

Carly Anne

Jenna

Catherine

Yangkyi

Bridget

Mia

Mike

What's in
YOUR NAME?

CITY OF SYDNEY  

Elyse

Panagiotis

Olivia

Megan

Sian

Sabine

Isabella

Hello _____
my name is _____

Lord Mayor's message

Our *What's in Your Name?* project asked 12 to 24 year olds to share the stories behind their names. We encouraged them to ask their parents, carers or older family members where their name originated, and how it reflects their identity, religion, culture, family or heritage.

Were they named after a flower, their grandmother, or their father's best friend? Whatever the reason, we wanted young people to explore their heritage, while also starting a conversation with their carers or family members. We particularly encouraged young people from diverse backgrounds to share their stories, so readers could get a true picture of the many different cultures and nationalities that contribute to Sydney. This also gives a great insight into how name-giving practices vary from culture to culture.

We received more than 120 submissions and selected 40 for this publication. The stories show the great richness of our young peoples'

experiences, reflect their diverse backgrounds and allow us to follow them on a journey of discovery as they explore the reasons behind their names.

Some stories are full of joy and a sense of adventure, while others highlight the challenges faced by young people in their quest to establish their identity and be true to themselves. Their challenges include bullying, racism, homophobia and peer pressure, so we thank the young people for sharing these personal stories with us.

The project was developed following the 'Growing the Family Tree' forum, at NSW Parliament House in May last year, which generated discussion and awareness of issues important to multicultural communities and families. The forum was a joint initiative between the City, Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW and Relationships Australia, and aimed to encourage greater communication between different generations

within families. The project was also inspired by three students from Moriah College in Sydney who presented a similar idea, 'What's in a Name?' at the NSW launch of the Federal Parliamentary Friends of Multiculturalism last year.

Our *What's in Your Name?* project would not be possible without the support of many people. We would like to thank the Pride in Colour volunteer Nick Baldas, the City's interns on this project, our project partners the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW and Pride in Colour working group. We would also like to express our gratitude to the many schools, organisations, teachers, youth and community workers who encouraged, supported and mentored young people to participate in this project.



Clover Moore
Lord Mayor of Sydney

Bridget, age 14

I was born on a crisp winter afternoon. In the months leading up to this day, 3 July, my parents had been planning, buying clothes, pram and toys, getting ready for another baby in their lives.

One thing they paid close attention to was my name. They knew what they wanted: a strong Catholic name that went well with the name of my older brother, Patrick. They had many ideas, but just before I was born, they had narrowed it down to just two names, one for a boy and one for a girl.

At 3.55 pm I was born and immediately my parents named me. This was to be a name that I would hear millions of times.

A few hours later, my parents received an excited call from my mother's father, my grandfather.

"Congratulations! I am so happy you chose to name your daughter after my grandmother!"

My parents were slightly confused at this and even more so when they got another call, this time from my great uncle on my father's side. Again my parents were congratulated on my birth and my great uncle also commented he was so glad I was named after his grandmother.

These sentiments were all very sweet. I do share a name with two of my great grandmothers. But this is not why my parents chose my name. In all truth, my name was chosen simply because my parents liked it.

It was a good Catholic name, one that went well with Patrick. My parents did know that within our Irish background, my name was a common name, but that was only a minor factor when they were considering names for me, their unborn child.

I was named... Bridget Mary Brewer.

Catherine, age 12

My name is Catherine. I guess I've never really thought much about my name. It's not an unusual name and I don't find it particularly interesting. But I don't mind it that much. When I asked my Mum about why she called me Catherine, I was assuming an answer like, "You are named after your aunt" or "You are named after your great grandmother". But in fact, she said, "You are not really named after anyone. I started to think of the name because of Cathy Freeman. You were born just before the 2000 Olympics."

Later, when I thought about it, I thought it was nice to be named after someone who has won a gold medal. It gives me somebody to look up to. Not that I am going to win a gold medal; I am not great at sports.

I went off to Google, and researched the meaning of the name 'Catherine'. I was pretty surprised by the results. It turns out that the name 'Catherine' is Greek and means 'pure'. It also said that 'Catherine' may have had origins in 'Hecate': the name of the Greek goddess of magic.

That's cool. I love Harry Potter. It additionally mentions that the name may have been taken from the Greek word 'alkia', which means torture. What? That is so weird. Who would think up a name that means 'torture'? It's kind of creepy. I read that there are 211 variant forms of the name 'Catherine'. I soon realised that most of these were probably nicknames for someone with the name 'Catherine'. I don't have a nickname. I used to want one, but over the years, I just let it be. I am just Catherine. That's the way I like it.

Carly Anne, age 24

Is Carly Anne 'Carly', as in Carly Simon?

"Yes," said Carly's mum.

"No," said her dad.

Is Carly Anne 'Anne' after her mum's mum, Annette?

"No, you are Anne after my auntie, Anne," her dad always said.

While this little girl Carly had just three names, she felt a little ashamed, since only Kenneally had been given thought.

Then one day, just like *The Brady Bunch*, a blended family was created when a little girl, Carlee, landed on Carly's front step. It has been 15 years since the day that they met and these two little girls have become two little ladies.

They are two very different ladies with two very different lives, yet these two opposite sisters, are joined by their name.



Charlotte, age 13

When I was born, my mother and father wanted to name me all sorts of different names, such as Lily, Charlotte or Isabella. They thought for a while, and since they are both teachers, they decided to choose a name that no child in their classes had. They finally chose the name Charlotte. The name means that I am drawn to the arts, am often the centre of attention and enjoy careers that will put me in the limelight. Charlottes are interested in art, music, singing, dancing, and anything of an artistic nature. You could become a very fine performer.

