

# If name's not sexy, judge might help

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The name her parents gave her is so heinous, so cruel, that she rarely speaks it. It comes out of her mouth as a two-syllable shudder.

Sheila.

"I absolutely hate it, " Ranea Crabtree said. "I think it's really ugly."

Crabtree has gone by her middle name since she was a teenager, and now, as the mother of two teenage girls herself, she's ready to dump Sheila. On Feb. 11, the Pataskala woman will stand in front of a Licking County judge and ask him to change her name to another S-word, one she likes much better.

Sexy. Yes. Sexy.

"I wear Victoria's Secret clothes all the time, " said Crabtree, who doesn't want you to know how old she is. "I was like, 'Shoot, I'll just go for Sexy.' "

Hundreds of people change their names in Licking and Franklin counties every year, but it's rare to see a Sexy Crabtree.

Judge Robert Hoover, who will hear Crabtree's case in Licking County Probate Court, said most name changes stem from domestic-relations issues. A woman decides to finally ditch her married name after a divorce. Mom chooses to square up the kids' last name with hers. An adopted adult reclaims a biological parent's name. A transgender person wants a name to reflect a new identity.

The process is fairly simple: Fill out a form, pay a court fee (\$108 in Franklin County; \$87 in Licking), pay for a notice in a local newspaper at least 30 days before the hearing, and then go to that hearing and plead your case. Hearings are usually brief, and most name changes are approved, said Michael R. Moran, chief counsel for Franklin County Probate Court Judge Robert Montgomery.

Then again, most aren't that unusual. Of the more than 1,600 name changes granted in 2012 and 2013 in Franklin County, few requests stand out. Rubbie became Ruby. Derrill became Pepper. Clyde became Genghis. Princess Tiffany dropped her royal title, while Daisha picked it up.

Ricky Ricardo settled for just plain Ricky.

A person requesting a name change need only show the nebulous "reasonable and proper cause" to get it approved. Denials happen when a person is a registered sex offender or has been convicted of identity fraud, or is clearly using a name change as a way to avoid creditors or the law.

But judges and magistrates can deny names for other reasons, too. More than a decade ago, a Franklin County magistrate refused a man's request to change his name to Santa Claus -- because, the story goes, he didn't want kids one day reading Santa Claus' obituary.

In Licking County, Hoover once denied a man's request to change his name to Tasmanian Devil, though he did allow the first name Taz. He denied the request of a young woman who no longer wanted to be known by her nickname -- "B.J." -- and thought "Winnie Pooh" might be more appropriate. He didn't agree.

Last year, he allowed a woman to change her last name to StoneKeepTalkingTree, but five years ago he denied the request of a woman who rode a horse to the courthouse and walked in wearing a bathrobe. She said something about conducting the Last Supper and poisoning her husband afterward. She wanted to be known as Jesus Christ Lord & Savior.

"I denied that because I wasn't certain she was fully competent, " Hoover said.

Hoover wouldn't talk about Crabtree's case because he hasn't heard it yet. But Crabtree's not too worried.

"He's going to change my name for sure, " she said this week.

She was lying on her couch, posing for a photographer. Her brown hair was curled. The big sequins on her shirt sparkled. She was worried that the tiny wrinkles around her eyes might show up in the pictures.

Upstairs, her 15-year-old daughter, Bethany, said she's never understood why her mom hates the name Sheila so much. She knows, though, that the name is not to be spoken in the house. Grounding has been threatened.

"I think it's kind of funny, " she said.

Back downstairs, Crabtree said she can't wait to escape the name that bothers her so much she only refers to it as "Ugly." She's counting down the days until her hearing. And if Hoover denies her, she has a backup plan.

"If it's not Sexy, " she said, "then I might go for Sparkle."