

Interviewee: Jill Tiefenthaler (retained maiden name for personal, professional, familial reasons)

Interviewer: Erik Laitos

[Intro, consent] *Tell us a little bit about the origin of your last name.* My last name is German. It means 'deep valley' in German, and I grew up in a small farming community in northwest Iowa where there were around 14 or 15 families in the phone book that were Tiefenthalers, and this is a town of 500 people, so very small. My grandfather is first-generation American, his parents came over...he had many siblings and they all settled in the area there. German Catholics, which is very...obviously came over in response to the Reformation. That is the origin of my last name.

*Specifically with respect to you, what is your last name story?* For Jill Tiefenthaler, how did you decide to keep your last name, or why? In sort of a weird way, I just never really assumed I would give it up. So when my husband proposed, and shortly after we discussed it, I think he wasn't surprised I had no intention of giving it up, having been together for several years. So we did talk a little bit about at that time whether we might pick another option, which was for us to both keep our names, which was one, we never really discussed me taking his name or him taking mine. We did talk about taking a hyphenated name for us, which some people do, but we decided that 'Tiefenthaler' was too long. And when we had children we made the same decision, that rather than hyphenate for the two of them to have both of our names, that they would just have Rask rather than having 'Tiefenthaler-Rask.' But at that time I already had published as an economist, and had a network in my profession, and was known by name. So some of it was that, but I think more fundamentally even if it hadn't been for that I would've kept my name, just because that's who I thought I was.

*So just a personal identity. You could carve it up into three broader categories: a personal, a professional, and familial impetus.* Right, and I think it had all three for me. 'Cuz that connection to my family's really important to me. I do have a baby brother who has two boys who have the Tiefenthaler name. My sister chose to take her husband's name. But that identity, part of it was personal, but also it was being part of that clan, to some extent, and then it's hard to separate for me, being an academic, it's hard to separate the personal and professional. It's kinda part of your identity, all together. So I think all three of those things had an impact on my decision.

*So I understand that you're a parent, and you have two children...what has the effect been, if any, of the choice of your last name on them?* You know, it's funny, because they grew up on a campus at Colgate [University, New York], and there were lots of women there, academics who kept their names, and...they never really thought anything of it, my kids neither did. When we moved to North Carolina, it was the first time they really brought it up to me, because it was much less common, and they weren't in a rural community, they weren't around just academics, there were a lot of local folks. But I don't think in three of four years either of them has ever mentioned it one way or another. Every once in a while, the only issue becomes when Olivia or Owen's friends will call me 'Mrs. Rask' and we just roll with it, or one of the kids will say 'No, don't call her that, that's not her name!' But overall, I think it's very natural for my children. My daughter told me a while ago that she would like to consider adding 'Tiefenthaler' to her name, and we told her that she could decide when she's eighteen if she wants to do that. I didn't want it to be a fad. We did decide to give them 'Rask' rather than 'Teifenthaler' or 'Tiefenthaler-Rask.' Part of that was 'Tiefenthaler-Rask' was too long. And the other part was we...felt we would be sort of conventional, and it would be easier for them to have their dad's name.

*You mentioned that sometimes their friends call you Mrs. Rask, and I know obviously you say you 'roll with it,' so I don't know if it really offends you per se, but is there a sort of reaction in you that says, 'That's not my name!'* No, you know, there's not. I mean, there is a reaction, I notice it every time they do it, it doesn't feel natural, but I'm not offended, or take it as an insult or anything else. Just as I'm not a 'Mrs.' 'Mrs.' probably bugs me more than 'Rask.' We tend to, it was hard in the South, but Kevin and I always try to go by our first names with our kids' friends, and that just makes it easier... You know, it's funny because it matters a lot to me to keep my name, what people call me doesn't really matter either, so it's kinda strange. I think people who get all, people have said to me 'Isn't that hard on your kids?' No it's not hard... [laughter]

*You explained a little bit about the origin of your name, Tiefenthaler, and its German Catholic origin. So, do you have a role model, you mentioned your siblings, but do you have a role model for your decision to retain your name? I know you say it's personal...was there anyone in your family, or a friend perhaps, who did the same thing, or is it just you?* No, no, certainly none of my family members. It actually bugs my mom that I kept my name, 'cuz she likes to say my sister's name, 'the Maystads,' and my name 'the Rask family,' or whatever. So I think...my parents are pretty traditional, so...certainly they would've preferred...but my dad, I think, is kinda proud that I still have the name, too, especially now that my name is around. I think he, in particular, is proud that it's around. I can't think of any role models, I guess when you're in higher ed, all of the women, the few women that were in economics, my professors, some of my undergrad professors, but all of the three or four women at the PhD department at Duke all had their own, had kept their names. Many of them had multiple marriages, so it gets complicated...but I wouldn't say there was anyone I looked to and said, 'I want to do that because they did it' in a role model kind of way. *Was it maybe affected by your father, did you feel like maybe you would be betraying or abandoning him or anything like that, or your family generally?* No, no...coming from a farm community in Iowa, I think they were a little perplexed by it, but they also didn't give me any grief one way or the other.