I find this very funny as I go to a performing arts school and I love to dance and act. I would also love to become a successful movie star. The diminutive of Charlotte is a feminine form of Charles, meaning man or manly. It also means tiny and feminine. As I said, my parents wanted a name that could fit my last name, and 'Charlotte Boulus' worked well.

My last name is Boulus, coming from the Lebanese heritage and is Arabic for Paul. It means generous and giving.

There are many famous Charlottes but one of my favourites is Charlotte Brontë. She is a very amazing writer and I think she inspired many people. There's a place in North Carolina called Charlotte and it's the 17th-largest city in the United States. There are also many actresses called Charlotte, such as Charlotte Rae. Charlotte Coleman, Charlotte Rampling and many others.

I like how this name represents my personality, my life. It represents me.



Connor, age 13

I am Connor, I am Anglicised, from a King of Ulster in the time of Christ. My name means hound lover. My name is Anglicised from Conchobhar. My name is Irish, Gaelic in origin. My first name. A boy's name. Mum liked my name because she just liked the sound of it.

My last name is Wink. Derived by three possibilities. Winch, pulley, Wic, dairy farm, and wynn, a meadow. My name is derived from Old English, a nickname for someone who lives near a well. Also means noble or wise, which matches me completely. Mum liked my name because she just liked the sound of it... Connor Wink!

And here is the music for my song:

ththdfv oueredwh
 dddthed ouedwthv
 ddththdf hhgftv qq ofq
 ddthded hhged thththv vded
 owiiiiifg ouggedwh you
 dddthed hheredwh fedeq vvvv
 thvthed thvdddf ththedy
 ouhhhhh ouowou
 ddddddthth edeeth thddq efeth thddth thedth
 owiiiiifg ouggedwh gghk

Elyse, age 12

My name is unusual, but not too different. Most people think 'Elise', but my parents thought 'Elyse'. I agree; what a weird way of spelling it. Don't ask me why because I don't know. If it was of my choosing I would have picked something other than 'Elyse'. It's not that I don't like my name, it's just... well OK, you got me, I don't like it. It's weird: so many mispronunciations, so many people spelling it wrong. I always wonder why I couldn't have had a normal name like my friends, why can't I have a name like Ella or Sarah or Ruby. My mother was going to call me Ruby, but my last name being Diamond she thought Ruby Diamond might perhaps be a tad over the top, but honestly, I would have much preferred that to stupid 'Elyse'. Twelve years I have had to suffer this name, six years I have to wait until I can change my name – I've researched it and everything.

For this writing competition I began searching up my name, trying to find where it came from, trying to find its meaning. After a lot of 'name not found' errors on baby-name meaning websites, I found my name: Elyse. Latin. God's promise. Blessed by the Isles. I am now aware that Avenue des Champs-Élysées, a Parisian street with my name in it, 'is arguably the most famous streets – and one of the most expensive strips of real estate – in the world.'

Now I know this, can I confide in you a secret? I just wanted to say... maybe I kind of like my name.

Erika, age 24

My first name, Erika, took one week to be declared. In that time I was known as possum mostly but also cherub. Erika is Old Norse and compounding of the elements ei (ever, always) and rikr (ruler, king) meaning 'ever powerful' or 'ruler of the people'. I also have strawberry-blonde hair and am of Nordic descent.

I was lucky to also get two middle names: Rose then Cecilia. Rose being my mother's choice. My second middle name is uncommon. St Cecilia was betrothed to a pagan noble youth called Valerianus, but her body was guarded by a jealous angel. Valerianus wanted to see the angel, so he saw the Pope and was baptised and both Cecilia and Valerianus were crowned with roses. She was sentenced by the prefect to be decapitated, but after three blows she did not die and spent three days serving the poor and singing in her heart. St Cecilia is the saint of music. My grandmother phoned to tell my mother that it was St Cecilia's Day the day my birth registration was sent in. I'm not sure either know the story of St Cecilia, but rather see her as a musical influence.

My last name, Watson, is of Scottish origin and I am part of the Buchanan clan on my father's side. The Buchanans moved from Ireland and were employed by the Scottish king to help defend the west highlands from the Viking invasions. This is curious as it suggests my name is a crossover of the Viking heritage and Scottish clan, of which I am not sure my parents knew when naming me. I am also a descendant of Joseph Wright on my mother's side, who after stealing lead in Sloane Square, Chelsea, was sent to Australia on the first fleet in 1788.

Finley, age 13

My name is Finley. It is a Gaelic name meaning two things: fair-haired warrior and sunbeam.

The last meaning I find ironic, because I was born on a dark and stormy night on the 11 July 1999. My father's family are the Fraziers, who originated from Scotland, so at one point the Frazier clan must have emigrated to Australia. I have researched more about the Fraziers, and found out that most of them (41 per cent) were, and still are, farmers. I also discovered that the average life expectancy is 71 years, but that data was taken in 2003, so the information is slightly out of date.

The family history of my mother's family, the Brittens, is unknown to me, except they came from England. My grandfather was English and my mother therefore, is half-English, so I naturally, am a quarter-English. Many people say I have an English accent, so I can easily say I can trace that to my English heritage. The Britten family has an emblem, as well as a motto: *Cassis tutissima virtus*, meaning 'virtue is the safest helmet'. The Frazier clan also has a family emblem and a motto, too: *Je suis prest*, or 'I am ready'.

