

Kaitlin Thompson

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What's in a Name?

Growing up I didn't really like my name. Kaitlin Eileen Thompson didn't have the ring I was looking for. I detested that 2-2-2 syllable pattern that seemingly runs in my family, and the never-ending pattern of N's at the end of each name. Besides the awkward sound, there were too many Kaitlins in my school. Of course, all of us spelled them differently, but one year I had two other Kaitlin/Katelyn/Kaitlyns in my class. There were so many of us in the school that I stopped responding to someone yelling out, "Kaitlin!" in the hall because there was a one in twenty or so chance they were talking to me. The mass amount of Kaitlins makes sense though seeing as in 1989 Kaitlin (even my spelling) was the hundredth top female name ("Kaitlin"). To differentiate myself, I tried shortening my name for a time to just Kate, but soon discovered that Kate rhymed with far too many things. A boy I often played tag with at recess learned that as well. For many recesses I suffered through the endless chanting of "Kate and Nate wanna go on a date". However, I learned quickly that Kate also rhymed with castrate and decapitate, and so did Nate. Needless to say, Nate stopped rhyming once I started. After dealing with the rhyming battles of my first name, I never even dared to mention my middle name, lest someone belt out a loud and out of tune version of "Come On Eileen." Through school, the name Kate stuck for a while, Kaitlin poked its head out now and then, and Katie even made an appearance or two, but as I've grown up I've come to realize that my own opinion of the drum beat syllables or the popularity of it doesn't matter so much. My name isn't just a few words. My name represents my heritage,

gives tribute to a family member, and makes me unique to the family.

When my parents found out that they were having a daughter, they started choosing names. Like most other parents, they picked up a baby name book and started flipping pages. My mom looked for some Czech names and my dad looked for Irish. In the end my mom came up empty handed, not wanting to name me Kateřina or Eliška, they settled on the good old Irish name Kaitlin. Since my dad's side of the family comes from a long string of Murphys, it is only appropriate that I have an Irish name. Kaitlin is the Irish version of Catherine (“Meaning of Kaitlin”) and Eileen, apparently also a version of Helen, is Gaelic name as well (“Eileen- Origin and Meaning”). Although I know very little about my Irish heritage, I have always been especially fond of it. For example, I remember going to the grand Murphy family reunion in '97 to meet all of my aunts and uncles and hundreds of cousins. I barely knew any of them, but having an Irish name, I still felt some sort of connection; I knew I fit. Then there was Uncle Johnny's funeral about three years ago. I had never been and probably will never be at a funeral as fun and uplifting as his. Irish funerals are full of family, good memories, and Irish bell flowers. Nobody cries over the death of a family member; instead, they celebrate their life. Because of my fond memories of the Irish side of my family, I used to dream of someday visiting Ireland and finding a whole clan of Murphys to whom I may be related. I wanted to visit the old castles and kiss the blarney stone like my grandma Thompson (now Hardy and formerly Murphy) had done. It didn't matter if I didn't like my name that much. I was Irish, and I was proud. Besides the strong line my name draws to my heritage, my name also pays homage to a family member.

My middle name is a tribute to my Aunt Susan Eileen, who I never met. Susan Eileen should have been my Grandma Thompson's third child and second daughter. Unfortunately,

Susan was born three months premature. Doctors had estimated her due date around August, but Susan Eileen surprised everyone and was delivered on April 1, 1957. Sadly, in those early decades doctors still thought that premature babies needed to be isolated from all contact, including their mothers. Susan Eileen passed away only days later on April 6, 1957 (Hardy). Thirty-two years later when my mom was pregnant with me, my parents deliberated back and forth on what my middle name should be. They had already chosen Kaitlin as my first name, a good strong Irish name, and wanted something that sounded tasteful to go with it. They went through all the baby books and finally decided to go ahead and name me after my Aunt Susan Eileen to carry on her name since she was never allowed to (Thompson). Even though my name carries on the memory of Susan Eileen, Kaitlin Eileen is still unique to the family.

Nobody else in all of the family I have met is named Kaitlin. Even if one is hiding out there somewhere, I doubt she spells it the same. Since I do not share my name with anyone else, I am allowed to create my own persona. Technically speaking, Kaitlin is supposed to mean “pure” ("Meaning of Kaitlin") but that's all I have behind my name. I don't have a wacky aunt Kaitlin to associate with, or a noble grandmother Katie to live up to. I am free to create the definition for this name. If I have to follow the dictionary meaning of Kaitlin, I have to define it not as purity alone, but purity of heart. When I think of purity, I think of religion, and I'm not pure in that sense. Yet, with purity of heart I feel comfortable. I have always tried to be as caring and honest as possible to all of those around me. I've been stabbed in the back a few times, but I won't allow myself to be bitter, and I won't stop helping people out who've gotten into a tight spot. Besides purity, I want to expand on the definition of my name. To me, Kaitlin means creativity. For instance, I have always loved to draw and build things. Even at a young age, my grandpa Moudry and I would sit at his kitchen table for hours creating vivid monsters and

stories. In addition to creativity, my name also means adventure. Although the adventurous aspect has gotten me into trouble a few times, like when my friends and I got a car stuck in four feet of mud, I still like to keep an open mind and try new things. Like they say, "It's better to regret something you did than something you didn't do." So far with my name I have defined Kaitlin to mean pure, creative, and adventurous, but the defining of me never has to stop. As long as I am the eldest Kaitlin in the family I'm setting the trends for this name. In this sense my name has to suit me because it is me.

When I look back on the disfavor that I held for my name, I feel shame. A name can't be liked or disliked purely on how it sounds coming out or how it feels on the tongue. My name may not have had the best ring to it, but it has history. It held up my Irish heritage and connected me to one of the biggest parts of my family. With my name, I carry on Aunt Susan Eileen's memory. Beyond all the past history that my name represents, my name allows me to create my own future history.

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