

Sacred Stories of Transgender Names

Compiled by Sr. Luisa Derouen

Ben

Ben is a busy property investor and musician, who loves hiking and nature, and has been happily married for 18 years with fifteen-year-old twins and two dogs.

When I was trying to decide on my new name, I went about it much like parents who are trying to pick a name for their soon-to-arrive baby. For years, I had called my longed-for male self "Dan". But when I went to an FTM conference, in the early days of exploring transitioning, I used that name for the weekend and, surprisingly, it did not feel like home to me. So I began looking for a new name, in books and online lists. There were many that I liked, but none carried any significance for me and so did not "say" who I felt I was becoming.

I don't remember how I finally came to realize that Bennett was a natural choice that had been waiting for me to realize it the whole time. Bennett was the surname of someone I had loved and admired my whole childhood. Louise Bennett, affectionately known to all as "Miss Lou", was a famous Jamaican poet, actress, singer, comedienne and guardian of Jamaican culture. I watched her on stage every year in the traditional Jamaican Christmas "Pantomime", an annual lighthearted play that wove into the story funny commentaries about the year's events and Jamaican politics, and always had a happy ending. I watched her every Saturday afternoon on television, where she led her own show for children called "Ring Ding". She would sing Jamaican folk songs, recite her own poetry in Jamaican Patois, tell Jamaican folk stories about Anancy, a mischievous spider, celebrate children's birthdays, and relate children's news from around the island. It was a wonderful celebration and acknowledgment of the richness and value of Jamaican culture. She, more than any other figures I can remember, taught me to be proud of our culture. She gave it validity. She would often appear in performances dressed in a traditional Jamaican "bandana" dress and head-wrap. She was not afraid to be who she was, in spite of not matching stereotypical Western ideas of what a beautiful woman should look like. She just WAS, and she was a great example to me that it was okay to be, and be confident in yourself as you truly are. In this way, I feel she impacted who I am today. Although I never met her, I still feel a great depth of love and gratitude for her, and I am proud to carry her name.

Christine

Christine Monica Zuba (she/her) is a facilitator of her Catholic parish's LGBTQ+ ministry, participates in similar ministries in NJ, PA, and NYC, and is on the board of directors of Fortunate Families, Inc.

I remember a conversation with my mother when I was a child. I was sitting on a swing in our backyard when my mother mentioned that had I been born a girl, my name would have been Christine. At that time, probably very early 1960's, I "knew" there was no way, no words, to explain to Mom that I really was a girl. That short chat has stayed with me my entire life. Years later I shared this memory with my mother, 87 years old at the time I transitioned, as the reason I chose the name Christine.

I have always loved my middle name Monica. It was my mother's middle name, but unfortunately, a name which she disliked. It was also the name of a college friend, who was one of the sweetest, kindest, most beautiful persons I had ever met. Aside from my beautiful mother, she was the only Monica I knew at that point. For some time I debated about Christine or Monica as my first name, but ultimately, I knew I was Christine.

Corbin

Corbin is a faith-filled Catholic, passionate social worker, and lover of all of God's creation.

Once I became aware that I didn't connect with my birth name, I chose to start going by a family name, Corbin. To my surprise, as people began to use this name, I felt something I'd never felt before. My heart

would light up and I felt a deep connection. Up until that point I didn't know what it felt like to be called by my name, a name that resonated throughout my whole being. From deep within I could feel the truly alive response, "Here I am!" To add even more meaning, my mom and I selected my new middle name together—a name that represents a connection we both share. Now when I see or hear my name, I feel seen and connected. I can proudly be fully present and engaged with the life around me.

Colt

Dr. Colt St. Amand is a family medicine resident physician, licensed psychologist, and physician with expertise in clinical work, research and training in the health of transgender people of all ages.

