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Katherine's Nickname

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Katherine DeBry
Logan, UT
November 14, 2017

“Katherine’s Nickname” Folk Speech

Informant: Katherine DeBry is my older sister. She is in her late 20s, a high school history teacher, graduate of USU, and is originally from Ferron, Utah. She is the middle child, having two older brothers, a younger sister (me) and a younger brother. Growing up she wanted to be tough, like her older brothers, and saw herself as a tomboy. As she got older, she grew in her love for being tough, but in a more independent way, rather than a masculine way. Katherine is a strong and independent woman with a passion for animals, history and the outdoors. She loves to read, learn, and memorize random facts. Katherine also enjoys camping, fishing, and riding horses, all while helping other people learn to do so. She currently lives in Ferron, Utah and works in Carbon County as a teacher as well as a field archeologist for the Forest Service in Emery County.

Context: I interviewed Katherine over the phone while she was heading home from work. We often talk on the phone, making this form of communication smooth and easy. Her nickname is a something we always bring up when either talking about childhood memories or introducing Katherine to a new friend for the first time. It’s not something that she openly shares with everyone, she said she was even embarrassed by it in her teenage years, but will freely give it when we ask. The nickname started when she was about 2 ½ years-old and was added at different times until she turned 8. She added different parts of the nickname at different times with each one signifying a different aspect of her personality, hobbies, or aspirations. She describes them as things that she felt defined her and set her apart from others. Katherine is an independent, headstrong individual and she wanted to pick things for her nickname that both defined and inspired her as an individual. As siblings we always loved trying to say it all. Garrett, our older brother, is the only sibling who has memorized it, the rest of us have only remember parts of it. She never wrote it down but would actually write “Katherine Lee Ponytail” on her papers in school and would get frustrated when her teachers crossed it out. When our brothers would try to add anything to it, especially some of the more embarrassing nicknames, she would adamantly tell them no and refuse to add them on. This is a nickname that she created, and she alone.

Text: Katherine-Lee-Ponytail-Buffalo-Rattlesnake-Ladybug-Pack Pack-Princess Jasmine-Lizard lips.

So Katherine is obviously my name, but I called myself “Katherine Lee Ponytail”. Because my nickname was “Ponytail”. But “Lee”, after Lee Moss. I admired him and I feared him. [pause]

And I have this memory of him hypnotizing chickens. And you remember how, how much I

loved animals. Well I thought he was magic. And so I named myself after him because I equated the name “Lee” with animal magic. I don’t know why, it’s really weird. But as a little kid, he was a wizard. So I was like basically naming myself after a wizard, “Katherine-Lee-Ponytail”. Um, [pause to take long breath] yeah.. I know, it’s weird. As a little two-year [interrupts thought] So “Ladybug” came from how much I loved ladybugs and Grandma Vay gave me a ladybug bracelet, that I actually still have. Um, that I have for one of my daughters when they’re born. It’s tiny, tiny, tiny. I don’t even, I had to be tiny to be able to wear it. So, “Katherine-Lee-Ponytail-Ladybug” [realizes she messed up order] Oh no, sorry. “Buffalo Rattlesnake”. Okay, “Buffalo” came from the, so I love animals- that’s where most of the animal ones come from. So “Buffalo” came from our first trip to Yellowstone when I was little. Because I thought buffalos were awesome because Indians hunted them, [chuckles] so I put “Buffalo” in my name. “Rattlesnake” because we live in the desert, and rattlesnakes are scary and vicious and intimidating, and I wanted to be a tomboy and intimidating. And then “Ladybug” because I love ladybugs and the bracelet that Grandma gave me. And I think that happened when I was six when Grandma died and it was putting something in it I associated with Grandma in it. “Pack Pack” came from my first day of preschool. And “Pack Pack” was actually part of it before ladybug and it was before Buffalo too, Buffalo came later. I added things in different orders. Yeah, “Pack pack”, because that’s what I said for back pack and I loved my pack pack. I don’t even remember what it looked like but I remembered that I loved it. “Princess Jasmine” because she’s the most legit princess, and she has a pet tiger. And “Lizard lips” because I loved lizards, I absolutely loved lizards. [pauses and takes long breath] It’s weird, it’s a weird nickname.

Texture: Katherine had to say the nickname really fast, as if to say it more out of a habitual rhythm, making the comment that it flows out easier when she says it fast. When she says it slow she gets jumbled up and has to concentrate on it more, and usually has to start over to get

the rhythm right. When she has said it in person she points her finger in the air for each nickname, tapping each word as if in the air as she says it. She also will look up at the ceiling with her eyes squinting in concentration. When she finishes saying it she'll look down, make eye contact and smile or laugh, often putting her hands in the air and shrugging her shoulders. Growing up she said it with a lot more pride, almost as a way to show off. Now she says it with a little less pride but still with endearment. Even though she doesn't think about it everyday, like she used to, she still enjoys saying it when we ask. What came more naturally during the interview was when she explained the history behind each of the names. She was quick to recall them, laughing at different times, more at herself than anything.

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