

CALL ME KIM

Even if you have a last name that makes others snicker, it's not always easy to give it up. One newlywed recounts her quest to stay true to both her new love (him) and her old (herself). *By Kim Schworm Acosta*

for the four years we dated, I had nothing against Rich's last name, Acosta. It's short, it puts you first on a lot of lists, and the hard "k" sound flows nicely with "Kim." Best of all, it doesn't elicit strange looks, as Schworm, my maiden name, does. But having an unusual (or downright weird) last name has its perks. There's hardly ever another one like you. (There are two other Acostas in my office, neither related to me.) And until they close some of those loopholes in the Do Not Call registry, having a name like Schworm gives you a heads-up when the phone rings during dinner. ("Hello, is this Miss...?" They pause. They stutter. I hang up.)

WHEN AND IF YOU DO come across someone with the same name, it leaves an impression. A Schworm from Wisconsin once found my e-mail address on the Internet and sent me a message. When I got to the bottom, where he signed "Sch'worm," I got chills: He's had to deal with the worm jokes too! (The whole thing seemed a little creepy, though, especially when he told me his height, weight, and favorite sports, as though our common surname was enough of a foundation to begin a long-distance romance. I didn't write back.)

Despite the teasing, figuring out what to call myself after I got married turned out to be a much tougher decision than whether we should have a sand-dollar motif at our outdoor wedding. (And you can ask my maid of honor—that was no cakewalk.) My husband's progressive stances are largely what drew me to him, but on this issue he was, surprisingly, firmly on the side of we-are-becoming-a-family-and-it-would-be-awfully-nice-if-we-had-the-same-last-name.

So I suggested we create a new one. He wasn't game, but one of my girlfriends was. After a few margaritas and a lot of

scribbling, we came up with "Schcosta." I thought it was jazzy. He didn't. We settled: It became the name of the signature drink at our reception.

I hinted all along that I probably couldn't lose Schworm altogether, but I was unsure where it would go. Drop the middle name I share with my mom? Have two middle names?

I knew I didn't want to hyphenate; complicating an already eyebrow-raising name was just flat-out dumb.

Two days after I got married, my mom was addressing mail to Kim Acosta. She, apparently, had no problem letting go. But hard as I tried, the only image I could conjure was a made-up Latina superhero.

SO THERE I WAS at the Social Security office a few months after we'd married. We were refinancing the house and I needed to just pick a damn name. I waited for my turn, thinking, getting sweaty. Up until the moment I was called, I thought I'd have two middle names, but even that felt like a betrayal. So I kept Schworm as my last name and added Acosta, minus the hyphen.

I've had some time to live with the new name, and it feels right, though State Farm added a hyphen on our insurance papers,

and on my driver's license "Acosta" is off to the side on its own line. My multiple identities still mix me up. When I went to vote, I bounded past the 10-person-deep "N-Z" line to the empty "A-M" area, loving Acosta like never before. Unfortunately, I was still under the S's.

I do like the idea that when we have kids, all of us will be linked by the same last name (well, sort of). And there are some jokes we can share, like the fact that Microsoft Word's spell-checker suggests "accost." And who knows? Someday, Kim Acosta may even feel like me, and Schworm will be there but not really there, like the silent "e" in love. ♦



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