu

I changed my name to Bakari Chavanu six years ago and my mom still won't pronounce it. The mail she sends is still addressed to Johnnie McCowan. I was named after my father. When I brought up the subject with her of changing my name, she said my father would turn over in his grave, and "besides," she said, "how could you be my son if you changed your name?"

I knew she was responding emotionally to what I decided to do. I knew and respected also that she was, of course, the giver of my life and my first identity, but how do I make her understand the larger picture? That the lives of people are more than their families and their birth names, that my identity was taken from me, from her, from my father, from my sister, from countless generations of my people enslaved for the benefit of others? How do I make her understand what it means for a kidnapped people to reclaim their identity? How do I help her understand the need for people of African descent to reclaim themselves?

"Sam Austin"

By Sam Austin

My name is an all encompassing, fully endowed, drench soaked, burnt and charred entity, glazed over with a dark molasses finish. And then given a strong strawberry smoke. It's a sweet song that every time you hear it sounds better than the last

If spoken correctly, it can get you the sweetest of love or the harshest of hate. Sam to Sammy to Samuel. I've heard those plus some. A man from the streets once told me it's not what you do, but how good you look doing it. And he's halfway right. If you flip my name just right, it gives the feel of an old 1930's gangster Dillinger, or a modern day Casanova. It's the way the girl down the street tosses in an extra long am into my name. "Hey Saaaaaam." Or the way that pretty girl with the sensual accent throws that low and long aaah into my name.

Mary

Mary was a hand-me-down
from Grandma.

I was
the "Little Mary"
on holiday packages.
Merry Christmas:

Mary, mother of God,
who is a strong woman
in a male dominated religion.
Me,
a lone girl,
in a world of testosterone.
Because of her,
it means sorrow and grief —
I am very sad about this.

"How does your garden grow?" they often ask.
With colorful fruit like the pictures
I attempt to paint,
and beautiful flowers like the poems
I try to write.

They had
three little kids in a row,
and the middle one's me.

Mary, Mary, not always contrary.

"Sekou"

I have a very unusual name. Not as unusual as I used to think because just last year I came face to face with another Sekou. He didn't look much like me, and we probably had very little in common, but when I stood in front of him and shook his hand, I felt we had some kind of secret bond. I could tell he felt the same way.

One day I asked my mom about my name, "How did you come to name me Sekou?"

"Well," she said, "I used to work with convicts, tutoring them, and one day as I walked across the prison courtyard, I heard someone yell, 'Hey, Sekou!' I thought to myself, 'Wow. What great name.' And I remembered it."

I didn't know how I felt being named after some inmate, but I've always been thankful for having it. I couldn't imagine hearing my name and wondering if they were talking to me or the other guy with the same name. I wouldn't like walking into a little gift shop and seeing my name carved onto a key chain. I've heard that somewhere in Northern Africa my name is quite common.

My name has a special meaning. Sekou Shaka, my first and middle name, together mean learned warrior. That's the way I'd like to see myself: Fighting the battle of life with the weapon of knowledge.

My Name From *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse--which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female-but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild, horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it.

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name Magdalena--which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least- -can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza. would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

Jorje

The first day of school is always tough. New teachers and new classmates can make anyone a little nervous. As the teacher begins calling roll, I brace myself for the inevitable. And then it happens, a chill goes up my spine as the teacher calls out, "Is Jorje Chica present?" What's wrong with that, you may ask? Well, if you heard the brutal mispronunciation, you would understand. I find myself saying, "It's just George, with a G." In elementary school, giggles and laughter would follow. This laughter hurt me inside. At that moment, I would wish that I had a normal name. As school went on, my name would take the brunt of much teasing. "George Porgy pudding pie," the other kids would say. And, of course, there's the famous "George of the Jungle, watch out for that tree!"

It's been said that people like to hear their names. Personally, I think it depends on who is saying it. In school and in public, I play it safe by using George. Only at home or with my Hispanic friends am I comfortable with Jorje. Why is this so? I shouldn't have to do this, but hearing my name distorted, accidentally or purposely, hurts inside. I shield myself by settling with the Anglo "George." However, I do like to hear my true name. When my mother or grandmother calls me, my name sounds beautiful. I feel pride for my name, as well as my heritage. However, when someone really screws up on the pronunciation it sounds like a needle being dragged across a record. When this happens, I retreat into my American persona.

