

HE HATES SMITH

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Jeremy Smith, a graduate student in anthropology, doesn't like his last name. One afternoon at Donutland, where he works, he started telling me about the problems his name has given him. This transcript contains mostly quotes from Jeremy, with my words appearing in italics.

I'm going to change my last name sometime soon. Smith doesn't have much time left. Two years at the most.

A lot of people complain that they have problems with people mispronouncing their names. That probably happened to you. But it never happens to me. I want people to pronounce my last name wrong. People never ask me how to spell it, either. The only time is when I say "Do you want me to spell it?" Then they say "Yeah, is it spelled differently?" and I say "No," and that's it.

I used to have a list of reasons why I didn't like my last name.

People say "Change your last name to Smythe." No, that's not enough. Maybe Smite. I'd smite my old name away.

When I get married, I might do an anagram of my last name and my wife's last name, and change my name to that. Or maybe spell it Psmith with a silent P.

Smith means "maker of things, metal things". I thought about changing my last name to Maker. Smith's one syllable, the commonest name in the Western world. I might change my first name, too, It's getting too common.

People say to me "I can't remember your name. What is it again?" When I tell them Smith, they laugh and say "How could I forget that?" It's like a big joke.

It's so common that it's one of the few last names translated into Spanish: Esmiz.

Have you ever gone out with a girl named Smith?

No, but I'd like to. If I married someone named Smith, we'd both change our last names.

My father wouldn't like it if I changed my name. He'd want me to carry on the family name, but why?

I'll tell my children that they can change their name if they want to.

I might change my first name, too. Maybe I could change my first name to Smith.

How about naming a child Smith?

I like that. A little boy named Smith, or a little girl.

When I work at the gas station, every day the name Smith appears on at least one credit card. I say something to the person to show that we have something in common. But I told one guy and said maybe we were related, and he said "Probably not. My grandfather came over from Lithuania, and they couldn't spell his name, so they wrote Smith."

When my mother and father went to a hotel on their honeymoon, and he signed his name Smith, the hotel clerk didn't believe them. He thought something shady was going on.

Maybe I'll call myself Jeremy Alias. I'll pronounce it Ah-Lie-Us.

Unless a class is really small, there's always someone named Smith. And one time there was another Jeremy Smith, but he called himself Jeremy Shane Smith. My name's Jeremy Charles Smith.

How about dropping Smith and calling yourself Jeremy Charles?

My dad would like that. His father's name is Charles.

How about lettershifting SMITH, like IBM into HAL?

Hmm...just ICY and DOC. It's dull there, too.

Maybe your first name will lettershift better--TO, BOW, UP, SAM, WE, BOB. How about this line: FANAIV?

I could pronounce it Fan-I've. Jeremy Fanaiv.

Or call yourself Jeremy Fama,IV. Or anagram Smith to St. Him

Yeah, but people would think I was trying to make a gender statement, and I'd have to explain it.

Right! That's better than people not saying anything, isn't it?

Yeah, and I could make up something, some genealogy, to tell them. I want people to ask me how to spell my name.

Jeremy Banal. I might as well change it to Banal.

It's a doomed last name.