

A Name

David means beloved.
 Peter is a rock. They named me
 Linda which means beautiful
 in Spanish—a language
 I never learned.
 Even naked
 we wear our names.
 In the end we leave them behind
 carved into desktops
 and gravestones, inscribed
 on the flyleaf of Bibles
 where on another page
 God names the generations
 of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Homer cast a spell with names
 giving us the list
 of warriors and their ships
 I read my children to sleep by.
 There are as many names underfoot
 as leaves in October;
 they burn as briefly on the tongue,
 and their smoke could darken
 the morning sky to dusk.

which means, among other things, committee meetings—and why I'm also the chairperson of our newly minted Mitzvah Committee—a committee that, thankfully, doesn't require committee meetings. You have to understand: As a child, and through my teen years, I was so hostile to organized Judaism in any form that I played hooky from Sunday school for an entire year before my parents wised up and figured out that I wasn't going to make the date for my bat mitzvah any time soon. I was so bored in services that I could feel my brain cells dying. The various Hebrew teachers whose misfortune it was to attempt to teach me all gave up in despair, figuring me for another kid lost to the temptations of the prosperous American suburbs. I went to college, dated a Catholic boy, and worshiped Tolstoy and James Joyce. And even in adult

Remember the boy of seven
 who wandered the Holocaust alone
 and lost not his life
 but his name? Or the prince whose name
 was stolen with his kingdom?

When I took my husband's name
 and fastened it to mine
 I was as changed
 as a child
 when the priest sprinkles it
 with water and the name
 that saves it a place in heaven.
 My grandfather gave me a name
 in Hebrew I never heard,
 but it died with him.
 If I had taken that name
 who would I be,
 and if he calls me now
 how will I know to answer?

LINDA PASTAN

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life—after I'd wrestled with and reclaimed my Jewish heritage—I wasn't exactly involved in Jewish communal life. Actually, I didn't much like the giant synagogue that we attended when we lived in Washington—stuffed full of congressmen and assorted policy wonks. I didn't much like the High Holiday rush hour, with its attendant car and fashion show. Plus, I didn't know any of our fellow congregants. And if any one of my three children started acting like children, all kinds of people gave me mean looks, and I had to shush the kids and haul them away.

But now, our synagogue, Beth Shalom (the more traditional of Baton Rouge's two Reform temples), is as much a part of our lives as our own home, and the friends we've made there form the warp and woof of our lives. I don't want to go on a brag-

fest here, but I've simply never seen a more devoted, more involved, more committed group of congregants—people who, across income, gender, age, and class lines routinely devote large chunks of their time to fostering joyous Judaism. The irony is that we found it here, in a parochial, sprawling, industrial southern city perched between swamps, in a Reform congregation where people greet each other by saying "Shalom, y'all." Every time a child becomes a bar or bat mitzvah, for example, the entire congregation turns out for the event, which is seen as the achievement of the entire community. After all, the kids don't belong just to the parents; they belong to the entire congregation. As babies, they crawl up and down the aisles in their diapers during services; later on, they run up and down the aisles. Later still, they start Sunday school and then Hebrew school. By the time they hit thirteen, they jump up onto the bimah to do the full Friday night and Saturday morning ritual, including chanting the Torah and Haftarah, delivering a dvar Torah, and leading prayers. The amazing thing is, they all do it. I've never seen anything like it. OK, maybe this kind of thing is standard fare in Crown Heights. But this isn't Crown Heights, and our kids don't have access to an array of yeshivot.

What they do have is access to an array of Catholic and Episcopal schools, which for many Jews represents the best educational opportunity for their children. (The public schools can be dicey.) My three children attend two different Episcopal schools, where they keep kosher, miss school on the Jewish holidays, and make Santa Claus heads out of papier-mâché and cotton balls every December. You try sending a very bright, somewhat hyper, extremely verbal eight-year-old to a church school and see what kinds of questions he brings to the dinner table. Our eight-year-old is, in fact, the darling of the lower school chaplain, in part because he's so outspoken—pointing out, for example, that what Christians call the Old Testament is what Jews call the Hebrew Bible—and in part because he knows his way around biblical ethical issues pretty well. ("But, just like in the prophets, we Americans have turned our backs on the poor...") And the religious stuff he gets at school he brings home as well. "But, you