In 2006, at my first transgender support group meeting, as everyone went around and introduced themselves, I chose the name Colt to try on for myself. After hearing people call me Colt that evening, the name stuck. Two years later, On Palm Sunday, I received an incredible blessing, a confirmation that my gender journey was the right path for me. In the Gospel reading, Jesus instructs disciples to untether a colt, "Untie it and bring it, 'The Lord has need of it.'" This was such a powerful moment in my spiritual journey. I realized then that the name I thought I had chosen for myself had really been chosen for me. Now untethered and living in the fullness of my truth, I was the colt, liberated by Jesus' request AND He has need of me, BOTH as a transgender person AND as a child of God. He needs me to carry Him with me everywhere I go.

Daniel

Daniel is a psychiatric nurse practitioner in the Southwest who began his transition in middle age.

I don't recall ever consciously choosing the name "Daniel". I have always been aware of it, in the background, for decades before I stopped repressing the thoughts that would one day lead to my transition once I allowed them to take root. Choosing a name had not been on my list when I decided I was going to go for it. It was only in a group of transgender men, my first such discussion group, that when describing myself, I included "Daniel" as my name.

I was more simply aware of the name than having consciously chosen it, at least to my recollection now. I do recall from my childhood a classmate named "Daniel". This must have been the first Daniel I ever knew. I observed him from a distance. What fascinated me about him was his utter and seemingly complete self-possession. He expertly drew comic book superheroes. He knew what he liked, what he was good at doing, and happily spent his time honing his skills. His self-knowledge and comfort with himself were mysterious to me. These are qualities that I had scant familiarity with. The important people in my life told me who I was, not vice versa, and I was still struggling to fit into the boxes I was assigned while still trying out parts of myself that came naturally. I was usually reprimanded for the latter, though, when caught. If I was tasked with describing the meaning of my name to myself in a single term, it would be self-possession, including finding the courage to continue to explore and develop parts of myself not directly related to transition, per se, but impossible to have pursued without transitioning. Therefore, my name also represents to me a constant gentle push to continue the work of growth.

When I came out to my parents, and they heard my name, they immediately recalled keeping the name "Daniel" in reserve for my eldest brother. They vacillated between "Daniel" and "Ian" for months before finally settling on another name entirely. In keeping with my sense that I did not choose "Daniel" myself, it turns out my mother named me several years before I was born.

Dylan

Dylan lives in New York and is a writer currently finishing his memoir.

I chose to legally change my first, middle, and last names. My choice of names reflects the man I am. My first name, Dylan means "flash of lightning" and "rebirth." My middle name means "man" and my last name means "proud." I really like my last name and it is shared by two male members of my family. My middle name is in memory of my beloved dog who passed away a few years ago. My realization of my

gender identity as male came like a bolt of lightning and served as a rebirth for me. To put it another way, I am now a proud man who was reborn like a flash of lightning.

Negative experiences come when people who claim to love me continue to deadname me (call me by my birth name) because it makes *them* comfortable. They say it was my name given at birth and at my baptism, paying no mind to my feelings and the intense hurt it causes every time I hear it. They tell me my chosen name is *not* my name and that it's not who I am, as if I have no autonomy or say in the matter. I know myself better than anyone else does. I know who I am. I am a proud transgender man who has truly been reborn.

Erin

Erin Russ is a former Army Infantry officer, corporate trainer, pastor, community leader, and teacher who has been an advocate for the transgender community in social and religious circles for over twenty years.

The significance of my name, of names in general, has always been important to me.

In many cultures, names are given as an initial basing, or prophetic declaration, of the child's future, as hoped for, or sometimes discerned by the agents or a spiritual leader. In some of these cultures, like the indigenous peoples of North America, some Asian peoples, and Middle Eastern peoples, names could change as a person grew to and through adulthood. Examples of this in North American Indigenous cultures include Crazy Horse, whose name was given at age 12 and Sitting Bull at age 14.

Judeo-Christian tradition also has examples of this. God changed Abram's name to Abraham, Sari's to Sarah, and Jacob was renamed Israel after wrestling with God. In the New Testament, we see Simon being renamed Peter and Saul becoming Paul.

In my own family, names were chosen for their historical significance. For my children we gave them names with both a historical and spiritual significance and that we felt would speak blessing for them throughout their lives.