Flynn, age 13

Once there was a boy called Flynn, not to be mistaken with Finn, and when he popped out they all gave a shout and said "What can we name this thing?"

There were names from afar and some just by ear but none could find the right one.

After a bit of a struggle they all went into a huddle trying to find the name.

Some were lame and some a bit sane but none could find the right one.

They went to the snow just for someone to say, 'I know!' but they only got 'hello'.

But one windy night (while getting heaps of frights) a young girl said 'I know!'

With a bit of a gasp, they all said 'At last, she finally found the right one!'

She said with a breath 'we will name him Tess' and they all let out a sigh and said 'that will not fly. How about another one?'

Then the little girl said 'Well I was saving it to last, but I guess we need it fast, we should name him Flynn!'

After all struggle they all had a huddle saying, 'I'm glad we named him Flynn.'

They all sat down and did not frown, because they had named him Flynn.

Ines, age 13

Ines is my name, I know
it's hard to say,

It comes from Spain,
and I love it anyway.

Ines was a saint, so holy
and pure,

Who was never faint,
or insecure.

A bit like me, I like to make
myself heard,

And drive others crazy,
let's face it, I'm a nerd.

But behind all that craziness,
there is some grace,

Often with added laziness,
in my own special place.

Ines is my name, Eee-nez is
how it sounds,

I'll probably tell you again
and again, so don't be bothered
if I hound.

For there aren't many others,
who have a name like mine,

If it weren't for my mother,
it wouldn't really shine.

For she was the one,
who travelled the world,

And came back with a name,
for a beautiful baby girl.

Ines is my name, well,
Agnes in our talk,

But I don't think it's quite
the same, since my name
simply rocks.

Isabella, age 13

I'm not named after someone famous or a princess or a family member. As soon as I was born I was named Isabella. There is no significant reason as to why I was named Isabella, although it was an Italian name, and they named me because Mum liked it. It would be great to be named after someone famous, but I would be mistaken and offered special things like a limo to the Opera House, or being stopped on the street to sign autographs. But life with the name Isabella (a common name), would be different. If I was named after someone famous, I wouldn't be unique, or the same as I am today.

My nickname is Bella, which is the name I go by. In Italy it means 'beautiful'. My dad and his parents are Italian, which could have influenced my parents' decision to call me 'Isabella'. Sometimes I think to myself, 'who would want to call their daughter a confusing name that means something different in a foreign country?'

Just imagine being in Italy, and how confusing it would be hearing my nickname spoken everywhere. Not only would it be confusing, it would be annoying having to answer to every 'Bella' that was spoken. In saying this, I wouldn't be the same person if my name wasn't Isabella or Bella.

In the end, it doesn't matter if you are named after someone famous, a princess or a family member – you are unique in your own way, like me. I may have an ordinary name with no reason behind why I was called that, but I love my name, and think it's a beautiful name. I respect my parents' choice.

Jun Ning Isabella, age 14

Names mean quite a lot in Chinese culture. More than English names, Chinese names must have a meaning. Most are three characters. The first is your surname. Mine means ‘white’ (白). That’s the non-optional part. Some parents pick the other one or two characters of their children’s names themselves, but my parents consulted a teacher of the Chinese language.

I was a 1998 baby: Year of the Tiger. Hence the second character in my Chinese name: ‘jun’ (君). In essence, this means ‘lord’ or ‘leader’. It comes from the Chinese words for a tiger-mountain lord. This was a good opportunity to reflect and pay tribute to the lordly and majestic aspects of my zodiac animal. Symbols of balance are found everywhere in the Chinese culture. A good example of this is the sign of yin and yang. Similarly, in a name, the third character must balance out the second. My name concludes with the character ‘ning’ (宁), meaning peace. Majestic tigers are roaring, fierce creatures with tempers and temperaments to match. By balancing this out with a peaceful character, it was hoped the fearsome tiger in me would be balanced.

Chinese put a lot of stock in names. They don’t have middle names; instead it’s the characters of their Chinese names. My middle name is Jun Ning. There was a lot of confusion among my friends about that. But I didn’t mind. There was a time when I wanted to have an English middle name: there are lots of pretty English names. But still, when I think about it, a name does sort of define you for who you are.

Having a Chinese middle name is fairly unique and it makes me who I am, because when I have a Chinese name, I’m part of a community and part of a family.

Yuk Ling Isabelle, age 15

The soft hum of metal bells rang, announcing the half hour, from the courtyard of the Buddhist temple, the most venerable and ancient temple within the borders of Canton. Hong Yi sat cross legged on a maroon rug in the peaceful solitude of the study, nothing to distract him from his task of calligraphy. Carefully and delicately, Hong Yi dipped his feather brush and wrote a passage from one of the teachings of Confucius. This teaching followed ‘filial piety’: the idea of living a harmonious, humble and respectful life, to love, and in return be loved. It applied to elders, and the subsequent generations.

A character away from finishing the sheet of beige parchment, a sound that had never been heard before pierced the serenity. A baby’s cry! Hong Yi dropped his feather brush and gathered his robe of orange silk from his position on the floor. He was infuriated, yet curious. It defied Confucius’ teachings of a harmonious community, like the eruption of a volcano, the cry violated the peaceful scene.

Hong Yi’s bare feet slapped the white tiles at a furious pace, as he marched down to the courtyard. “Fa Xian!” Hong Yi bellowed over the ringing bells to another robed figure in the distance, who seemed to be carrying a basket. “It’s a baby, Hong Yi!” exclaimed the smiling monk. “Her name is Isabelle.”

