

What's in a name?

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I will very shortly go to the St. Louis Airport and head back to Boston, and home, after a very busy week: five cities, countless book-signings, lots of people to meet. Many libraries, many bookstores...I only wish I'd had time to browse and read in all of them!

And in each place, someone I've known the past appeared! In the midst of signing book after book for strangers, there would suddenly be a familiar face, or name. In Dallas, a little girl named Grey, who was named for the son I lost, by her parents, who had been his good friends. An unusual name... a family name in our family...(and now my other son has a boy named Grey, for the uncle he never knew).

I love naming book characters. But it is never a difficult task because somehow the right names just come to me, as if they have been whispered into my ear by the characters themselves.

In my book [The Silent Boy](#), the main character is Katy, named for my own mother, who was a child herself in the years the book takes place, and whose actual childhood photographs are used as illustrations.

Many of my books have a minor character named Ben, just as a private joke between my son Ben and me.

But most of them—Jonas, Kira, even Anastasia and Gooney Bird— simply appear magically, even as the characters do, on the page.

And in [Gossamer](#) one of the main characters has no name at all, at least to us; she is simply The Woman. It seems odd, but halfway through the writing of the book, I realized that she didn't need a name.

My own name was changed when I was a tiny infant. I had been named Sena, for my Norwegian grandmother. But she sent a telegram to Hawaii, where I'd been born, ordering my parents to "Give her an American name." I have always wished that they had disobeyed.

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