

The True Name of the Beast, Part 2

Sherilyn Connelly

2004

According to the 1990 census, Sherilyn is the two thousand and sixty-ninth most popular female first name in the USA. That means there are two thousand and sixty-eight names which people are more likely to have heard of than mine. I think that explains a lot.

Humans are lazy, so names longer than one syllable tend to be abbreviated. In fact, it only needs one syllable; my brother used to call me "J", short for "Jeff." I guess, in his mind, it was a timesaver.

The most popular abbreviation for "Sherilyn" is "Sheri." So far, nobody has needed to be told not to call me "Sher." My personal favorite is from my girlfriend Maddy's two year-old nephew, who reduced it to "Nin-nin." That's better than most adults.

Most adults, for some reason, can't pronounce it. Americans who learned English as their first language can generally say both "Sharon" and "Marilyn." And, yet, the vast majority cannot say "Sherilyn." "Shirley" and the aforementioned "Sharon" are usually their first attempts before settling into "Sheryl Lynn," which makes me sound like a truck stop waitress. Not that there's anything wrong with being a truck stop waitress, but give me a few years, okay?

Maddy's mother in Kansas can't say my name correctly to save her life. She insists it's a Midwestern thing. Maddy's sister in Iowa disagrees.

When I pointed out to their mother that my name rhymes with "Marilyn," she started chanting the two words like a mantra: "Marilyn-Sherilyn-Marilyn-Sherilyn-Marilyn-Sherilyn." That was worse than her not getting it right in the first place.

Given the number of phonemes in the North American dialect, there many ways to mispronounce it. There are at least as many ways to misspell it.

The most common is inverting the vowels: S-H-E-R-Y-L-I-N. All the proper letters are present, suggesting that the person had at least some clue. It's a simple typo, really, a junior jumble. The other most popular is equally simple: S-H-E-R-I-L-Y-N-N, doubling the final consonant. Again, it's simple enough, and understandable.

The mystery is why it happens so damn much. When I officially changed my name in October 2001, I sent copies of my new, properly-spelled license and social security card to my credit card company, utilities, student loan agencies and the like. Each entity was provided three (3) different examples, on paper, of how to spell my name. Each entity got it wrong.

So I had to call and explain what had happened, while trying to ignore how they insisted on calling me "sir." Usually they stuck to their script, which was bad enough because it meant relentless sales pitches. Occasionally, however, one would get brave. The phone company employee with the thick southern accent realized that he might be talking to a real live Jerry Springer guest and exercised his Normal Person's Right To Inquiry, asking if I was going to...you know...go "all the way" with the change. I've always wondered if he had his hand down his pants, hoping nobody walked by his cubicle.

The credit card company, after getting my first name wrong, sent a new card with my first name corrected and my *last* name spelled wrong. That was a refreshing change of pace.

The unemployment office had me listed as "J R Connelly." After I informed them my new name, the next check was made out to "Connelly S." It took me a while to realize that while changing my first name, they inverted it with my last.

I told myself it was just bad timing, or maybe further proof that the capitalist system has so degraded that office workers put even less effort into their jobs than the zombies at the 40th and Taraval Walgreen's. (There are three situations in which I probably not only do heroin, I would actively seek it out. If I was in prison; if I was at war; if I was working at Walgreen's.)

Then I opened an account at a video store in West Portal. As I was leaving, I noticed my name was misspelled on the computer receipt. I went back in and asked the clerk to fix it. I handed him my license (again) and spelled my name aloud, slowly and clearly. After two or three attempts he was unable to type it correctly. I gave up while I could still resist the temptation to jump over the counter and type it myself.

That was when the truth hit me. Nobody can pronounce or spell my name correctly because *they aren't meant to*. There's never been a Sherilyn Connelly before, and there isn't meant to be one now. It is not a name for humans. It is a harbinger of the End Times, rejected by the human brain out of self-preservation. It is The True Name of the Beast.

At least I know what to tell my father if he ever asks again why I didn't pick a "J" name.



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