

mommy daze

A girl named John

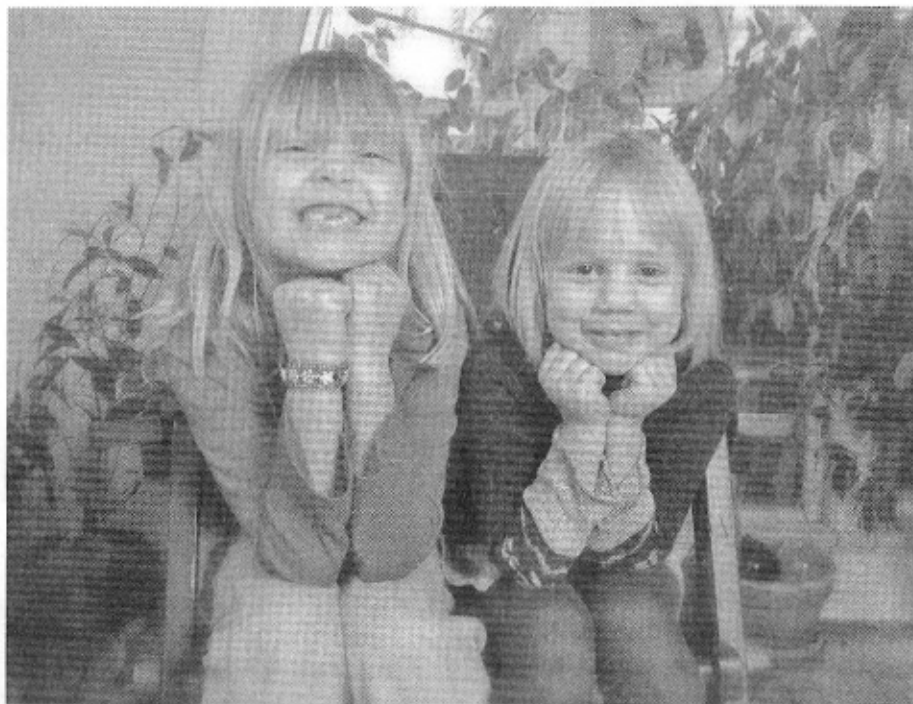
By Kim Zachman

A friend of mine recently became a grandmother of two baby girls. Proud and delighted in her new status, she was eager to show pictures of the little darlings. However, when I asked her what their names were, she became visibly embarrassed and answered quietly, "Hayden and Ezra."

I tried to comfort her. "Don't be embarrassed, Carol. Your grandmother was probably shocked at your name. In her generation, Carol was spelled Carroll, and it was a man's name."

Naming girls after boys has been happening for a long time. In the 1880s, my great-grandfather was named Beverly. In the 1980s, my college female roommate was a Beverly. At some point, Beverly became exclusively a feminine name. My own name, Kim, used to be a male name, and so did Evelyn, Florence, Maude, Alice, Robin, Kelly, Crystal and Lucy. How does that happen?

Leslie Alan Dunkling explains one gender switch in his book, *Guinness Book of Names* (Guinness Superlatives). "Shirley originated from the Old English expression 'the sheer lea' which means 'the bright clearing.'" Eventually, Shirley became a surname to describe someone from that place and it gradually underwent the common transition from surname



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The problem with unisex names is that once they go to "she", they don't go back to "he." The pool of names for boys is shrinking rapidly. As soon as a hot, cool new boy's name starts making the top 10 list, the girls start using it. It's only a couple of genera-

According to name records of the Raleigh Colony established in 1587, of the 99 men in the colony, 48 of them were named John, Thomas or William. Looking at the top 10 names for New York City for the years 1898, 1928, 1948 and 1964, you will find John, William, and Joseph. Those names were still in the top 20 names for the United States in the year 2003.

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spurred him on to be ultra macho. It would only take one Linda winning the Heisman trophy for that trend to take off.

To help the parents of boys, the inherently male names should be reserved for the boys. The most obvious of these is the "-son" names, as in Harrison, Carson and Addison. It doesn't take an advanced degree in lexicography to figure out the origin of these names. Harrison means "male child of Harris." It's become a real fad in some parts of the country to dub baby girls with a -son name.

I imagine a pretty, beribboned little girl of 10 who is curious about her name. Eagerly, little Bateson searches a baby-name website. Up pops, "Bateson: male child of Bates." She bursts into tears and yells at her mother, "Why did you name me after a son of a Bates?"

When my older daughter started kindergarten last fall, she brought home a roster of her class. Besides my daughter's name, there were only four names that I could place as boy or girl. I guessed at the others. I picked Taylor, Selby and Ansley as girls and got two out of three correct. I was fairly confident that Gibson, Jordan and Lawson were boys, but I was wrong on two counts. This is just a kindergarten roster. What happens when they're teenagers

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What are parents of boys going to do for originality, without branding their son with a name that may turn girly before he dies like Leslie Nielson or Carroll O'Conner? One solution is to fight fire with fire and name the boys traditionally female names. Remember Johnny Cash's song, "A Boy Named Sue"? That kid had a rough time with his name, but it

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Not quite Sue, but close ...



These girls' names used to be boys' names:
Alexis, Robin, Jamie, Kim, Lynn, Kelly, Dana, Jan, Alice, Anne, Crystal, Emma, Esme, Evelyn, Florence, Jocelyn, Lucy, Maude, Ashley, Lindsay, Courtney

Source:

Beyond Jennifer & Jason, Madison & Montana (St. Martin's Griffin) by Linda Rosenkrantz and Pamela Redmond Satran

Having trouble choosing the perfect name?

These websites can help:

- babynames.com
- babyzone.com
- ssa.gov/OACT/babynames — The Social Security Administration's lists of most popular names
- popularbabynames.com