This may be the only time I reveal my birth name, but I was originally named Edward Alexander which means Guardian and Defender of men. Interestingly, this is still one aspect of who I am and have been all my adult life.

My current name, Erin Marie is just as much who I am, who I am becoming and in many ways who I have been. Erin comes from the Gaelic name for Ireland - Eire, or Eireann that traces back to the Greek **εἰρήνην** (eirenen) found in John 14:27, and refers to the peace of God, while Marie means sea of sorrow or waters of bitterness.

So to me my name means Peace of God found through navigating a sea of sorrow. Taken together, my former name and my chosen name pretty much describe who I am and who I am called to be--a protector and defender who is totally at peace even in the midst of sorrow and bitterness. Sometimes this is an encouragement that I am in the right place and sometimes it is a reminder that I have a duty to my fellow human beings to stand for God's grace and mercy as they guide and triumph over human justice.

Greer

Greer is a queer, white, transfemme person who has deep affection for the poetry of Mary Oliver, the music of Sergei Rachmaninoff, and their two goofy cats.

Growing up, the root of my birth name meant "the watchful one", a description I've always identified with. As a shy child, a sense of gentle watchfulness oriented me to the world, noticing what others missed and lending a hand where I saw it was needed. When I began navigating my gender identity, my birth name started to grate on me because people made assumptions about my gender that were wrong. It became untenable and I knew I had to change my name. I grappled with this realization and the

feelings of sadness, confusion, and loss as I contemplated what it meant to leave behind a name that I cherished. How could I abandon the name my parents baptized me with?

I began exploring how to change my name while retaining my sense of identity. I stumbled across a different version of my birth name that held on to this sense of watchfulness, Greer. Relief washed over me. Here was a name that honored both my own sense of gender and identity, while also honoring the choice my parents made when picking a birth name for me. When I began using the name Greer, it felt like I was able to take a deep breath that I had not understood I was holding in.

Today, hearing people use the name Greer for me no longer feels surprising or startling, it is simply my name that fits as it always has. To be called by name is a gift I am grateful for.

Hilary

Hilary, the founder of TransCatholic.org, has been advocating for transgender people since before her transition 27 years ago.

For the time I was participating in support groups, and as I changed my name by usage rather than court order, I used a slight change to my male name to be my female first name. That was legal in California, and back in the 90's court orders were difficult and expensive. But a trans mentor at the time recommended that I choose a name that was unique for use once I transitioned to separate my full time life as a woman from the days of questioning and from my past as a man. She recommended that it be something that had meaning for me, perhaps a woman that inspired me and practically one that would fit the time period of my original birth as back in the 90's we were concerned about passing as a woman. I chose Hilary in part because it means laughter and perhaps the most recognizable personal trait is my laughter. But also Hilary Clinton was our First Lady back then and about my age and I had known many Hillary's back in my childhood. But also I was changing my name by usage at a time when my drivers license had to have an M on it rather than a F so I needed a name that could be a male name too. It's considered a very feminine name in the US (and I am very feminine) but in the UK it can be a male name so it helped me sneak my way through the identity paperwork of the day.

Like choosing a Saints name at confirmation it is an affirmation of the change in your life. Hilary is a Saint and I did officially choose it for my saint's name when I was baptized and confirmed as an adult catholic in 2003.

Jamison

Jamison Green, Ph.D., M.F.A., is an author, a retired corporate publications manager, a former president of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, a legal scholar and policy consultant, and a husband and father.

I chose my name, Jamison, when I was 14, about twenty-five years before I transitioned. At that time (around 1962), I had no idea if I would ever be able to have the male body I knew I belonged in. I had struggled with the lovely girl's name my parents had carefully bestowed on me for most of my short life up to that point. I had gone through a series of nicknames, which began when I was around four. My favorite of those was Chip, but I had also been called Squirt, Thor, Packy, Green, and Bill by my friends at school. I was an adopted child, and my parents had wanted a girl. I always felt a bit guilty that I could not give them the kind of girl they wanted.

