

We are pleased to announce (if a tad belatedly) two exciting events in our life!

— We have had a baby —
— We have changed our last name —

Noah Kyle McNaughten Loving was born on July 15, 1996. Starting at about 7lb.11oz. and 21 inches, he is now about 18½lbs. and 28½inches. We chose the name Noah after we got to know him for a month—it comes from the Hebrew word for “restful” or “peaceful.” Noah is a bright, happy and undeniably mellow dude. We are so thrilled he is with us! We feel so privileged, (so tired), and so thankful.

The choice to change our last name came out of our strong desire to have a united family name. Here it seems better for each of us to write about our own choice to break tradition and consciously choose a different family name from the one we were raised with.

KATE: I knew how deeply I wanted to have all the members of my family share the same last name. Previously, I had kept my birth name Kinney throughout my first marriage and my marriage to Will. I had been known by that name in my painting business for 18 years. Now that I had stopped painting and my life was approaching the motherhood I had been anticipating since I was 21, everything was changing, and soul searching on all levels was in order.

The hyphenated double surname seemed unwieldy. Taking my husband’s surname was an option, but I only wanted to do that if Will and I had closely examined the historical roots of that tradition and chosen it as our best option together. Aspects of the expectation that a woman relinquish her birth or ‘maiden’ name (her father’s name) in order to assume her married name (her husband’s name), bothered me greatly. Granted things have changed a fair amount over the years, but the tradition goes back to the days when women were legally their husband’s property, there was no recourse for them in the event of abuse or rape within marriage, they were unable to own their own property or business and were thus completely dependent on fulfilling their husband’s wishes for their survival, and the man was righteously supported by society in being “king of his castle.” Of course not all marriages of old were built upon abuse of the woman, but the social traditions surrounding marriage *sanctified* such abuse.

I was willing to take McNaughten as my name because I had thoroughly thought it through and could contextualize the choice in a new and positive way. But wouldn’t it be exciting if we both wanted to take a new last name as a statement that our marriage is a consciously chosen partnership of equality and mutual empowerment?

Will and I decided that we would take a new name only if we found one that we both felt was right. Otherwise I would take McNaughten. Then I read of a couple whose last name was Loving. It is a surname that has been around in this country for a very long time. The more I contemplated assuming that name, the process became something more far reaching and profound for me than I could have anticipated.

I like the name Loving. And, in Quaker tradition, it is the primary vow that Will and I share in our marriage, to be loving. I also liked it because it is the active form of the verb—loving rather than love—reflecting the fact that my commitment to be loving is a function of my intention, just

like any other commitment of heart. Like a nourishing marriage, that commitment doesn't just happen once I decide on it. *I must make it so, day by day, moment by moment.*

But beyond my marriage, beyond my family, this whole matter had become a reflection of the deepest levels of my faith. Because I am not a member of a particular religion, I can't say that I am taking this name as does a Catholic at their confirmation or a Jew at their bat mitzvah. Yet though I do not have the official blessings of a priest or a rabbi, it is every bit as significant in my life, and in my relationship to God. I think a more fitting analogy is that of a nun that enters the convent and in so doing dons a habit as a daily reminder of her spiritual vows. In taking the name Loving, I am making a profound lifelong vow to God and to myself about what is at the core of my faith, my intention to be loving. If I am addressed without an understanding of that vow, it does not weaken or alter my commitment. If people know of and honor my vow, it can only help give me strength in the hardest of times. Regardless, I wear the name like that habit around my shoulders reminding me every day of my most essential purpose in being here, in being alive.

WILL: There was a point in our wedding ceremony where I made some longish statement which Katie followed with a simple, "ditto." In this case I am the one saying "ditto" since so much of what Katie has written above describes my own thinking, particularly about the historical aspects of names changes. And though I do feel our name change as a spiritual commitment as well, I arrived at the decision and think about it somewhat differently.