Fa Xian stated as he showed Hong Yi a crinkled letter, written in a foreign language: “She has been sent from Catalonia in Spain, as her parents cannot provide for her. She is named after the recently passed Isabella of Castile and her name means, ‘My God is a vow.’”

Carefully and gracefully, Hong Yi took Isabelle from Fa Xian’s arms and cradled the infant, now calm. Hong Yi looked up towards the bell tower and murmured, “Yuk Ling”. A bell made of jade.

Jamie, age 13

As Shakespeare said, 'What's in a name?'

Was I named after someone famous, a great family member or someone special?

Well, my parents liked the name Jamie, but only knew of a horse by that name! Yes, I am named after a horse. So it's ironic that I grew up to be passionate about horses.

The name Jamie is what identifies me. It has roots in Hebrew, Scottish, American and English. The meaning is 'supplanter' which means to 'take the place of another through force or intrigue'. This sort of applies, as my grandfather died before I was born and his name was James.

Not many people remember your middle name, but it still identifies you and your personality. My middle name is Anne and, again, it is a Hebrew, American and English name, and features in the writings of William Shakespeare. The meaning of Anne is 'favour and grace', which fits in with how I am a dancer and gymnast. I like to think that I am graceful in both these activities.

My parents chose this name simply because it sounded good with the rest of my name and they just liked it. A good enough reason!

Your surname is what some people would think as the most important part of your name, but I think every part of your name identifies something different about you.

My surname is Byrne. It is Irish, like my dad. It originates from the name O'Brien and, the O'Briens are said to be descendants of Brian Boru, one of The High Kings of Ireland. The name O'Brien means noble. I like to identify with this Irish connection.

I hope that I can honour this name, of which I am proud.

Jenna, age 13

I asked my parents why they chose the name Jenna. They said it was because they liked it! That's great, but it doesn't really help me when it comes to writing something like this, does it!

The name Jenna means 'small bird' and originated in Arabic. It was either my name or Meg.

Before I was born, my Mum said my name had to pass her three-stages-of-life tests.

First, the friendship test: my name had to sound good and be able to have a nickname or be shortened ... 'hey Jen!'

Second, the job interview test: 'Hi, my name is Jenna and I'm applying for this job because ... blah blah blah, ... it had to sound employable.

Third, the meeting of my future partner test: 'Hello, my name is Jenna, it's nice to meet you!'

It's good to have a name that's easy to remember and is a little unique. Fortunately my name passed all three, and that is why I'm called Jenna.

My middle name came from Mum watching a TV show. When the credits down the screen, Mum noticed the first name Bree. This went well with Jenna and so became my middle name.

Even though my name doesn't come from past relatives or famous historic events, Mum says that a lot of thought and effort went into deciding my name, and you know what? I think they got it right!

Lara, age 13

Quite... lame.
 Or destined for fame?
 Money? World acclaim?
 My face on big screens,
 Like Laras before.
 I'd have my own theme,
 Or own my own store.
 Maybe that's why they called
 That interesting name.
 Not Jack, John or Sarah,
 Not Kate or plain Jane.
 What if it was a scheme?
 A twisted plot to increase?
 The teasing of peers,
 And those I call mates.
 Lara's short for Larisa.
 Why can't that be my name?
 I could walk elegantly,
 Be called 'grande dame'.
 And all those books claim,
 'Lara means this.'
 Maybe it's good,
 My name is unique.
 I can make it my own,
 Not 'named after that'.
 And one day my Lara,
 Will be written in black.
 Written up in the halls,
 Where the other names stand.
 And be unnoticed,
 Among those in tan.
 So when someone asks,
 'Lara, are you here?'
 I'll reply, 'Yes,' with a smile,
 And a knowing veneer.

Lucy, age 13

Lucy it was and will be. I changed it a few times in my younger years.

There was my Lucinda phase: I loved it every time I got into trouble. Lucinda suited the circumstances. They could elongate it: L-U-C-I-N-D-A!

Then I went through the Lucia phase, as I was in love with my Italian heritage and the way my nonno said my name 'Lucheya'. So that was it. I changed my name to Lucia and I loved the way it sounded when everyone said it. I even had it written under my school photo: Lucia Avvenevole.

Yet I have come back to the original, Lucy. Lucy means 'light' and was the name of my great-great aunt Lucy Cullen, and just seemed to fit me when I was born. I have collected a couple of nicknames along the way: 'babe', 'precious', 'Luc' and even 'juice'. I was almost called Rachel or Kate.

I'm no Rachel, Kate, Tallulah, Pearl or Eleanor. I'm Lucy, and that's all I'm looking for.

Lucy, age 14

When I was born my family had many ideas about what they wanted to call me. My mum liked the name Lilly, but my great-grandmother said, "You'll name your daughter after me over my dead body", so that was that.

My father was set on the name Darcy. The doctor had thought I was going to be a boy before I was born, and was severely disappointed when I turned out to be a girl. He seemed to think he would be able to turn me into a boy, even trying to name me like one. The rest of the family hated the name, and luckily it was decided against.

Nana and Pa loved the names Josephine and Ursula. My sister, Laura, was thrilled when she found out she had a baby sister. She adored the names Daphne and Daisy. She wanted me to be as girly as possible with names to suit. The whole family bickered for hours trying to decide what to call me.

Later, a nurse came into the room and looked at the family. My mum told her they were trying to decide what to call me. The nurse stared intently at me, and said very straight, "I think she's a Lucy."

The name rang through the room, and everyone's ears. Everyone thought it was good enough although they were running out of ideas, and not able to agree on a single one.