The name Jamison came from two sources. One was the many cement trucks with the big rolling barrels that we could see around town from the Rhodes & Jamison Cement Company. I like construction, and I liked the sound of Rhodes & Jamison. It felt very literary, which was also something I liked. The first and middle names my parents had given me started with a C and an S, and I like the writing of C.S. Lewis, and I wanted to become a writer, so I thought it would be really cool to add another name to my own C.S., and Jamison had just the right ring to it. I had also seen a "Man from UNCLE" episode on television that featured a villain who was never seen but was called Jamison. It was clear that the heroes of the series were both intimidated by and respectful of this mysterious Jamison. Pronouns were never used to describe Jamison, and that was to enable the surprise when it was revealed at the end that Jamison was

a woman! How could a woman be so powerful and command so much respect? Well, it was the early 1960's. My response to that "reveal" was to realize that I didn't know whether I was going to grow up to be a woman or a man, but whatever I turned out to be, I wanted to be respected. C.S. Jamison Green was born, and I started going to Jamie for short because that seemed cute, safe, and androgynous.

When I transitioned in the late 1980's, I changed what the C and the S stood for, and I started using James for short, but I don't mind being called Jamie now and then. To me, being able to choose my name was crucially important because, apart from your skin and your clothes and how you comport yourself, your name is something that telegraphs something about you to others. In my mind, Jamison said, "strong, graceful, solid, respectful, and respectable; this is a person who thinks". The C and the S now stand for my adoptive parental great-grandfather, Charles A. Green, and the S stands for Stuart and my adoptive mother's Scottish heritage, that she loved deeply, I am now very comfortable with my name; it gives me peace and represents me well.

Joe

Joe lives in Akron, Ohio with his two cats Ksusha and Tatiana, is employed as a histological technician, and is in his 27th season of singing baritone with the Akron Symphony Chorus.

I was originally Jo Ellen Gardner. I was named for my paternal grandma: Her name was Eva Ellen, and her maiden name was Joy. My parents took the Joy and made that Jo, and then kept Ellen as the middle name.

Everyone called me Jo Ellen when I was a kid. I was 11 and in the 5th grade before I finally learned that Ellen was my middle name. After I learned that, I dropped the Ellen and insisted that everyone call me Jo as "Jo Ellen" sounded too girly for me. Of course, the folks at church and anyone else my parents knew kept calling me Jo Ellen because that's what my parents told them.

One time when I was in college, my parents were picking me up at the dorm. They used the phone in the dorm vestibule to call in. One of my dorm mates answered, and my mom asked "Is Jo Ellen there?" My dorm mate replied "Who?" and my mom remembered that I went by Jo and asked "Is Jo there?" Then my dorm mate knew who she was referring to.

When I transitioned, I took the Jo and made it Joseph, although you may still call me Joe. I changed the Ellen to Allan; both names worked out beautifully! I didn't see any reason to change my name drastically; the change as mentioned above has been and is fine for me, plus it keeps the intent of honoring my grandma.

One time fairly early in my transition, my dad had captioned some photos of me as Joe Allen on the computer. I told him that I had changed both Es to As in my middle name. I did so to make a "complete" change, and also to follow the "KISS" principle (Keep It Simple, Stupid!) as it made sense to change both and to use only one vowel. I also don't go by Joe Allan; I prefer Joe or Joseph.

That's my name change in the proverbial nutshell. You may use my full name in whatever publication you're working on.

Maureen

Maureen Rasmussen is a practicing Catholic, child of God, CEO of an architectural sales company, enjoying her free time exercising and cheering on University of Notre Dame's sports teams.

As transgender people, we struggle so much to understand our identities. After hard fought acceptance of our true selves, we go through the arduous process of coming out to our family and friends. A critical element in the process is selecting a name. I wanted a name that connected me to my family lineage. I believed that honoring the family tradition/connection would offer clarity and peace. And it has ... thanks be to God!

