

Ep #68: Uncommon Perspectives: Keeping Your Name



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Most women in the U.S. and many other countries change their names when they marry. When I married my partner 15 years ago I chose not to, and I'm going to share the why behind that decision and how it has affected me.

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Hey, everyone, welcome back. I am home from the Clarity Collective retreat and feeling amazing. I don't even care how coachy this sounds, but it was truly transformative for all of us, including me. If you listened to our last episode, you know that the theme was creating quantum leaps. Mine turned out to be a huge heart opening.

I never really knew what that meant. I'd heard the term; I heard it a lot in yoga when you're doing back bends. People would say, "Oh, this is a great heart opening pose." I'm like, what the fuck does that mean? But the way I felt it over those few days, was vastly expanding my ability to love.

It started out being about leadership, and stepping into a new level of leadership, both with my team and the movement that I'm leading through this community. It was amazing, because without knowing that the woman who was leading our Cacao Ceremony, cacao bean, chocolate...

I guess the difference by the way, PSA, the difference between cacao and cocoa is that cocoa comes from a roasted bean. But cacao comes from the raw fermented chocolate bean. It has just this really amazing earthy flavor. They often drink it without sugar. I think it's going to be my new coffee because you don't have that level of caffeine, but you definitely do have some very feel good chemicals in that, well, they call it medicine, but in that plant.

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So, the woman leading this ceremony gave me a blessing for heart centered leadership. And then, more and more things happened throughout the time there that really helped me tune in to what was going on and how I was starting to feel.

It was, of course, loving every woman that's heeding the call to an Uncommon Way of living, and building their own Uncommon Way in business. But also my love for my son and my husband, and my mom who lives close to us. I've just carried that back, and really still feeling it very powerfully today.

Anyway, while there, we got into some great conversations about uncommon living and making intentional choices; everything from polyamory to shorter work weeks. One thing I shared that I haven't talked about here yet, was my decision not to change my name when I married my partner 15 years ago.

Since I haven't added to the uncommon perspective series in a while, I decided to record this episode. So, this is for you if you're wondering about this for yourself should you decide to marry, or are thinking maybe about a hyphenated last name. Or maybe you already have adopted your partner's name, but you just want to thought game a decision that you never considered.

This is something that I have my clients do when we do reinvention work. Not necessarily about the name they chose, but about decisions in their lives that they made and might want to reconsider, think about reconsidering. Because it's great practice if you're trying to think of new ideas for yourself and new ways of being.

To look to your past and practice on decisions that have already been made. Now that you have a different perspective, you can see where you weren't making that very intentionally and you could have made a different decision. Then you get to try that on for size to see how that might have landed for you or felt for you.

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So much of our lives are spent on autopilot, doing the things we've been taught or that everyone else does, or that are based on decisions we made long ago, and then we just haven't bothered to reconsider. But to live an uncommon life, we need to be intentional, and we need to be committed to reexamining our choices as we grow and change.

Today, I'm just going to share my thoughts about this, which I still align with today, in case they're helpful for anyone else. The point of this episode is not to make a strong case for right versus wrong, or shaming anybody in any way.

There are so, so many ways each and every day that I act in ways that don't make a lot of sense from a feminist perspective. Just look at any picture of me and it's obvious that I'm a product of the society in which I live and was raised. I have long, wavy hair, I wear makeup, all the things. So 100% no shame.

But I know I appreciate it when someone has been able to clear their head on a certain topic, and then present me with thoughts that I maybe never considered, or am working on building up for myself. Then I get to think about them and redecide.

Sometimes there's something that doesn't sit with me really well anymore, but I'm just not ready to make the change. Like coloring my hair, for instance. I think it is so amazing, and I am so grateful to the many women who are growing out their grays, and even the young women who are normalizing that aesthetic by coloring their hair gray. It's great. I'll actually be talking about this topic more in a future episode, about why I don't.

But the point is, we are all on our journey. None of us are making decisions in a vacuum. I always trust that you are doing what's right for you in this moment. Okay, in no particular order, here were some of the things that influenced my decision.

