

# The Family Name

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A surname's legacy of wealth may precede you, but you can choose whether and how it defines you.

## Your family name inheritance

Your family name is an inheritance that you receive at birth. From that moment onward, no matter where you are, your surname is always with you. Whether it is a school attendance list, a C.V. for a job interview or a nametag at a networking event, your last name is on display. Furthermore, if your last name is famously associated with wealth, your identity is intrinsically linked to the family fortune in a very public way. "I always knew that my family was very well known – because in every bar, there was a beer with my surname on it", a young adult member of the Guinness family has said.

Although it may be daunting to know that certain opinions about you could be based solely on your surname's legacy of wealth, you can be strategic about seeking out opportunities to develop and enhance your individual identity.

## The public perception of you based on your family name

A high-profile family name attracts attention. This notoriety may open doors for you, but it may also leave you open to uncomfortable assumptions, comparisons and judgments. Acquaintances and people whom you have never met may have preconceived notions about:

- your lifestyle (e.g. "Her walk-in closet must be full of designer labels.")
- your physical appearance (e.g. "I don't see the family resemblance. Is your family 'the' Junipers?")
- your education (e.g. "Of course he attended the best University. His family probably made a large donation to get him in.")
- your career aspirations (e.g. "Your uncle is someone whom I have always admired. Are you planning on following in his footsteps?")
- your hobbies (e.g. "He must have a lot of time to practice because he doesn't need to work for a living.")

- your industry, political, or religious affiliations (e.g. "It is only a matter of time before she joins the family business. I would be shocked if she didn't.")
- your social connections (e.g. "Did you attend the wedding of Phil and Nadia? I heard that all of the who's who of the city was there!")

However, no matter what the presumptions about you may be, your family name is only one aspect of your identity.

## Creating good conditions for your individual identity to blossom

Developing an individual identity that is on equal footing, at least from your perspective, to your family name will allow you to have a balanced view of who you are. Eileen Rockefeller has said: "I am [now] just as much "Eileen" as I am a "Rockefeller""<sup>3</sup>. Here are 3 suggestions:

### 1. Adopt an entrepreneurial mindset about your life

This does not mean that you should necessarily become an entrepreneur. Rather, no matter what you want to do or how you want to live your life, have a spirit of adventure about your future and a desire to be true to yourself. The character traits that the wealth originator of your family had most likely included having a unique point of view and a willingness to persevere despite any naysayers and critics. If this is the case, you are following family tradition by forging your own path.

For example, the granddaughter of a late Canadian media innovator has said: "I think I have a lot of [my grandfather]...in me. He was all about standing up for what you believe in, and believing in yourself, and always questioning why things have to be certain ways"<sup>4</sup>. His positive influence on her was so impactful that, although she uses her married surname, she made the on-trend choice of continuing the legacy of her maiden name by giving it to her eldest child as a first name<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Expand your geographical horizons

The public perception of your family name will be more intense in the town, city, or country that is your family's home-base. Studying, travelling or living at a distance for a period of time will give you breathing room to be your own person.

A life stage may create the perfect opportunity for such a getaway. The eldest daughter of former U.S. President Barack Obama took a gap year involving travel prior to beginning her studies at Harvard University, of which her parents are alumni. Her gap year also coincided with the last year of her father being in office, and was a way for her to begin the transition out of being a President's daughter and into her own independence - which included supporting causes that she believes in<sup>6</sup>. A peer, who is a U.S. actress and activist, had nothing but praise for her saying that "it [is] amazing to...witness a human being and a woman coming into her own outside of her family and outside of the attachments that this country has on her...someone who's willing to participate... regardless of her last name"<sup>7</sup>.

## 3. Engage in values-based activities

Being in the public eye because of a family name may mean that the attention that you receive is due to what someone else within your family has achieved instead of what you have done yourself. In order to foster your own sense of accomplishment, regularly engage in activities where you feel that you are challenging yourself and are the one who is providing value to others (e.g. mentoring, volunteering, advocacy, philanthropy, etc.).

For some, such activities turn into a life calling. This evolution occurred for the young adult son of a prominent family in Beijing, China. He, his wife, and a friend are co-founders of a non-profit contemporary art museum located in the art district of Beijing that

mainly features his private collection. He describes his art acquisition process in the following manner: "I only buy something that can touch me, teach me or enlighten me with new perspectives to look at the world and life. I enjoy the experience of discovery"<sup>8</sup>. When sharing his enthusiasm about becoming a name in the burgeoning local art scene that is engaging young people, he explains: "My life felt boring before...I am very privileged and want to give back to society"<sup>9</sup>. The gallery's name consists of an initial and the English language translation of his surname<sup>10</sup>.

## Entertaining surname-related activities

There are also ways to lighten up your feelings about a weighty surname. Entertaining activities that involve embracing your family name include:

- Researching the many other last names that form part of your family tree
- Developing a positive family surname motto based on a character trait highlighted in a family story (e.g. "Junipers never give up!")
- Finding out the meaning or origin of your last name (e.g. Junipers are a popular and diverse range of hardy evergreen trees or shrubs, and Juniper berries are traditionally used along with other botanicals to flavour gin<sup>11</sup>)
- Referring to the family pet by its given name and the family name when talking to it (e.g. "Let's go outside, Chewy Juniper")
- Creating a unique wine or perfume blend bearing your surname (e.g. The Juniper)
- Having a personality trait handwriting analysis done of your signature

\*The views in this document are those of the author.



### About the author:

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<sup>1</sup> "Inviting Us Inside Her Tuscan Home: Amber Guinness On Love, Italy And Her Famous Family" in Hello Canada Magazine, No. 621, August 2018, at pages 9 to 11.

<sup>2</sup> Juniper is a fictional surname that is used in this paper for illustrative purposes.

<sup>3</sup> Being a Rockefeller, *Becoming Myself: A Memoir* by Eileen Rockefeller, The Penguin Group, 2013, at page 2.

<sup>4</sup> "Lydia McLaughlin – Editor in Chic" by Amanda Storey for Dolce Luxury Magazine on March 24, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> "Millennial Moms Making Their Last Name A Child's First Name" by Alison Bowen for The Chicago Tribune on October 25, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> "Malia Obama's Gap Year: A Fad Not Just for Presidents' Kids" by Max Kutner for Newsweek on May 2, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> "Malia Obama Ditches Palm Springs For Sundance Pipeline Protest" by Jayme Deerwester for USA TODAY on January 28, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> "Below The Surface: Lin Han And The Art Of Collecting" by Peggy Yuan for The South China Morning Post on May 20, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> "Children Of The Chinese Super-Rich Aren't All Burning Money: The Next Generation Of Wealthy Chinese Are Revamping Their Shallow Image And Falling In Love With Art" by Virginie Mangin for BBC Capital on May 28, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> "An Art-Lover's Guide To Beijing's 798 Art District" by Fran Lu for Culture Trip on September 27, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> The Plant Encyclopedia at the website of Better Homes & Gardens magazine, and "The 10 Most Popular Botanicals in Gin, Explained" by Nick Hines for Vinepair on October 25, 2017.

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