I am proud of my name. Either way you say it, it has a long and great history. Jorje comes from the Greek name George. The name George originated from the Georgics, a poetic treatise on agriculture by the Roman poet Virgil. Thus comes the meaning "farmer." In Biblical times, a Roman soldier named George converted a Lybian village to Christianity, after slaying a dragon which victimized the town. He was made a saint, and in the 14th century he was made patron saint of England. This proclamation led to seven British monarchs named George. The name George is also important on American soil. Our first president, George Washington, has been a favorite of Americans for the last 200 years. His popularity will no doubt, ensure the longevity of the name George in the United States.

My name may have a long and celebrated history, but it has more personal meaning to me. It represents a new beginning and a positive future. I'm the first in my family to have the name Jorje, so it's a fresh and unused name. I don't have to live up to the achievements of someone else, just because we share a name. My name is also unique. It differs in spelling from the Spanish Jorje. Another positive aspect of my name is the reason my mother chose it. In Cuba, my parents' homeland, my mother had a friend named Jorje. He had certain qualities that she wanted in her children. She said to me, "He was very noble, and was a good friend." She went on to say, "The name Jorje brings to mind great men and grand achievements. I guess had great expectations for you."

What use do names have for us? Names perform the public task of separating us from others. But, a number could do the same thing. There has to be more to a name than just a means of differentiating us from our fellow man. Names have to fulfill personal needs, too. My name is a part of who I am. Jorje is a reflection of my heritage. My name influences how I look at myself, and is a part of what I want to be, my own person. My name helps me keep one foot in the past, and the other in the future. By having a Hispanic name, I connect myself with my ancestry, while moving forward in life. Names may have literal meanings, and great histories. But, the personal definitions and histories are usually more interesting, and always more special. I hope to carve out my own personal history, one just as worthy as that of the famous Georges the world has seen.

Jorje Chica

From Borron, B. (1996). My name, my self: Using name to explore identity. In C.B. Olson (Ed.), *Reading, thinking and writing about multicultural literature* (pp. 596-615). Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman. Reprinted with permission.



i am kwakkoli

By Bisco Hill

A few months after my tenth birthday, my dad began to talk to me about receiving my Indian name. He said this had to be done in a ceremony by a medicine person or an elder in our tribe. My older sister, Megan, had received her Indian name, Maquequay (Woman of the Woods), when she was only three. At that time my family lived on the Oneida Reservation just outside of Green Bay, Wisconsin. My grandfather was alive then, and he asked a medicine man friend of his to name her and made the arrangements. I always thought my sister's Indian name was so perfect for her. I was told the medicine man meditated for three days before the name came to him.

My family moved from Wisconsin to Colorado three years before I was born. My grandfather died when I was only two and a half, and both of these major events delayed my Naming Ceremony. My dad talked about naming me for several years, but it was hard to pull it together long distance. Because of the sacred and traditional aspects of this, it is not like anyone can just call and order a Naming Ceremony, like ordering a pizza! As it happened, my uncle Rick became the chairman of the tribe when I was ten, and he was able to talk to the right people and select the time. The right time was the summer solstice, near June 20, and it was also the time of the annual Strawberry Ceremony.

There are many traditions connected to the Naming Ceremony. For one thing, there are a limited number of names among the Oneida people. When a person

dies, their name returns to the "pool" of available names and can be given to someone else. The medicine person decides whose energy fits which available name, or a person may ask for a certain name. In my case, I was named after my grandfather through my Anglo name, but I also wanted to take his Indian name which was available and had been waiting for me for seven years. I felt that if I had both of his names, it made a full circle and I was wholly connected to him and to my family. The name that was his is "Kwakkoli," or "Whip-poorwill" in English.

A few days before the ceremony in June of 1990, my parents and I flew to the Oneida Reservation. A friend of my dad made me a beautiful "ribbon shirt." It was a shade of deep turquoise stitched with pink, purple and green ribbons. My family and I thought it was very special and that I looked good in it.

