

## I'm still hoping for a Tim revival

My breed, the Tims, are disappearing. The name Timothy has been sliding for decades; in 2009 it fell to 110th in popularity among male names. This is how you get old — one day your name is part of the mainstream, the next you have an unfashionable, geezer-certified moniker. We Tims can now join the old-timey ranks of the Walters, Harolds and Alberts.

Timothy was once hot — it ranked as high as number 11 in three different years, including 1966 (the year of my birth). Timothy remained in the top 20 until 1970, and the top 30 until 1990. Then the bottom fell out: Timothy plummeted from number 39 in 1994 to 84 in 2005 to its current 110 spot.

My wife has it even worse — she was saddled with the name Heather before it was properly in vogue. Heather charted as high as number three in 1975, but now languishes at a dismal 558.

So what's big these days? The Social Security Administration, which provides these figures, lists Jacob as the most popular boy's name for the last 12 years. On the girls' side, Emily also had a 12-year run, but in 2008 it was displaced by Emma, which in turn lost out to Isabella in 2009.

I'm tempted to mock the front-running Jacobs, just to take the wind out of these tykes' sails, but this is probably the name many readers of this good paper have bestowed upon their male child, so I'll refrain. Jacob has enjoyed a spectacular rise: It was ranked a lowly 351 in my mid-1960s heyday, entered the top 20 in 1990 and now sits atop the pile. But Jacobs, don't get smug — you'll fall one day, and it won't be pretty. An obscure name can't go out of style, but when a fat cohort of 70-year-old Jacobs is running around with precious few 40 and 20-year-olds behind them, it will sting mightily.

There are a handful of consistent winners among boys' names — Michael and Joseph never seem to go out of style — but in general names are subject to fashion. The fad aspect is even more pronounced for girls' names. The top five names for girls from 2000 to 2009 were Emily, Madison, Emma, Olivia and Hannah. Emily was relatively popular in the 1970s (number 66), but Madison didn't even crack the top 1000 mark until 1984. Ever meet anyone over the age of 15 named Madison? Emma was no world-beater 30 years ago either, ranking number 446 for the 1970s, while Hannah and Olivia checked in at numbers 452 and 316, respectively. In the 1970s, Jennifer, Amy, Melissa, Michelle, and Kimberly reigned; all are now "mom" names consigned to the dust bin of history.

Having a popular name isn't necessarily a good thing. Who wants to be common really? But what one should be shooting for is consistency. The steep drop-offs are bad — it's like making the all-star team and then losing your starting spot the next year to some up-and-comer. Better steady as she goes, year in year out attracting new recruits while maintaining the base. I don't need to be number 11 again; I've had my day, but perhaps Tim could consistently hover in the 30-60 range. The name wouldn't be too common, but there would be enough new blood to keep it current. But number 110 and falling, that's depressing. Of course, it's possible that Tim has already hit bottom — it's notoriously difficult to time the market — and will have climbed back into the 90s by this time next year.

On the other hand, Timothy could easily go as low as the three or four hundreds before rebounding.

I am hoping for a 2040 Tim revival (when I really will be old and not just have an old person's name). Perhaps Tim will become a trendy retro name, and a powerful Timothy vogue will have hit such that the preschools will need to designate Big Tims, Little Tims, Curly Tims and Baseball Tims, just to keep things straight.

In the interim, I suppose I could change my name to Jacob or Ethan, but then again maybe not; in order to fit in I'd need to recruit a bunch of 8-year-olds as friends, and that could be a little weird.

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