[Intro to pros and cons] *What did you hope for in retaining this name, and we already mentioned those three impetuses, personal, professional, and familial; has that worked for you?* Yeah, I think it has. There are a few little annoyances of having kept my name, but they far outweigh just my sense that that's who I am. Again, it doesn't feel like any big decision to me, it feels really natural to be called the same name I have been all my life. So you mentioned there are little things that kinda irk you about it. Have there been any unforeseen consequences that you have gotten? I can't think of anything that's been really difficult. I mean, little things...about when you travel having to have a marriage license sometimes to prove that you are married when you don't have the last name, annoyances like that. The thing with people calling you the other name. Silly things like not being able, on your Christmas card, to put 'The Tiefenthalers' or 'the Rasks.' And you're trying to draw slashes or hyphens or goofy things. You can't have a doormat with a letter on it [laughter]. So there are little things in the world you realize that you are nonconventional in that sense, but nothing that I think has made any big difference or has ever made me regret my decision.

*Would you make the same choice again?* Absolutely. Yeah. Although I will say, this is kinda funny, it doesn't mean as much to me as it did when I made the decision. I think when I was younger and probably more activist in my feminism, it was more of a statement at the time, maybe more than right now, it feels more just like part of my identity. There I would've been

willing to fight and battle to the death, now I'm sort of like, it's good and I like it, but if you had to pick your battles it wouldn't be probably the highest thing on my list.

*So the length of your name...and the fact that it's unique, is there anything about that that really interests you...? Yeah, it's funny, 'cuz sometimes when people say 'Wow, that's quite a name,' and they don't realize that it's my name, and I say 'Yeah, I could've had Rask,' and people are like, 'Wow, why didn't you take that name, that was so simple!' So I think my name is interesting, I like it, and people often ask me about it, and the origin, and what it means, and that kinda thing. My mother's family...both my mom and dad's family came...my grandparents were almost all first-generation Americans from Germany, so there's a very strong German heritage on both sides and my mom's side too...in that sense, it probably...speaks to the name being so clearly German, speaks probably more to my identity maybe than it would if I was half English or Irish or whatever else.*

[Intro to implications for feminism] *How effective do you think your choice has been, relative to you in your sphere, do you think that that has been reflective of women being erased in society? You mean by taking names? If they take someone's name? Yeah. Eh, I don't think so. Again, for me it was the right choice. I would hope my daughter kept her name, but she can do whatever she wants. And I don't think women who take their husbands' name are in any way less of anything for having done so. I think feminism is about choice, and if it's truly a choice, and you really are making choices, not being forced to do anything, then I'm for everybody making those choices for themselves and their families. So the basis of choice is really central to you? Yep.*

*In your opinion, how meaningful for you is a woman keeping her father's, or father's father's, the patrilineal line, how much does that name retention mean to you? That doesn't mean a lot. I think it's more...let's say I had my mother's name. That wouldn't have made as big a difference to me as it was who I was my whole life. I think the bigger issue is the convention, certainly some people would say...like my kids took their dad's name rather than their mom's, and again we had a discussion about that, actually being somebody for twenty-seven years or whatever I was before I got married, and then thinking about changing that. For me that was the big issue, as opposed to thinking about it being my father's and his father's, etc. My mother's name is German too, as I mentioned, Polking. I see a lot of who I am in that family as well, even though I don't carry the name.*

*Same question, but with respect to the goals of feminism overall. So, retaining patrilineal naming for women: does that coincide with, or is it oppositional to, does it matter to feminist goals, do you think? Obviously it matters a little bit, because...its origin is obviously very opposed to feminism. But then there are some things in our society that... people do because of tradition, and how you balance what you shake off of tradition and what you keep, I think is hard to know. And back to my point about picking your battles, I think this one is...there are a lot more things that are a lot more important. Like violence against women, and people's assumptions about that, etc., as opposed to thinking about something like names. Although I won't pretend that that collection of history is not somehow related to the issues of violence and other things that are more serious. But I do understand tradition, and I've become probably more sensitive to that as I've gotten older than when I was younger, as I mentioned, where I would've probably fought to the death on this issue more than I would now [laughter].*

*Last question: what do you think that the generation of children with hyphenated names...what do you think they should do, especially girls, when they marry and have children. You know I*

have some friends, who when they got married they chose an entirely different name. *Yeah, that's one of the things we're reviewing in our study.* I think that's kind of a neat idea, especially if you had two hyphenated people getting together and thinking about what that means, eventually. Maybe you can take 'em all and squish 'em all into one name, or something, I don't know. Again, I think people can do whatever they want. I'm good if they want four names, or if they want one or, whatever they want to do, as long as it what people are comfortable with and make those choices. So, I say go for it! [laughter, conclusion]