So my name became Lucy Josephine Daisy (Ursula being my confirmation name) Peck.

Lucy means 'light of the world'. The name is derived from Swedish culture. There are many similar names from different cultures such as Lucille, Lucinda and Lucifer.

I used to hate my name, but I have grown to love it.

Madeleine, age 14

My name is French and the reason my Mum and Dad picked my name was because they had no idea what to name me.

My dad wanted me to be called Gabriella because he liked long names, but my mum wanted something more elegant.

She remembered when she was in France, everyone had really elegant names, and everybody acted as if they were royalty. She wanted me to have a French name, so she was looking on the internet for French names. She found two really nice names, Madeleine and Clair.

They spent about three months deciding on my name because my dad was set on Gabriella but my Mum was set on Madeleine or Marie. She liked Madeleine better than Marie, so she thought it was 'done and dusted', until Dad decided he liked Marie better.

When I was finally born my dad looked at me for the first time and decided I looked like a Madeleine. Dad didn't lose, though, because Mum still liked the name Marie, so she decided my middle name could be Marie. The reason Dad loved the name Marie was because that's what his Mum's middle name was, except it was Maria. So Dad decided Marie was one letter away from Maria and it was also a lovely name.

So that's how I got the name Madeleine Marie Ayre.

Madison, age 13

Do you want the truth? OK, I'll give it to you. In life we all wonder about things whether it's 'Will I be famous?' or 'Will I get good enough grades to pass high school?'. You never know what you might think about. So, sitting in my house one day, I was wondering why I had the name Madison and what my name meant.

I asked Mum, and she said because she liked it.

The next question is, what do I do? I went online. Oh my gosh! Apparently my name was a surname. So next I found out that the name Madison was only a male name. Meaning 'son of Maud' then it said something about being the son of Matthew and a name of Old English. Not knowing anything about the Bible, I had absolutely no idea who Matthew was. Now I do.

By this stage I was just completely annoyed, having a male name and all. Then I found out that Madison didn't become a girl's name until the 1984 movie *Splash* starring Tom Hanks and Daryl Hannah. Daryl Hannah plays a mermaid who goes to New York and adopts her name as Madison after reading the Madison Avenue street sign. How corny is that?

Then my mum told me that the reason I have one 'd' not two is because she wanted all her children to have seven letters in their names. I'm not really quite sure why, but that's my mum! Now I realise it doesn't matter where your name is from, as long as you have one.

Marissa Thu Nam, age 15

To me, my name defines who I am,

With a background of Viet and Indo,

And a nationality of Australian,

I'm definitely one of a kind.

Marissa, the sea,

Is me!

Waves crashing,

Seagulls flying,

Calm yet wild,

Filled with creatures from another world,

Salty in green and blue.

Thu Nam.

Thu means together,

Nam represents Vietnam,

While Namduong is Vietnamese for Indonesia.

Thu Nam also means autumn, poem and water.

It's me!

Coloured in orange, red and yellow,

Wind shuffling through the leaves,

Rhyme or not,

It's just fun with words,

Cool and refreshing in just one sip.

Supriadi,

Is me!

Coming from my Indo father,

It links me back to his family,

Such a long way away.

Marissa Thu Nam Supriadi,

If I could change my name,

I wouldn't. It's me.

Meg, age 13

I knew. I knew from the gleam of her glistening grey eyes, the flush that sat on her cheeks, giving her an appearance of bewilderment, yet also calmness. Her little hand wrapped around my finger, and everything in the world stayed silent for the moment, and it seemed like we were frozen in time. My eyes traced her nose, her mouth, her chin. She was so interesting, so unique and special. Although she just cried, her voice was so sweet, it was raspy, but at the same time quiet and simple. As I held her delicate, almost breakable, frame in my arms, I felt no strain.

She was weightless, with fluttering eyelids, like the wings of an astonishing, astounding butterfly. I wished to myself, eyes scrunched tightly closed – as if it would help – that my little girl would never grow up, that she would find everything funny and have nothing to regret. Also, that no-one would hurt her, or leave her scarred, or desert her in her darkest hour.

She was precious like a shining pearl in the oyster that was the world. I knew instantly that she would bring hope and light to the people who spoke to her, touched her or were simply near her.

Meg is the Greek name for 'child of light'. I knew when she came into the world, she was my Meg.

Megan, age 14

Deep under the ocean, a small, creamish rainbow-coloured pearl was forming inside a shelled mollusc. The pearl is perfect: perfectly round and perfectly smooth. On 4 October 1998, a little girl was born. Her parents truly cherished her. She was small and very precious to them, so they decided to call her Megan, their little pearl. Megan never really fancied her name, and she thought it was plain and boring. On Megan's 10th birthday, her parents gave her a special surprise. She hoped it would be big and fun to play with. She was quite disappointed to find her present was in a small pink box. When she opened it, she found a small, smooth, creamish, rainbow-coloured rock.

Megan had no idea what it was and why her parents were giving her this boring gift. She asked her mum what it was, and she replied, "It's a pearl." Megan had never heard of a pearl before so asked her dad why they had got this for her. He said, "Because your name means small, precious pearl." From then on she was very interested and decided she would find out more about her name.

Later on she found out that her name originates from Wales and Greece. She was very intrigued by the fact there were 164 Megans born in 1998, and since then the name has become much more popular.

Years passed, and Megan learnt more and more interesting facts about her name. From then on she loved her name, and never once wished her parents had called her anything other than Megan.

Mikaila, age 13

Mikaila Xanthe Milwright. An unusual, but nice, name. It's often pronounced wrong and underlined in a red, squiggly line on a computer, but I like it and I will explain the meaning and history behind it.

