

**Essay #1:**  
**My Name Is High**

Three years ago when I decided to get specialized license plates for my car, I chose to have them read "M-S H-I-G-H" to see what kind of reactions it would get. What I didn't expect, however, was that very few people would know what it meant. I thought it was obvious that the plates read "Ms. High." This situation is a classic example of the problems associated with having a last name of "High." Having "High" as a last name means that you have to tolerate constant disbelief, misspelling, and ridicule of your name.

A person's first reaction to hearing my last name is disbelief. For some reason, people just can't accept the idea of having a simple last name. For example, shortly after I started a particular job, one of the employees I worked with said that she thought I was a "drug addict" when she saw my license plates. Another time I took my car into a garage to get an estimate of repair on the body damage. The first thing the mechanic did was inspect the car's dents and write down my license plate number, but he didn't say anything. We then went into the office where he finished writing up the estimate. When he asked me for my last name, I responded, "It is spelled, H-i-g-h." he immediately said, "Oh, **Ms. High!**, I thought your license plate was referring to your high school." On another occasion, my brother, Scot also decided to get special license plates. Scot chose to have his say "I-M H-I-G-H 2." When he went to the cashier at the Department of Motor Vehicles office with his request, they told him he couldn't put "an obscene message" on the plates. Only after showing the clerk his driver's license to prove that High was his last name, did she allow him to have the message on his plates. Another example of this constant disbelief was when I went to the personnel office where I now work to fill out some papers. When I was talking to the people in Personnel, one of the girls told me that when she first saw my name, she asked the other girl, "Is this her **real** name?"

Once I finally get a person to accept that my name is really "High" I then must spend

## Essay #1 – “My Name is High”

another ten minutes trying to get them to spell it right. As I mentioned earlier, a person's first response to hearing my name is disbelief. The second response is "How do you spell it?" Once, when I was on the phone, the person I was speaking to asked me what my last name was. I gave my usual response, "High, H-i-g-h." I later received a letter addressed to "Miss lhigh" from that person. I have also on other occasions received mail addressed to Miss Hith, Miss Hyde, Miss Hight, Miss Hi, Miss Highland, and even Miss Hill. I have finally decided the best response to this question is, "It is spelled....H-I-G-H." I have discovered the hard way that spelling my name without saying it, and seeing it in writing are the only two ways of ensuring that the person will get it right.

After I have **finally** convinced a person that my last name is simply "High," they usually laugh and start telling me some "High" jokes. For example, whenever Paul, a man I work with walks by, I say, "Hi!" He immediately responds, "Jones!" Also, whenever John walks by and I say, "Hi!", he responds. "No, you are High; I am Smith!" The first time I ever heard, "Hi, High!" I was in the second grade. Among the many other jokes I repeatedly hear are: "Hey, High, are you **High**?" "Hey High, why are you so short?" "High, Kathleen!" Or, "I wish **I** was high." Since my brother, Scot, is 6'3" tall, he is always called "Sky High."

In conclusion, I tend to pause after being asked my last name and I think to myself, "I hate this question" because I know what to expect next: first, disbelief; then my name misspelled; and finally, endless ridicule. I put up with the ridicule because the benefit of a new last name is not enough justification for getting married. However, I can't understand why my mother and sisters-in-law would voluntarily take the name! I still think there must have been something wrong with them. I think my ex-sister-in-law was very wise to take back her maiden name after she and my brother were divorced.