

# NAME TAGS #6: Patron Saints

written by Guest Contributor | September 21, 2017



**By Julia Dauer**

*Photograph courtesy Julia Dauer*

My mother got my name from a movie. *Julia* came out in 1977, eleven years before I was born. It starred Vanessa Redgrave and Jane Fonda and was Meryl Streep's first film. My mother saw it in theaters. I have two copies, one on VHS and one on DVD, both given to me by my mother at various times. Sometimes I take them out and look at their covers and admire the deep drop in the "J" of the movie's title. I've never watched it.

Names were a big thing growing up, partly because we were Catholic. There were always name cards and patron saints, stained glass windows, medallions. If you were lucky, your name got you a saint, a famous one, a martyr maybe, who could intercede for you in heaven and be your guardian on earth.

The year I turned 14, I got confirmed. It's a ceremony where you have a sponsor and you go up in front of the church and stand in a big circle and a priest comes around and makes crosses on everybody's forehead with eucalyptus oil. I'm not sure what's being confirmed in the ceremony—your commitment to Almighty God maybe? It felt important the way ceremonies with you at the middle feel important, and also because the adults told us over and over again they were going to make an immortal mark upon our souls. Afterwards, we would have new names.

We got to pick our new names, our names for after, and I picked Jude. "J" and "u" like me, but a rounder, surer end, and a boy. In those years I was trying hard to be a girl in the style of the girls around me, but I was relieved to get to choose in this instance to be a boy. There wasn't any trouble with it. It was a thing nuns did. And at least, the adults said, I was in earnest.

St. Jude was a big deal, and no one else in our class had picked him. I still buy his candles at the grocery store—tall glass cylinders full of green wax and on the front Jude beams out with his green cloak and his big, ridiculous necklace. I grew up and became unreligious, but I still like the holy

candles.

Jude is the patron saint of lost causes. There is another saint for depression, St. Dymphna, but when I think of desperation, I think of Jude. A sense of being unable to find traction in the world. No one can find any photos from my confirmation, but in the other photos from around that time, I look pretty happy. All I remember is being sad. The name felt like an opening. You're 14 and you can say, with your name, I am so sad and maybe I am a boy.

I used to change clothes halfway through family holidays. Girl's clothes in the morning, boy's clothes in the afternoon. For my confirmation, I wore a tweed skirt with black leather lining on the pockets and a black turtleneck. There was applause, there was cake.

Nothing really changed. I was still Julia, Jul-yah, like my parents say it. No one called me Jude. I did not feel protected.

I tried other things. Around this time, I made a new friend named Lukas, with a "k" like I like. He said aunt like taunt instead of aunt like can't, and it made me see that I could make words different if I tried. I said taunt/aunt for a while and dropped it. I stretched my name out, three syllables instead of two, Jew-lee-uh, and it stuck.

Names were big. The name of the Lord. Lots of fights over it. Lots of drama.

The year we got confirmed, we read *Romeo and Juliet* in school. I memorized the prologue and the part about cutting you out in little stars and thought a lot about poison and dying in someone else's arms. It was suddenly momentous being named Julia, so close to the romantic lead. We were fairly certain that all-consuming romances would define and save our lives. We wanted to be meaningful. We were bored. Except for religion, we didn't have much going on. We were just starting to imagine what we might want from each other.

What did my mother imagine when she picked this name for me? The somber women from the movie poster? A radiantly pious child?

I still think about naming myself something else. I understand better how I might do that now. I could ask people to call me by a new name. Mostly, people would. I could be called Jude, J.L., J.V., Vincent, Vince. Vincent, the painter, sure, and Vince, my grandfather's brother who died under a falling truck bed on the side of the highway around the time *Julia* was released. A name I would give to a child, if I had one, which I don't or won't. I could give it to myself instead.

I am not good at identity. I have Jude candles in my living room. I have the bags and blankets from when I was a kid, *Julia* sewn into them in big, beautiful letters. I don't know if it's the right name, but I like the way it looks. I am grateful that people have something to call me. I didn't have to get martyred for it, or make a movie or become a girl or a boy or believe in anything at all. It's here, someone gave it to me, I have it, and I accept.

---

*Editor's note: This essay is part of a series called Name Tags, about issues related to names and naming. You can find the original Call for Submissions [here](#).*

---

**Julia Dauer** is a writer and printer and a PhD candidate in English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She grew up in Kentucky.