With over 10 different spellings and many curious pronunciations, Mikaila can be quite a confusing name. My spelling of it is pronounced mick-ay-lar, and is Hebrew, meaning 'who is like God'.

My parents selected this name because when my Mum was pregnant, she and my Dad were watching a movie featuring a little baby girl named Mikaila. They liked the name and its spelling because it's a Russian name – the Russian spelling is Mikhail, but for a boy – and some of my ancestors were Russian.

My favourite part of my name is my middle name, Xanthe. It is pronounced zan-thee. Xanthe is Greek and means 'golden one'. It's also the name of an ancient Greek sea nymph, who was the daughter of Oceanus. It's rare in English-speaking countries. My parents chose this as my middle name because they thought it was very unique and pretty. Also, it makes my initials MXM.

My surname is Milwright and it has an interesting history behind it. It started off in the late-1600s as Mackrick, and then in 1703 it changed to McKiltrick. It again changed in 1729 into McIlrick, then to McWrick in 1751. Finally, in 1792, our family's last name became Milwright and stayed that way for the next 220 years.

My last name, Milwright, came from my dad's side, and when my mum remarried after his death, I decided to keep it.

I feel very lucky that my parents chose such a beautiful and interesting name!

Mike, age 23

It was a wet afternoon in Sydney, but it was summertime and the clouds had almost wrung out. Like birds after a storm in the desert, all the beautiful people were slowly sticking their heads out to see if it was safe to party.

I could smell the rain evaporating off the sandstone walls as my uncle drove us through winding, one-way eastern crevices I'd never been. He owned a party bus company and tonight I was helping him out.

This particular party was a sweet 16th and after dropping a pack of hyped teenagers at Mrs Macquaries Chair, we went to pick up their dinner: pizza.

My uncle had learnt the hard way to just get one of every topping. It avoided the special deluxe-pan, olive, cheese-crust (without flour) orders from fussy kids, awestruck by their first chance to decide anything. One of everything worked: "Never had a complaint," he'd remind me.

The bus pulled into the pizza place, the chain's namesake, whether a numbers game or type of housing, I can't remember.

He gave me his credit card and it was my job to run in and collect. As I stepped off the bus he yelled out, "Don't forget to sign it Michael Williams".

I turned around, unsure of what to make of this comment. After a moment staring at each other, a smile crept across our faces.

My name is also Michael Williams.

Things can get confusing when you have a family member with the same name as you. Especially when you have the same doctor, accountant, chiropractor... we even have to be careful on election day.

These days I'm known as Mike, but nicknames don't change much, your formal name will always stick: Mum still yells "Michael" when she's angry with me.

Mirima, age 13

“Merrimia,” the teacher calls. I refuse to answer.

“Merima,” the teacher yells. Giggles erupt around the class room. The teacher glares at me.

“My name is Mirima, Mi-ri-ma,” I pronounce it slowly.

Mirima is the Australian Aboriginal name for the land around Kununurra, Western Australia. There is a Mirima National park and a Mirima Aboriginal Reserve. My parents chose this name because it was the name of the beautiful land where my parents met.

While my white teachers have trouble pronouncing my name the Aboriginals living in third-world conditions have no problem. Whenever I visit the reserve with the vandalised play equipment, my name sings out through the broken swings.

“Where is Mirima? Where is Doctor Mary’s daughter?”

I am bit of a celebrity there: who would ever name their white child after Aboriginal land?

Mirima means ‘spring’, a natural waterhole, in the Miriwoong language. Whenever I am up north around Mirima land, my favourite thing is to go to a natural spring and swim in the fresh water. Go under waterfalls and let the pounding water hurt my head. Taste the fresh sweet water and be the only one there, so you can be yourself.

I was christened with two other Aboriginal children in Mirima reserve. My parents say I was unofficially ‘sung’ by these old ladies. I wonder if that is the reason that whenever I return to this country, I feel right at home.

“Mirima,” the teacher calls.

Again, my classmates stare at me. I struggle out of my memories of a tumbled-down reserve and bubbling springs.

“Don’t you know your own name when I pronounce it correctly?” the teacher jokes.

I smile back at the teacher while I remember all those Miriwoong people who pronounce my name so effortlessly.

Nina, age 13

Christopher Columbus created me. Fashioned me from the wood of the forest trees. He loved me like no other ship. He named me Santa Clara after Santa Clara Monastery. But everyone calls me Nina.

When he christened me, he smashed a bottle of the finest champagne over my bow.

“May this magnificent ship, hereby be known as Santa Clara. May she sail the ocean, leaving all other ships in her wake.”

Applause broke out. For me. Christopher rides on me, not the others. I brag dawn to dusk. Pinta doesn’t mind. She is bigger, faster, and she knows it. Pinta is nothing however, when compared to Santa Maris de la Inmaculada Concepcion. The length of Maria’s hull is amazing: 97 feet. Yet I am the most loved. I have three masts stretching high and possessing a 50-foot deck.

Maria scowls every time Christopher boards me. He doesn’t care for size. Everyone looks at me like they do the queen. I am a beauty. A piece of art. Magnificent. People cheer when they see me.

I am Nina without the masts. Without the accent. People don’t cheer when they see me. When I was christened, water was dripped over my forehead. I am just Nina. There is nothing special about me.

But that’s not true! My name means little girl, great granddaughter in Spanish.

In Russian, Nina means beauty, fitting. Nina means God was gracious or God has shown favour in Hebrew. In Persian Nina means nice.