Two days before I was given my Indian name, my uncle Rick, my dad and I drove around and looked at certain landmarks on the Oneida Reservation. I saw where my dad had grown up. There is a statue in the middle of the reservation of my great-grandmother, Dr. Rosa Minoka Hill. She was the first female Indian physician in the United States.

Oneida is very small and different from any other city I have known. It has only one school, several baseball fields, a small convent, a store, a post office, two churches, three cemeteries, a tribal building, and about twenty houses. My dad and his brother knew the names of everyone. They knew who was married to whom and who everyone's grandparents and parents were. They remembered all kinds of funny stories and laughed a lot. I thought it must be nice to live in a small town where everyone knows everyone for all those years. It is also a place where everyone is connected by common heritage, customs and beliefs.

The night before the ceremony, I got very nervous.

Bisco Hill attends the eighth grade at Southern Hills Middle School in his hometown of Boulder, Colorado. He wrote this in the seventh grade. An avid sports fan, he loves to play football and baseball, with basketball being his favorite. In his school district, he was awarded the Boulder Optimist Citizenship Award for scholarship and citizenship. This past summer he was named an American Indian Scholar and awarded a camp scholarship for summer enrichment.

My stomach hurt as if I had the flu, but I think it was just butterflies. I finally fell asleep at about 3:30 in the morning. I don't know what I was afraid of—maybe just not knowing what was going to happen or what I would have to do. My mother could not come to the ceremony because only tribal members were allowed. We had just learned about this and I was upset that she couldn't come. She was disappointed, but told me to remember the details and tell her about it later.

When it was time to go, we thanked the Faithkeeper and the Chief and gave them gifts. The gift that I received, and will be mine for life, is a very special name that runs through my family and connects me to my grandfather, whom I barely knew. My name also reminds me of the many traditions and beliefs that are part of my heritage and about which I have a lot to learn and understand. I look forward to visiting my reservation as I grow up. ★

On our short drive to the reservation, my stomach felt like it was going to explode! I had to at least get those butterflies flying in formation! I was pretty anxious, but really excited about getting my Indian name.

I wanted my grandfather's Indian name, to be wholly connected to him.

We arrived at the longhouse a little early and I sat with my dad and one of his friends while other people finished setting up tables and chairs.

The Faithkeeper named the others and we all sat down as the Chief said a few more prayers. After about an hour, we all danced to Indian songs and drum music. It was fun, but became tiring after a while.

285 Indian girls shed 'unwanted' names

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MUMBAI, India (AP) — More than 200 Indian girls whose names mean "unwanted" in Hindi chose new names Saturday for a fresh start in life.

A central Indian district held a renaming ceremony it hopes will give the girls new dignity and help fight widespread gender discrimination that gives India a skewed gender ratio, with far more boys than girls.

The 285 girls — wearing their best outfits with barrettes, braids and bows in their hair — lined up to receive certificates with their new names along with small flower bouquets from Satara district officials in Maharashtra state.

In shedding names like "Nakusa" or "Nakushi," which mean "unwanted" in Hindi, some girls chose to name themselves after Bollywood stars like "Aishwarya" or Hindu goddesses like "Savitri." Some just wanted traditional names with happier meanings, such as "Vaishali" or "prosperous, beautiful and good."

"Now in school, my classmates and friends will be calling me this new name, and that makes me very happy," said a 15-year-old girl who had been named Nakusa by a grandfather disappointed by her birth. She chose the new name "Ashmita," which means "very tough" or "rock hard" in Hindi.

The plight of girls in India came to a focus as this year's census showed the nation's sex ratio had dropped over the past decade from 927 girls for every 1,000 boys under the age of 6 to 914.

Maharashtra state's ratio is well below that, with just 883 girls for every 1,000 boys — down from 913 a decade ago. In the district of Satara, it is even lower at 881.

Such ratios are the result of abortions of female fetuses, or just sheer neglect leading to a higher death rate among girls. The problem is so serious in India that hospitals are legally banned from revealing the gender of an unborn fetus in order to prevent sex-selective abortions, though evidence suggests the information gets out.

