

Possibly the Worst Nickname for a Boy



My son, Ben, has an older sister, so it's the natural order of things that he would get some hand-me-downs: helmets, videos and sometimes, sadly, girl things. Not princess outfits or Angelina Ballerina backpacks, nothing like that, but he did get stuck with his sister's nickname. It is the endearment that is always tip-top on my mind.

The name had just become a habit, "Please come here, Babydoll." It would easily flow from my lips when I would drop him off at preschool, "Have a good day, Babydoll." I used it all the time – every day.

Then, one day on the way to school he said with all the seriousness a 4-year-old could muster, "Mom, could you not call me Babydoll? Not with my friends there."

How could I have done this to him? Yes, don't call a boy Babydoll. This should be obvious. It's like a double insult: "baby," only the worst insult you could lay on a kid, and "doll." Do I really need to point out the travesty of calling a young boy "doll"? I mean, it's not like I dressed him in heels and a tiara and sent him off to school, but Babydoll! Boy-image killer.

I knew I had to make things right for him.

So I let him choose his new name. After going through our options – Little Man, Dude, Blue Power Ranger – he came up with Dinosaur. He wanted me to call him Dinosaur instead of Babydoll. It was a little bulky for a nickname, but Dinosaur it was.

Everywhere we went, he was "Dinosaur this" and "Dinosaur that." It made people smile in line at Trader Joe's and strangers would join in at the park, "Hey Dinosaur, you're going to fall off there if you're not careful." It was fun, but I missed calling him Babydoll, just a little.

Then one day, I was driving him home and I accidentally let it slip – Babydoll. "Oh, gosh, Dinosaur, I'm so sorry." He was understanding and said, "It's OK, you can call me Babydoll sometimes. I miss that." (Yea!) He then quickly made sure to make one stipulation: "Just not in front of my friends."

It was a deal. We shook on it and everything.

It's been much different raising a boy than I thought it would be. Much more tender and sweet than one would think. Even though I had two brothers, the gentle love I have for my son always surprises me.

One of Ben's favorite books when he was a little boy was "Where the Wild Things Are." He loved when I read it to him. I have only one issue with it: I don't care if it says Max came home because he was hungry. We all know he really came home

because he missed his mom. But, I'm letting Max stick to his story. I get it. It's important to be tough.

It's a balancing game for moms of boys.

My son turned 10 years old a few weeks ago. That little boy who came home from the first day of kindergarten with a Spiderman Band-Aid. The one who had an invisible friend named So-So who lived with us for years. The one who believed in magic. He is now living in the world of double digits. His thoughts are now consumed with times tables, Minecraft and karate.

He lost a tooth on his birthday and he put it under his pillow. As he did he told me, "Most people don't know this, but the Tooth Fairy usually leaves a little bit of glitter behind when she takes a tooth."

"I've heard that, Babydoll," I slipped. I think just the idea of him talking about the Tooth Fairy and reminiscing all day about the things he did as a little boy made me forget the rule. "Oh, so sorry!"

"That's OK, Mom. No one is around to hear you."

Originally published October 2016