It was imperative that my authentic name reflect my Irish and Danish heritage. I asked my mother years ago if she had another girl in the family, what would she name her? Her answer was Maureen. This name was perfect! My name, just like my birth name, was given to me by my parents. I cannot tell you how reassuring it was to know my parents named their transgender daughter too! Further, God calls every one of His children by name. He has blessed me with the name, Maureen.

To be clear, I have also experienced the antithesis of positive name recognition. On three separate occasions at the Dulles Airport TSA checkpoint, I was required to state my dead/legal name out loud while clearly presenting as female. I was forced to “out myself” in front of other passengers. This humiliating, demoralizing treatment caused very real emotional trauma. Where was the compassion and mercy?? I dread flying out of Dulles to this day, even with my Clear status.

Some friends and family would like to call me by the nickname, Mo. I despise this name. After a long journey of self-acceptance and God’s unconditional love, the last thing I wanted was a male nickname. My point is that our name, our identity, is fundamental to who God has called us to be.

Maxx

Maxx is a visual artist of many media and a fine woodworker.

Choosing and changing my name to Maxx was crucial to my mental health. The name my parents gave me at birth never fit me. It felt like someone else’s name. As a child it felt punishing, shaming, and held me back. As a child I felt forced to be something that I was not, a girl. Changing my name to Maxx in my thirties was a powerful change. It made me feel I had the power in life to be myself for the first time. Not being allowed to be myself during my growing up years held me back in every area of my life. This was very unfair. The world expected the same milestones from me as others but it was not possible not being allowed to be myself while being forced to be someone I was not. I chose Maxx because I wanted a Jewish name. I chose the double XX’s because I have two X chromosomes.

Michael R.

Michael is a retired senior public servant in provincial and municipal governments in Ontario, Canada, and a mother and grandmother who was ordained an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Toronto, Canada, in 2011 at age 68, shortly after they realized they were transgender.

My birth name is Margaret Fleming and my trans name is Michael. I knew that there was something different about me by the time I was three or four years old, but I didn’t understand that I was F2M transgender until I reached 67 years! Before I went to sleep as a little child, every night I used to pray in secret “Please God let me wake up as a boy, and let my name be Michael.” As a practical child, this would mean I could keep my same initials MF. But much more importantly, I was learning about angels in Sunday School, and I thought that the Archangel Michael was a particularly fine angel to be named after. I still use Margaret for day to day purposes, because I have spent my entire life protecting Michael from the difficulties of this world. I am, however, delighted to be called Michael when with other trans people, and gladly share this story with others now, including within my own family and as an Anglican priest.

Michael S.

Michael Sennett is a parish employee at St. Ignatius of Loyola Church in Chestnut Hill, MA, just outside Boston.

I never met my Uncle Michael. He died in a car accident in 1982, thirteen years before I was born. My parents spoke of him often and there were plenty of pictures not only in our home, but my aunts’ houses too. According to friends and relatives we shared the same contemplative, soft-spoken nature. Our round faces bore striking similarities framed in circular glasses. Reading was as much a passion for me as it was for him. I developed a bond to Uncle Michael through the stories my family told. Although I didn’t realize it at the time, he was a role model for my boyhood that was invisible to others. Years later, I relied on that bond when I was coming out. During my coming out process I began deepening my faith. St.

Michael, as a champion of justice, inspired me to better myself and serve others. Choosing the name Michael was twofold. It liberated me from an assigned gender that was never mine and celebrated the unconditional love of my family. In prayer I've grown close to St. Michael and hope the Spirit guides us to guard our Church against transphobia among other evils.

During my junior year of college, my name was finally legally changed. To celebrate, my friends threw me a surprise party and everyone wore nametags that said "his name is Michael." In all of their compassion, kindness, and love I came face to face with the presence of God. This celebration at a Catholic institution was an affirmation that my name was important and my existence blessed.

Michael W.

Michael is a 59-year-old writer, musician, and transgender health advocate living in Seattle, Washington.