Part of the reason Indians favor sons is the enormous expense of marrying off girls. Families often go into debt arranging marriages and paying for elaborate dowries. A boy, on the other hand, will one day bring home a bride and dowry. Hindu custom also dictates that only sons can light their parents' funeral pyres.

Over the years, and again now, there are efforts to fight the discrimination.

"Nakusa is a very negative name as far as female discrimination is concerned," said Satara district health officer Dr. Bhagwan Pawar, who came up with the idea for the renaming ceremony.

Other incentives, announced by federal or state governments every few years, include free meals and free education to encourage people to take care of their girls, and even cash bonuses for families with girls who graduate from high school.

Activists say the name "unwanted," which is widely given to girls across India, gives them the feeling they are worthless and a burden.

"When the child thinks about it, you know, 'My mom, my dad, and all my relatives and society call me unwanted,' she will feel very bad and depressed," said Sudha Kankaria of the organization Save the Girl Child. But giving these girls new names is only the beginning, she said.

"We have to take care of the girls, their education and even financial and social security, or again the cycle is going to repeat."

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Woman named Isis wants public to change how it refers to terrorist group



Miami-area resident Isis Martinez.

The Miami Herald

7 hr ago | By Kathryn Varn of The Miami Herald

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MIAMI — Let's play a game of word association.

The word?

Isis.

The association?

Terror or violence or maybe fear instilled by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, a terrorist group commonly referred to as ISIS.

But one Miami-area woman is trying to remind people that it's a woman's name.

Isis Martinez, 38, started a petition on thepetitionsite.com urging the media to refer to the group as ISIL, or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, to purge her and other women with her first name of the negative connotation.

"Whenever I was at a public place or a restaurant, there would be TV monitors with tickers at the bottom: 'ISIS warns,' 'ISIS kills,' 'ISIS threat,'" she said. "Every word after my name is incredibly negative."

Until the terror group surfaced, Isis was best known as an ancient Egyptian goddess in mythology.

The petition has gained about 1,800 signatures since Martinez started it in late August,

many of them in the last week since it sparked attention from local and national media outlets. On Saturday, in the latest horror, the group beheaded a British aid worker, following the murders of two American journalists.

Martinez and other supporters say ISIS is an inaccurate name and that the media should follow President Barack Obama's lead in calling the group ISIL.

But the question isn't one of accuracy as much as transliteration from Arabic to English, said South Miami-based foreign policy analyst Marsha Cohen.

"Everything about the title is somewhat negotiable," said Cohen, who also taught as an adjunct lecturer at Florida International University for a decade. "It's dependent upon who is doing the speaking and who is doing the listening."

It's tough to translate the group's Arabic name — al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi Iraq wa al-Sham. Dawla is state, Islamiya is Islamic and Iraq is Iraq. Sham refers to Syria and its bordering countries (other than Iraq). In that case, ISIL would be the more accurate translation.

But, in calling it that, "you're legitimizing this organization's claim not only to Iraq and Syria, but to the whole Middle East," Cohen said.

Her suggestion? Call it DIIS, an acronym formed from the Arabic name. However, she admitted that most media outlets wouldn't make the switch from English.

Cohen also pointed out that many organizations share in Martinez's struggle.

The Daily Telegraph wrote about the struggle of a nonprofit organization called the Institute for Science and International Security that refers to itself as ISIS. And the Palm Beach Post reported that developers changed the name of a new condominium going up in West Palm Beach from ISIS Downtown to 3 Thirty Three Downtown.

Many have suggested that Martinez go by her middle name, Teresa. But to her, changing her name would mean letting the terrorists win.

"I can't rebrand myself," she said. "This is my heritage."

She's been able to reach out through social media to many others named Isis who have signed the petition in support. But others view the campaign as selfish.

"Too bad Lady, it is not about YOU, it is about the description of the terrorist k-llers," commented a user on a WSVN.com story. "When they are gone, your problem will be gone. It will continue to be called ISIS."

Despite the bad feedback, Martinez is optimistic that her petition could spark a change.

Until then, she's prepared to endure the pitying looks when she introduces herself to strangers, the shocked reactions when someone calls out to her and the double take from the Starbucks barista writing her name on a coffee cup.