In Hindi, it means beautiful eyes. Nina is Swahili for mother. In Native American culture, Nina means strong or mighty. It means friend in Arabic and flower in Old Greek.

There are 17 variations of my name, but my name is the stem.

My name is Nina, and it’s supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!

Olivia, age 23

The story that my mother has always shared with me was that she'd loved the name Olivia since she was 14 years old when she heard it a few times. If I was going to be a boy I would've been Max, I think.

It took me a while to get used to, and like, Olivia. I'd always thought it was an old ladies' name, so proper and formal. Not long ago I've moved more towards Liv, kind of rebranding myself, and it's worked how I thought it would – casual and simple. Now I bounce between Liv and Olivia depending on my mood. Formal Olivia or laid-back Liv. Sometimes Livia, Livvy, or the occasionally Oli.

Every now and then when they ask for my name, Boost or Starbucks call me Oliver when my order is ready. So now, to the major chains when I order, I'm Bec.

I love my name now, happy and comfortable, and I think when it comes to naming my children, a name with versatility and a bit of fun is key.

A name is a name, you have to make it yours, though.



Panagiotis, age 16

My full name is Panayiotis Mantas. Panayiotis means 'all holy' and Mantas means 'masculine'. I think my last name describes me well, but my first name does not because I don't like churches.

I was born in IRA hospital, which is located in Athens, Greece. This is where I was named. My parents gave me the name Panagiotis because in Greece the tradition is to take the name of the grandparents.

In Greece my friends always called me 'mandarin' because my surname is Mantas and it looks like mandarin. And they were always laughing at me. No one in Greece knew me by my first name, everyone knew me by my surname. Sometimes my real friends asked me 'What is your name?' and 'is Mantas your name?'. Now my friends call me Peter in Australia and I love this name.

This is the story of my name.

Olivia, age 12

Olivia. That's my name!

But what makes a name?

My name in Latin means peace, as it derives from the word olive and olive leaves, and the plant itself, were seen as peaceful because in the Christian religion, a dove (the symbol for peace and heaven) is usually depicted with an olive branch in its mouth.

Another place that my name has been traced to is Greece. The name Olive was used because it came from the elaiia a name for a Greek fruit. It became a common name in England in the 18th century, and then circulated to Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom. Some experts say the name was brought to England during the Norman conquest. Another interesting fact is Olivia was a character in a play called Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare.

Last but not least, my parents like the name. There were three names, Olivia, Amelia and Georgia. Then when I was born, my parents decided to call me either Amelia or Olivia.

After contemplating a while, they decided on Olivia.

Renlet, age 16

Hello! My Name is Renlet Garcia. I come from the Philippines. For me my name is special because my parents gave it to me in a simple way. Other people's names are taken from names of artist or flowers or are not chosen for any particular meaning.

I think a person's name is one of the most important things that we have. Without this we would not really know ourselves and the people around us.

I have a very original name. My name is Renlet and comes from both my parents' names.

Ren comes from my father's name, Rene, and Let comes from Leticia, my mother's name.

I'm the eldest daughter in my family and I think that's the reason why they have given me this special name: Renlet. I hope to grow up and be just as wonderful as them!

My parents' names reflect their Spanish heritage or background. In our Filipino Panggalatok dialect there are many Spanish words reflecting our Spanish heritage.

My siblings also have interesting names: my sister's name, Leny, also comes from my mother's name, Leticia, and Ren-lou, my youngest sister, is named after my father, Rene, and my aunt, whose name is Malou.

I am proud of my original name. I really like it. It tells the world who I am, where I come from and how I fit into my family and my community. It's a very individual name, just like me!

Sabine, age 12

My name's Sabine, and that's all I know,
I'd love to find out more, so off I go.
Off to the kitchen to find my mother dearest,
To ask many questions, to express my interest.
"Mum, why is my name Sabine, won't you tell me?"
"Because I like it," she says very rudely.
That's still not enough, so I keep on nagging,
A good reason why, that is what my argument is lacking.
"Oh please tell me more, I am so intrigued."
Mum stares at me disapprovingly, looking very fatigued,
"Go and ask Dad, he's out the back,
He's cleaning and emptying his big, old sack."
I run to the garden, my smile now weaker,
Mum didn't want to help me, even though I was eager.
Now it is Dad's turn and I know he will answer
I see him now, with my dog named Prancer.
"Dad, why is my name Sabine, won't you tell me?"
"I am busy right now, can't you see."
I am now even more upset, disheartened,
ignored and rejected,
I storm to my bedroom, my determination is definitely
being tested.
I have a think as to who I can ask,
To find out where my name comes from, that is my task.
Grandma! She will come to my aid,
But I wonder if she is busy, of that I am afraid.
I phone anyway, my hand on my heart,
She picks up, and the story starts:
"Your mother was in Paris, lost in the city. A young
woman saw her and wanted to help. She directed her to
the station, where your mother needed to be. The girl was
so helpful, kind and beautiful. When your mother heard
her name, she knew straight away. If she had a daughter
her name would be Sabine."

