

# THE NAME GAME

One family becomes a team of rivals

By Dana Rebmann

» Her name was supposed to be “Summer.” But when she entered the world on one of San Francisco’s drearier June mornings, my husband, Brian, and I called an audible. Whether Brian or I first suggested the winner, I can’t remember. But the odds are in his favor, because the name we settled on was Berklee. It’s original, though not particularly noteworthy, unless you know that my husband is a Cal Bear, an alumnus of the University of California, Berkeley—spelled differently, but pronounced the same way as our daughter’s name. I, on the other hand, graduated from a Pac-12 rival, the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. We tried telling our friends and family that the name Berklee had nothing to do with any college. But they wouldn’t listen. Cal friends celebrated, while the USC crowd called foul. One of the first congratulations notes to arrive said it all: “If your next kid is a boy, you have to name him Cal.”

The long-standing rivalry has provided an infrastructure of sorts for our relationship. After all, Brian and I met at the USC vs. Cal game my freshman year, and we survived years of ridicule before getting married. We’re sweet to each other 364 days a year and rivals the day of the USC-Cal football game.

Most years, my family has road-tripped to the game, and car rides came with hours of conversations that have covered everything from license-plate bingo to driving practice to SAT preparation to prom-date debates. Part of what I loved was that Berklee and I had our own game-day traditions. Some mothers and daughters bond during manicures or hair appointments; Berklee and I did it between touchdowns and field goals. We talked after plays and cheered for the marching band at halftime. At the start of the third quarter, regardless of the score, we would go for a lap around the stadium concourse. Berklee would celebrate no matter who won, and she left the gloating to me and Brian.

The trickiest part was deciding what college sweatshirt she should wear. When my second daughter came along, the 50-50 split made life a little easier. (She’s named Reilly, not Cal, by the way.) Trying to maintain some sense of equality, I’ve dressed the girls in apparel from both universities; for instance Halloween costumes included both a Cal cheerleader and a USC Song Girl.



Then the game changed. College applications were submitted, and Berklee woke up one morning to an email from UC Berkeley festooned with digital blue-and-gold confetti. The nod from USC arrived via snail mail a week later, but it was too late.

Berklee was headed to Berkeley.

Sending your firstborn away to school is emotional for all parents, but I also had to embrace moving Berklee into the lair of the rival Golden Bear. She’d be in the student section, cheering for the mascot, Oski, and his goofy smile, and rooting for the marching band without me. And she’d always be in Berkeley blue. I swallowed my pride and bought a Cal sweatshirt, but at the

same time I acquired a new USC T-shirt and made Berklee promise to be nice to me and remember that she grew up rooting for both schools.

Life minus one kid was a little quieter, a little sadder. Then the big event arrived, the annual rivalry game between USC and Cal. It was on a Thursday in Los Angeles, and none of us could attend. I was out of town, my husband was home, and Berklee was at Cal. Those days of road trips to the stadium seemed long gone. I missed the talks Berklee and I would share. At the start of the third quarter, I thought about taking a lap around the block, but it

seemed silly to do so alone.

Late in the game, USC was way ahead, and my phone was silent. The mum response from my husband and daughter probably had everything to do with the lopsided score. As the final seconds ticked away, a Trojan triumph now nearly certain, I thought about sending a gloating text to Berklee and my husband. But I couldn’t do it. Maybe it was because I missed my daughter, and the changing nature of our family was just starting to truly set in. But the real reason was much simpler: Cal and USC still had to play Stanford, another rival Pac-12 school. And in those games, my daughters, husband and I would all cheer for the same team.

My youngest daughter heads to college next fall. Exactly where is unknown, but I’ll “fight on” for equal family representation. Though I suppose there’s always room in my closet for another sweatshirt. ■

*Dana Rebmann tracks scores from the San Francisco Bay Area.*