Not all countries do it, and because of that, the fact that we do made it so completely arbitrary. In the Islamic world, the Spanish speaking world, China and Korea, there are even countries now that have laws against a

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woman taking her husband's name. So, I really never saw it as this glorified joining together of two parts.

I remember always thinking that it was a really strange custom. Now that I'm older and have looked into it, I can see it more within the historical context. I can see that it's not just a custom, it's actually the legacy of a pretty ugly chapter in history, when women were considered the property of a man, always, either their father or their husband.

In English common law, in the ninth century, there was this doctrine developed called the Doctrine of Coverture, which said, specifically, 'you have no legal sovereignty. You belong to your husband.'

Even the term "maiden" name, think about that. It's the name you have when you are a maiden, which is steeped in the idea of chastity, another patriarchal concept; then your married name. Even before I knew about the historical context, it struck me that this was really showing that the primary rite of passage for our lives was marriage.

Because there's no greater marker of who we are than our name, and yet who we are changes when we marry. But of course, in a heterosexual relationship, a man's identity does not change. Unless you are famous as a woman, or well known in some professional context, because then, somehow, you have earned the right to be who you are.

But it's not a default state for a woman. A woman has to earn this, which also points to worthiness through doing or accomplishing, which is, again, endemic in our society. That's a whole other conversation. So, for me, it seemed like lots of strikes adding up here.

I remember when we were engaged and talking about this at one point, my husband said, "So, you're keeping your dad's name for [inaudible] than mine?" That's a good point. It's not as if I was free from any patriarchal legacy by not taking my husband's name. But of course, how far back could I go in my matrilineal lineage?

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Because my mother had her father's name, and my grandmother had her father's name, and on and on and on. So, I at least figured, okay, but the buck stops here.

Which brings up another issue, what name to give your children? Now, I used to think... I, of course, had an answer for this because at about 12 or 13 years, I knew everything. Right? So, I thought it made a lot of sense for boys to inherit their dad's names and girls to inherit that their mom's names.

But something I was not thinking about at 12 or 13, I can now see how that really demonstrates a heteronormative bias. So, the solution seems to be that you choose your own last name when you're 18, or when you legally emancipate.

Now I have heard some women express concern about confusion that that would cause in the community, maybe at their child's school or among their acquaintances, friends, family. Or that it would hurt their partner's feelings. My husband, Ben, was always supportive. He said, "If that's the way you feel, that's what you're going to do."

Maybe I picked up on a little confusion from my husband's family, but that might have just been me projecting it. I don't know, they never said anything to me directly. But honestly, nobody else. I just say, "This is my son's name, this is my husband's name, and I have a different last name," Then I give the mine.

Or if I give my husband's name first, then I'll just say, "My last name is Harrison." I have never gotten anything more than 'okay,' as they're typing it in. There's never been an issue. If someone calls me by my husband's name, which is very common because we live on military bases, so everyone knows me through him and his role, I just answer. It's not a big issue for me.

Then if, of course, I'm going to know them more, if we're closer or if we're going to be working together in some way, then I'll say, "Oh, and by the way, my last name is actually Harrison." Again, people just go, oh.

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Now, this episode is not meant to be a comprehensive discourse on the pros and cons of this decision. Because for me it really didn't require a lot of thought. For me, it was something that never sat well with me, and I knew I wouldn't be doing it.

But since I did have a defined perspective on it, I thought I would just come here and share it, in case it was helpful for any of you. And since I did have a defined perspective on it, and for those who know human design, I do have a defined Ajna, which means that I have a pretty clear perspective on many things.

And so, if that is helpful for you to solidify your decision in either way... maybe just through pretend-arguing against me, you've come up with exactly why you do want to take your partner's name. Either way, fantastic. Go live your uncommon life, make your intentional choices, and I don't know, maybe drop me a DM or something, or an email and let me know.

All right, you all have a wonderful week, and I'll talk to you next time.

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