Sarah, age 13

If I was aware that my name was so bare,
 I probably wouldn't have shown a care.
 However this competition came up,
 And I dropped my favourite cup.
 Not the best day, if I do say myself.
 My name has true meaning,
 Unlike Pisa's tower that is leaning.
 It's not a pointless mistake,
 And it's more famous than Drake.
 And it existed in 1880.
 Princess is what Sarah means,
 It's a name that really gleams.
 Sarah is the name of many round the clock,
 My namesake is Sarah Murdoch.
 Sarah is the best name, in my eyes.
 I know many people with multicultural names,
 However my name is special, all the same.
 I love my name, I have no shame about it.
 I was fortunate enough to be given a name
 full of wit,
 And never will I dislike it.
 Someday I'll make it,
 As a person of high significance.
 Ready for what life ever throws at me,
 And no-one will suspect my name to be so simple.
 Having only been a normal person.
 There is nothing to hate about my name,
 That's what makes it fantastic for fame.
 Don't hate my name, It's not a nice game,
 My name means a lot no matter what people claim.
 Don't let anyone hate on your name,
 Only you know what's in your name.

Sian, age 13

In my name there are
 16 characters, each with a
 description. There is a balance
 of eight vowels and eight
 constants. My name was given
 to me on the 25 May 1999.
 My first name was given to
 me by my mother, Simone
 Byrnes, but my father, Tala
 Filipino, had given me a middle
 and last name that went back
 generations.

I was named after a mixture
 of favourite names my mother
 liked: Chey-anne, Shiy and
 Sharn. Then they came to a
 conclusion: Sian.

The name 'Sian' has the
 meaning of god's gracious gift.
 Sian is a girl's name of Welsh
 origin. My first name, Sian,
 makes me self-reliant, creative
 in practical ways, and an
 independent diligent worker.
 I work best alone making my
 own decisions as it's not always
 easy for me to respond to the
 advice and direction of others,
 as I feel the need to be in control.
 I enjoy the simple pleasures of
 life, especially activities that
 take me outdoors.

I only have a few best friends
 who enjoy similar activities,
 but I have loads of friends
 individually. Although the
 name Sian creates the urge to
 be original and self-reliant, it
 also limits self-expression and
 friendly congeniality with a
 moody disposition.

My middle and last name
 were chosen by my father as
 he named me after my great-
 grandmother, Malama Filipino.
 She had a big impact on my
 father's life and since I was
 his first child, I had the same
 impact, so therefore he named
 me after her.

The name Malama in
 Aboriginal language means
 the light.

So altogether my name
 means God's gracious gift,
 the light.

Sophie, age 13

I woke up this morning and I thought to myself, 'What does my name really mean?' So I ran to my mummy and I asked her, "Mummy, what does my name really mean?" So my mummy told me that she chose my name and not my daddy. She said that my name is Sophie because her favourite actress from a movie called *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was called Sophie Marbeau, oops, I mean Marceau. Mummy didn't answer my question so I tried someone else.

I went up to my daddy too, and asked him, "Daddy what does my name really mean?"

And Daddy told me that he chose my name and not my mummy. He said I am called Sophie because it's a pretty name and when the storks carried me to my mummy, I looked like a little girl called Sophie! But still my daddy didn't answer my question so I went to my Auntie Danni.

She said my name is Sophie because the famous model called Sophie Monk was in the same hospital at the same time the stork came with me, and I had little bits of blonde hair just like her.

I was starting to get angry because no one would answer my question. I decided I would ask my grandma, Grams, if she knew and then I would give up.

Grams said that my name meant wisdom and that my mummy and daddy knew I was going to be a smart and beautiful girl so they called me Sophie. Finally, someone answered my question and I gave Grams a very big hug.

Sunday Primrose*, age 19

Hi, my new name is Sunday Primrose*. In a year or so I will change my name because I hate my birth name. My birth name represents everything that is family. I ran away from home when I was 10 years old. I have been in foster care ever since.

Family life was filled with mental and physical abuse, alcohol and drugs. I couldn't stay. The night I ran away I told my parents that I was gay. You don't want to know what the response was. Let's just say I had to leave because my life was at risk. So I hate my family and I hate my birth name.

I have a good life now: I have a job, a flat and a great girlfriend. A new name will mean a new beginning for me. I get to choose it and I get to choose how I will live my life: gay, straight, whatever!

*Name has been changed.

Yangkyi, age 24

When looking at the spelling of my name, you will in most cases need to pause and think through how you might say it. It is simply pronounced Yankee. People always ask me if it's a nickname and tell me what a unique name it is. You will be surprised to know that it's a very common Tibetan name.

I am a proud Tibetan, born in India and have been happily living my life in Australia since 1995. I, like many Tibetans of my generation, received my name from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. I feel a great sense of pride in my name as it directly identifies me as a Tibetan. My name to me is my link to my culture, to my country and to my people.

I am one of the lucky Tibetans whose name translates quite well in the western world. Whenever I introduce myself to new acquaintances, in most cases I will refer to Yankee Doodle or the New York Yankees. I do this because I know everyone is thinking that in their head and it makes them feel comfortable when saying my name out loud.

Also, it is probably important to note that my full name is Tenzin Yangkyi Chhoekyapa. Tenzin Yangkyi, as I mentioned before, was given by His Holiness. Tenzin is the name that everyone named by His Holiness receives, therefore I identify more with Yangkyi. Chhoekyapa is my Dad's family name. When moving to Australia, my parents decided it was too difficult to pronounce and Tenzin was made my last name. My sisters are all Tenzin something, so it worked out well.

The meaning of my name in Tibetan is happy melody. I really like the meaning of it but I don't think it makes me who I am.

Isabella

Erika

Ines

Sophie

Charlotte

Mikaila

Marissa

Isabelle

Lucy

Connor

Lara

Mertkan

Lucy

Jamie

Finley

Sunday Primrose*

Mirima

Megan

Madison



Ethnic Communities'
Council of NSW Inc.



Renlet

Flynn

Sarah

Olivia

Meg

Nina

Madeleine