I went through a whole big process to choose a name. I bought a baby name book and made a list of all the baby boy names that resonated with me. I never liked my given name and I didn't really like many of the names that started with that initial, either.

I wanted something that was me, but honored my family, and since I am a writer, I also wanted something that had a nice ring to it and looked good on paper.

My stepdad adopted my brother and me when I was in elementary school after my father agreed to give up parental rights, but that name never really felt like it was mine.

When I was beginning my gender journey, I went by the first name "Jasper" for a while as sort of a placeholder. I'd picked it up from a black lesbian friend who told me that her aunt used to use the term "jasper" to refer to masculine women. I knew it wasn't the right name for the long term, but it worked in the meantime.

In Indiana at the time, one did not require a court order to change the name on your driver's license, and I was eager to get my license changed along with a photo that matched my current presentation.

Ultimately, I took my maternal grandfather's first name, Corwin, and reclaimed my paternal last name, Woodward.

I go by Michael, which I chose as my middle name. It was a name that had always followed me around. My first major crush was on a boy named Michael. I had also sort of felt in the back of my mind that if I ever had a son, I would name him Michael, though that was not really something I was interested in doing. And while I don't identify as religious or spiritual, I was raised and confirmed in the United Methodist church in my youth, so I was aware of Michael in that aspect. I put it in the middle because it sounded better there, plus both my mom and my aunt go by their middle names, so it was somewhat of a family tradition.

Nicky

Dr Nicolete Burbach is a Catholic theologian, whose research seeks to use Pope Francis' teachings to navigate the challenges for the Church presented by transness and is Social and Environmental Justice Lead at the London Jesuit Centre.

I chose my name for several reasons. The first was to establish continuity across my transition: my first name is a simple gender-swap of my given name. I now have two middle names: one being the name I would have been given had I been assigned female at birth, and the second a gender-swap of my former middle name – which also ended up being my mother's middle name. I chose these names because I wanted to indicate that I was still the same person, and to involve my parents in my transition. I was aware that many parents see transition as the loss of a child, and I wanted to avoid this. I also recognize the cultural weight attached to name-giving, and wanted to respect this.

The second was to embrace trans naming traditions: my first name is an unusual spelling. Trans women often have slightly odd names, as an expression of creativity and self-determination. I think that one of the biggest graces of transitioning is that it can be a source of and opportunity for these things, and I wanted to consciously reflect that while also identifying with my trans sisters.

Also, I originally thought the name was pronounced differently; in quite an ugly way, in fact. I liked this as it signaled that I was unafraid of the way trans women are seen as ugly in our society – it was a way of owning that marginalization, and finding empowerment in it. In this way, it was also tied to the way I found myself identifying very strongly with the figure of the crone during my early transition: an archetype of a woman who, like trans women (and despite the age gap with myself) occupies a position outside of the heterosexual reproductive matrix which is bound up in perceptions of ugliness. I was reading a lot of cultural feminism at the time and, although I don't find it generally compelling as a form of feminist politics, I liked this idea and I wanted to embed my transition in a wider feminist context. The idea that I could subvert something that is otherwise quite hostile to trans women in a feminist way therefore really appealed to me.

When I later found out that it is in fact pronounced in the 'normal' way, I switched to using that. One of the things I found during my transition was that my life was easier when I could just disappear and not draw any attention to myself, or present any kind of inconvenience to cis people. It makes life a bit easier as I can just go with peoples' assumptions, and you've got to balance out symbolism with practicality to get by.

Scotty

James Scott "Scotty" P. Pignatella is a Principal Systems Engineer at Raytheon Technologies and a 20+ year Scouts BSA leader.

The first time I actively worked towards changing my name, I was a 7-year-old second grader. By that time, I had already had multiple conflicts over my male gender identity and what everyone else supposed I was and expected me to be. I pleaded with my best friend Jimmy to call me Jon or Jonny. I wanted to change my name to Jonathan, after Jonathan Livingston Seagull. I'd really enjoyed the book and it was another J name that I liked so much more than the one I'd been given by my parents, where I'd been named after a cousin. I was never able to get that to stick. Jimmy had an older brother named Johnny and struggled with that request.

