HELLO
— MY NAME IS —

Tiernan (TEE-EAR-NIN) shares her experiences with having a unique name.

▶ *an opinion of* **Tiernan Shank**   ▶ *photos by* **Maxx Lamb**

My 5th grade class had four Maddies, two Jakes, two Emilys and two Nicks. Teachers would get jumbled up trying to remember who was who and which was which. We kids would refer to them as Maddie C. or Nick K. Jake N. or Emily B. There was constant confusion with name games and playground activities. I've never had that problem. My name is Tiernan Bennett Shank and I was the only Tiernan in my elementary school. I was the only Tiernan in my middle school, and I am the only Tiernan in my high school.

The name Tiernan came from my grandpa. It's his middle name and before that it was my great grandmother's maiden name and before that I'm sure it belonged to dozens of my Irish ancestors where Tiernan is a common last name. So logically, the name came to lucky me, but not as a middle name — as a first name. My first name. The one name that people use to identify me. The name that's first on my birth certificate, drivers license, passport and all my school papers.

I've only met two other Tiernans (one a family member and one a family friend) — and trust me they are monumental events when they happen — but I've never been referred to as Tiernan S., but I have been called loads of other things: Turnan, Tierana, Kiernan, Tierney, Tiernon, Tiernoon, Tierean, Nanis and a personal favorite, Tina, just to name a few. There's even a red squiggly line underneath the name as I type this. Coaches, teachers, peers, basically everyone has scrambled it up at least once. It's a name that begs for misspelling, mispronouncing, and even misgendering.

Even with all these nicknames and mispronunciations, it's not all that bad having a name as bizarre as Tiernan. For starters, it's memorable. Since there aren't too many Tiernan's anywhere ever, it seemed to make running for class officer an easier job freshman year. At a time when all your peers are nervous 14-year-olds, it's difficult to make them focus on your name, remember it and then circle it during voting. Thankfully, my competitors were just another Alex and Anne, so I prevailed and even though I spent the entire year restating my name to various Student Council members, it was completely worth it.

Besides the fact that it's memorable, my name has also given me a decent sense of humor. In the 7th grade I was awkward to say the least. With my slicked-back ponytail and gap between my two front teeth, I was quiet, spastic and terrified of any embarrassment. But my name wasn't. It was loud, it made a statement. My parents' friends thought it was elegant and beautiful, two things I wasn't even close to during middle school. Meeting new people was a struggle. They'd ask my name several times and after awhile when they couldn't get it, they would give up and decide to just avoid me or avoid saying my name at all cost. After awhile I learned to just tell people my name was "T" it made it easier for me and people liked saying it. Some of my best friends still call me "T" to this day.

I've learned to expect people messing up my name, but the worst offenders are substitute teachers. In middle school, while most kids were rejoicing over the fact that we had a sub, I was in a state of fear. Once roll was taken, I'd be fine, and could celebrate the loss of learning because our inept sub couldn't control a group of rowdy middle schoolers. But those painful 10 minutes before, during and immediately after attendance was taken, with the lingering effects (snickers) from the mispronunciation, were traumatizing.
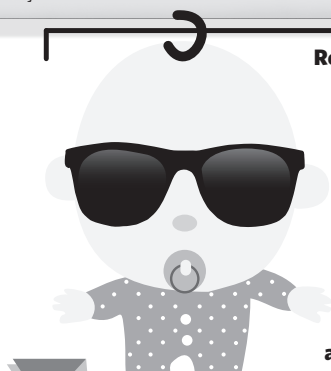
Today, I can handle the subs. Coming from middle school to high school I've slowly developed a thicker skin by using my sense of humor. Instead of reacting with embarrassment I can just let it fly over me. To be honest, it is funny. If a teacher called one of my peers Tina or Tiernana, I'd probably laugh. Now, I don't wish I could drop dead when the substitute teacher takes out the small three ring binder I know so well as host of the roll list. I now know when it's coming and can usually mentally prepare so I can avoid turning a burnt au-

burn color when she says my name. The sub reads the names in alphabetical order, she slowly moves down the list to the R last names and the next thing I know it's on me. She pauses, puts on her reading glasses, and leans closer to the roll book, her nose almost touching the list of mostly common names. Then, she decides to "just go for it" and insecurely she spits out "Teeman?" The class erupts in laughter and I correct her. She'll repeat it a couple times out loud, and if it's a morning class she might even remember for a whole 30 minutes.

Substitutes haven't been the only offenders. When my 7th grade gym teacher, Coach Salerno, called me "Turnan" in a thick New Jersey accent for the entire year, I was forced to laugh alongside my peers. Coach would take role, bungle up my name, and then ask me to do a quick demonstration of alley handball for the class. Hearing the echo of "Turnan" followed by chuckles sweep through the gym, I would lift my shrimp of a body up from the floor and make my way to the court. As I walked across the gym listening to the laughter of my peers, I decided I could laugh too. This once horrifying experience became a way to feel confident with my individuality.

The other day, even, a friend corrected a substitute's mispronunciation of my name, telling her to call me "Turdnan." I know you'll all call me this from now on, but don't worry; I can handle it.

The key to having a name like Tiernan is to smile and use the embarrassing experiences to your advantage. It's only taken me my entire life to realize those two things and they've made all the difference. But have I really learned my lesson? Am I planning on giving my own kid a name like Mary or Joe? No way. I'm dropping them off on their first day of kindergarten, automatically special, with a name like Wolfgang. So thanks mom and dad for giving my kid and me a tough skin and a way to stand out, I'm sure we'll thank you for it someday.

Real celebrity baby names that are funny, weird and just hard to pronounce. Because their kids wouldn't be in the spotlight enough anyways.

1 Gwyneth Paltrow **+** Chris Martin **=** HELLO my name is **APPLE**

2 Jason Lee **=** HELLO my name is **PILOT INSPEKTOR**

3 Nicolas Cage **=** HELLO my name is **KAL-EL**

4 Jermaine Jackson **=** HELLO my name is **JERMAJESTY**

5 Steven Spielberg **+** Kate Capshaw **=** HELLO my name is **DESTRY**

TOP 5 CELEBRITY BABY NAMES