



The Power of a Name

...what you choose to put on your child's birth certificate is less important than what you choose to call them each and every day of their life.

I remember when I was pregnant with my first child. Along with all the books about pregnancy, fetal development, what to eat, what *not* to eat and what to do when your feet swell up to the size of small piglets, came the “name books.” Approximately five million of these books lined the shelves at Barnes & Nobles, and waddling down the aisles I was thrilled to realize that somewhere hidden within was the “perfect” name for my child. I remember feeling so powerful, and somewhat overwhelmed, at the idea.

Names can resonate with dignity and decorum. Or they can torment you forever. In high-school I knew a Candi Box and a Paige Turner and a Harry Baer. I often wondered if those unfortunate instances were the result of too many corks popped in the delivery room, or if the little rascals had caused Mom so much pain she wanted to dish it back. To avoid any potential revenge-seeking behavior, I decided to name my babies in advance. I wanted to choose something that would be both cool and chic. Powerful and classic. Popular but meaningful. Something to encapsulate everything I dreamed of for my child. It was daunting, and I began to understand why some people opt for a family name.

Except when the family name is Orel Leonard Quinton Hershiser.

I still can't comprehend why Orel III would think it was a good idea to name his son Orel Leonard Quinton Hershiser, IV. But he did, and the future World Series MVP endured years of teasing for that decision. Orel IV was called “Little O” until his twenties. He was a scrawny guy with a concave chest full of ribs you could count, and he was never the best pitcher on his team. During his first two years of college he didn't even pitch enough innings to earn a varsity letter.

When the Dodgers called him up in 1983, “Little O” started his major league career pitching with all the ferociousness of a librarian. It made Dodger's manager Tommy Lasorda crazy. And in May 1984, after

watching Orel give up a two-out double with two men on base, Lasorda was furious, because Orel was pitching like a wimp. “You don't believe in yourself!” Lasorda shouted at him. “If I could get a heart surgeon in here, I'd have him open my chest and take out my heart. Then I'd have him open your chest, take out your heart, and tell him to give you mine. With my heart and your arm, you'd be in the Hall of Fame!”

Lasorda continued exhorting Orel to be more aggressive—to be a bulldog out there. Then, with a stroke of genius, he announced, “That's going to be your new name: Bulldog. It's the ninth inning, we bring you in and you're facing Dale Murphy. He hears, ‘Now pitching, Orel Hershiser.’ He can't wait till you get in there. But if he hears, ‘Now pitching, Bulldog Hershiser,’ he's thinking, Oh, no, who's that? Murphy's going to be scared to death!” Orel was bestowed with the power of a new name.

Two days after becoming “Bulldog,” Orel was walking to the mound as a relief pitcher. He was anxious, unsure, with a tender elbow and an arm thrashed from overuse. But as he took the mound, he heard Lasorda shouting, “C'mon, Bulldog! You can do it, Bulldog!” And at that moment he decided it was true. He was a bulldog. A true major leaguer who had what it took to win. He started to believe it because his leader had claimed it. Four years later he was named the World Series MVP. “Little O” who didn't even earn a varsity letter became the Bulldog of the major leagues.

The truth is, what you choose to put on your child's birth certificate is less important than what you choose to call them each and every day of their life. And the best names you can bestow upon them are the names the Father gives them. *Beloved. Desired. Chosen. Redeemed.* When they claim the truth of his name, it's not just a World Series that will be won. It is a world that will be won over. □

—Susan Reedy