

The True Name of the Beast, Part 1

Sherilyn Connelly

2004

One of the great ironies of my life is that my parents were hoping I'd be born female. After three sons and a miscarriage, they decided to try once more to give my mother a daughter. No such luck. Not at first, anyway.

I began transitioning in 1998, at the age of twenty-five. When I finally came out to my father two years later, he asked a single question. He said he'd have others, but to this day, he's never asked anything else. The question was: "Why couldn't you have chosen a J name?"

It's like this. His name is Jim. His firstborn son was named Jim. Then he got married, and his next son was also named Jim. (Being a good Catholic, he doesn't talk about that child born out of wedlock.) His next three sons were named Joe, John and, finally, Jeff. Are you sensing a pattern? My reply was to the point: "Because I like 'Sherilyn.' I don't care about the initial." And that was that.

Long before I came to terms with my gender, I hated my name. Hated hated *hated* it. "Jeff." Ugh. Worse was the full version: "Jeffrey." How undignified is that? It's hard enough to get anyone to treat you with respect when you're very young, but when you're a five year-old named called Jeffrey, forget it. No wonder they kept giving me those damned children's menus. As I grew up, adults often said I was mature for my age. Well, *yeah*. I had to compensate for that name. On the bright side, at least it wasn't from the Bible.

My mother tells me that if I'd been born a girl, my name would be "Jennifer." Nice enough...until 1986, when the movie *Labyrinth* came out. Then I would have been the *other* Jennifer Connelly, a plain version of the beautiful actress.

That would have been way too much for my fragile thirteen year-old's self-esteem to handle. It hurt anyway, since she was closer to how I felt I should look than what I saw in the mirror.

She's why I never seriously considered calling myself Jennifer. Besides, it sounds like an obvious feminization of "Jeff," a name I disliked in the first place.

(One day when I was fourteen, my mother was trying to convince me to get a haircut. (It's a battle she didn't stop waging until I came out to her a decade later.) Finally, she pulled out the heavy artillery: "Your hair's getting so long, people are going to start calling you Jefferina!" The dig at my masculinity didn't work, but I was impressed that she'd found a way to make "Jeffrey" sound even more stupid.)

My first name is inspired by the actress Sherilyn Fenn from *Twin Peaks*; my girlfriend at the time was fascinated by her. I started using the name online in the early nineties, and it stuck, especially when it became obvious that I would someday be using it in the real world. I liked both how it sounded and how it looked, details which were sorely lacking in my birth name.

I briefly considered changing my last name to "Manson," a reference to Shirley Manson from the band Garbage. It would have slimmed my name down to a manageable five syllables, but I knew most people would take one look at me and conclude I was a Marilyn Manson fan gone too far. In any event, "Sherilyn Connelly" is a perfectly fine name, and there's no point in making things more complicated.

The desire to keep things simple is why I don't have a middle name. Something *e/se* I've always hated about my birth name was all the potential variations: Jeff or Jeffrey, with the full middle name or just the initial or not at all, and so on. My sense of self was already amorphous, and receiving mail for six dozen people did

not help. Who's to say "Jeff Connelly" and "Jeffrey R. Connelly" are even the same person?

"Sherilyn Connelly," however, is simple and bulletproof.

Or so I thought.



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