When I started Junior High School and 7th grade, I had an opportunity to be around new people in a new school. I tried again. I'd discovered a love for Star Trek and science fiction. I was also able to play with performing accents. I was attracted to math and science; teachers had suggested that I might look into being an engineer. With all those traits, I encouraged my friends to call me Scotty. That name has stuck with me since and is the name that my most familiar people call me.

When I was a sophomore in high school, I was enrolled in Catholic Confirmation classes, despite not knowing that my heritage was Catholic prior to that moment. I had grown up with my mother exploring other traditions. I had been baptized in the Episcopal Church. I researched patron saints for the countries that I was ethnically descended from to find my new name. I ultimately decided on Patrick. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, of course, but also of El Paso, where I was born; and the patron saint of Engineers, I found out later. I had to fight with my confirmation teacher to take Patrick. She thought it was inappropriate because "I was a girl". Fortunately, my Irish pastor didn't have the same issue. I'm also quite sure that when the Bishop came by, in a ceremony with hundreds of kids to confirm, he only saw a boy to be named Patrick.

In college, after I had my first job and my own money, I pursued legally changing my name. I left my first name and surname alone but added Scott Patrick in the middle. Having legal male names before I left college was affirming, a start of the journey, even though I was still overwhelmed and terrified of the transition to come.

After I was working at my full-time job, at the start of my career in engineering, it became obvious to me that I couldn't compromise my identity for others' comfort anymore, and that I needed to medically transition. I started medical treatments to become more male in appearance to match my soul. The name

my parents had given me was still my legal first name, although I used J. Scott Patrick. It got tired of the old name “finding” me, so I decided I was going to legally change my name again after I had surgery to cement my legal identity. I ultimately decided on James. James was my Italian great-grandfather’s name and my uncle’s middle name. I’ve also since researched more genealogy and was pleased to find that on my Irish side, the ancestor that immigrated to America was Patrick, and he named his son James. Biblically, the book of James calls out that faith without actions is dead, which is a core value of mine. I am James Scott Patrick, which is a combination of my heritage, my ancestors, my faith, my profession, my calling, ultimately my being.

Scout

Scout is an artist who lives in the South.

When I was figuring out my place in the world as it relates to my actual identity rather than the identity others assigned to me, I thought I was probably trans. At first, I “tried out” a male name, but it was a name based on a beloved family name. I changed the “Eva” in my birthname to “Evan.” I had been one of several Evas over five generations and I wanted to honor that.

Once I realized that I am non-binary/gender expansive, I knew that having a binary name wasn’t going to work for me any better than it ever had. So, I shifted to a gender-neutral name that also means a great deal to me: Scout. I chose it because it’s short, it doesn’t belie anything about gender, and *To Kill A Mockingbird* has always been a favorite book of mine. The Scout character in that book was both (enthusiastically and stubbornly) boy-like and (notably resistant to being) girl-like, a circumstance to which I have always been able to relate.

Some people who have known me a long time still call me by an old name, but it doesn’t bother me because they either *are* or *are not* willing to shift with me. Their problem. Not mine. The only thing that matters is that I KNOW WHO I AM, so I don’t care much whether other people judge me, or can’t relate to me, or resist me. They’re wrong. I’m right. *I’m the authority on me.*

Interestingly, since there are no singular pronouns that work for me, I can’t list them. People are free to read me as they will. I’m too old at this stage (66) to fight the pronoun wars. If any pronouns actually worked for me, I’d make them known. They just don’t exist.

Stephanie

Stephanie is the founder and owner of Follow Your Heart, LLC, (www.StephanieBattaglino.com), and is an internationally recognized speaker, workshop presenter, trainer, author and workplace diversity and inclusion consultant.

I didn’t really consciously choose Stephanie; it came to me and felt right. I chose Christina as my middle name because it contained “Christ” within it, and it signified for me the role that He plays in my life’s journey.