

Interviewee: Lisa Mueller (A married woman who kept her last name for familial and feminist reasons)

Interviewer: Hershall Cook

What exactly would you call your “last name story?” Why did you decide to keep the name Mueller instead of Dillard? I was married when I was twenty-four. Jack Dillard and I had been a couple for a long time prior to our getting married and I had always had my name. It seemed, um, in addition I had gone to law school and the people whom I had known at that time knew me as Lisa Mueller. I somehow felt I had no desire to change my name, and I liked my name and it was a tie to my family heritage

So it was more of a family name that you cared about than like, your professional standing? I think there were multiple motivations. I think I liked my name, I liked the link to my family. I didn't feel, and also, you know, I knew at that time, which would have been the late seventies, early eighties, that it was a way of carving out an individual identity. Do you think it had any connection to feminism? I know that was during the second wave feminism there. Yeah. No, I think it did. I do think it did. For generations, women had taken the names of their husbands without really considering it just as a matter of...Yeah, just as a matter of tradition. Tradition. And it never, it wasn't an issue. And it appealed to my sense of individualism, I think at that time to, you know, to maintain my individual identity.

Interesting. Did you ever consider doing some combination like Mueller-Dillard or Dillard-Mueller for James and Connor? No, I think when we had children, it was pretty easy for us to decide that they should have only one name...There were other friends of ours who were doing all kinds of things, like some were going the hyphenated route, some were having one name as the middle name and then the second name as the last name...We had some other friends who combined last names. So, like...? So, I'll give you the example, it's a crazy name. The father's name was Negri, he was from a Turkish tradition. the woman's name was Vanderbeak. Those are both fantastic names. Very cool names. Negri and Vanderbeak. So their children were named VanNegreak. That's great! So there you have it.

Have there been any unforeseen consequences regarding your last name decision? It never bothered me. The person who has had the most difficulty is my father in law. Really. Was he a very traditional person? He would not say that he was a traditional person, but I think it rattled him somewhere, that I didn't take the Dillard name...The way it comes out is in how he addresses us. It's gotten to be kind of a joke between Jack and I because he's come up with every conceivable mutation of the two names. He's hyphenated them both ways, he's come up with various titles--You know, I think Muellard, that would be a good name. And we have some friends who refer to us as the Muellards, just because, again, of our generation. Although, in that couple, the wife did take the husband's name.

What do you think of the concept of a woman being 'erased' by marriage? Do you believe keeping one's last name is an effective way to counter the erasure? I think it is hard to separate the political and the personal in some sense because obviously I think doing this is making some political statement. But I don't think I had a value judgment about other people's choices. So, for example, I think you find some women who were advocates for keeping your name. They would say, "Oh, you have to keep your name or, if you take his name, you're contributing to the oppression of women." And I never felt that way. I always felt like it might be beneficial to me professionally, I like my family name...I was maintaining the identity I had had all my whole life.