As a male raised in the U.S. I did not grow up assuming as most females do that I would most likely change my last name someday. It was not something I had ever considered because of the long-standing tradition of women taking their husband's name. At the point that Katie and I came together we were both running businesses which were very closely associated with our names. We were also widely known by our birth names as swing dance teachers and so a change seemed both unnecessary and confusing for people at the time.

With the coming of Noah though, I felt as Katie did that I wanted us to have a unified family name. Although Katie had said she would be willing to take the name McNaughten, I felt that in the spirit of equality that is one of the cornerstones of our relationship I had to be willing to consider changing my name as well. This is something I think few men are willing to face and I did so with some trepidation, fearing what my attachment to my name might reveal about my own unconscious sexist attitudes.

Over the years, though my last name McNaughten has often been misspelled, mangled or twisted (by teasing schoolmates), I have come to take a certain pride in it. Much of that has to do with the associations that people have with the name McNaughten connected to my father, to myself and the rest of my family, and to the businesses that I have established over the years. There is also my family history and the fact that I am named after my great-grandfather. I've enjoyed learning about some of the genealogy of the McNaughten lineage in this country including the fact the the first Neal (or Neil) McNaughten arrived here around 1720 and that there have been many William and Neal McNaughtens since then. McNaughten has been my identity and I have and still do like and have strong feelings for the name. As I examined all this, I realized that if we were to take a new name, I would have to like it as much or more than what I already had.

When Katie came to me with the name Loving I knew immediately that this was a name that I had to consider. It conveyed the unspoken, underlying commitment and focus of my life and dared me to take it on consciously and wear it for the world to see and hear. It also scared me because it was so daring and because I feared people might view it as pretentious. I have only

rarely been one to expose my true feelings and motivations in public, and I feared the self-consciousness of choosing and carrying such a bold name.

Yet, once I heard it, I did not think I could shirk back from considering it. After several weeks of sitting with it I told Katie that I wanted to go ahead, not because I was completely comfortable with it (I think that will take some time), but because intuition said that, yes, this is the right thing to do. It does express something important about me and about who Katie and I and Noah are together as a family. It also feels like a loving challenge to me personally to be worthy of the name, or as some have said, to simply notice that I already am worthy. This is in no way meant to imply that because we have chosen this name that somehow we are “loving” and others are not. It is simply what we have chosen to call ourselves, for the myriad of reasons we have described above, and to put forth what is most important to us in our lives.

There is an old tradition of taking the name of one’s trade, such as “Smith” or “Wright,” or in the case of one McNaughten family that changed it’s name, “Workman.” We have taken a name that describes in a sense our “trade,” the thing that we try to communicate with each other, our friends, our family, our co-workers and clients, and with all those we meet. I don’t see it as “new-agey” or “airy-fairy”, I see it as hard work that I do every day which requires constant personal examination and self-honesty. I am not always “loving” in my actions or thoughts, but it is my heart’s desire to be so.

I also do not see this change as a rejection of my family or my family’s name and our heritage. I love my family, I love the name McNaughten, and I appreciate the heritage of all the lines of my family, both male and female. I have kept McNaughten as my middle name and given it to my son as one of his two middle names. Katie and I feel strongly the importance of sharing with Noah his heritage and intend to do that in as many ways as possible. We will also fully support him in having whatever name he wishes to have when he grows up should he choose to drop Loving or to take some other name. He has a right to choose his own identity as we have chosen ours.

This has been a long explanation, but I think it has been necessary for us to communicate what this change is all about. I know that some people, including family members, have had and will have strong feelings about this and so I would like to close with a few words about tradition. When people, in any society, choose to not follow familial or cultural traditions, it is often upsetting, especially to those who may not have questioned the history, rational and larger cultural effects of those traditions. Traditions are wonderful, valuable reminders of who we are and where we came from; they are also in many instances the means by which injustices and inequality are perpetuated from generation to generation. Traditions should be, and in fact, are constantly being modified to reflect new awarenesses, new goals and new thinking. We free ourselves from the tyranny of the past when we choose to reinterpret tradition, keeping what is good and empowering, rejecting what is unfair and hurtful.

Katherine Sue Loving
William McNaughten Loving
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