

Moving forward to a new year with a new last name



I knew it was coming. My boyfriend, Tim, and I have been dating for over a year. Both of us have two kids each – his are ages 6 and 8, and mine are 10 and 13. We began the process of “blending” our families at Christmastime last year and things have gone as well as anyone could hope.

So, I knew it was coming. We talked about getting married from almost the very start. We had talked to the kids about it. We had talked to our pastor about it. I knew it was coming, I just didn’t know when.

I had my hunches. Maybe on Thanksgiving when all of our families were together. Maybe on my birthday, Dec. 13 (This year it falls on 12/13/14. That would be memorable.) Or maybe on our trip to the Grand Canyon. Standing on the rim of one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World seemed like a perfect place to make this almost-as-awe-inspiring wonder official.

So I didn’t suspect a thing when I received a text from a mutual friend inviting our kids to a Christmas craft party on a Saturday afternoon. It sounded like fun. No parents allowed – just the kids. Tim made plans for us to have an early dinner in downtown Huntington Beach and then suggested a walk on the beach. Still, I wasn’t suspicious anything life-changing was about to happen.

As we walked on the beach of my hometown, the autumn light lit the pier. The sand was scattered with sunbathers cheating the calendar by getting in one last day of summer. I looked up and I saw something falling from the pier. They were rose petals

and our kids were the ones dropping them down to the sand. Yes, that was my 13-year-old jumping up and down holding a sign with a big heart. Yes, that was Tim's daughter scattering the last of the petals. (Which, by the way, isn't allowed. A big voice boomed from the lifeguard tower: "Please stop throwing things from the pier.")

"What's going on?" I asked Tim. He was suddenly serious, turning to face me he pulled out a plain white piece of paper that had his proposal typed out so he wouldn't forget anything.

People on the beach started to clue in to what was happening. Cellphones began to pop out of pockets and beach bags as total strangers took pictures as Tim got on one knee. The pier railing was lining up with people watching our intimate moment (#totalstrangersgettingengaged). When I said yes, our impromptu audience burst into applause and cheers.

Our kids rushed down from the pier to the sand to meet us. The kids were smiling, then the younger two quickly blurted out "We really have to go to the bathroom!"

BAM!

And so begins our journey as a blended family. The most romantic moment of our life followed by a frantic search for a public bathroom at the Huntington Beach Pier. Immeasurable sweetness followed by chaos. A picture-perfect scene followed by reality.

Tim and I laughed as we ran across the sand with the kids. I told him, "This is it! The life is our family life. This is part of it!"

Since then, when I tell someone I'm engaged, they quickly follow a congratulations with, "When's the date?" After that, if they're a woman, the next question is, "Are you going to change your name?"

Isn't that an odd question? In some cases it almost feels like a challenge. When I answer with a fast "Yes," I have been surprised by the amount of negative comments I have received. Blunt opinions. Straight out of dooms day predictions.

"That is the stupidest thing I've ever heard," one man told me. A colleague of mine told me, "As a woman and a professional I feel I have to tell you I think you're making a HUGE mistake."

The common theme from these anti-name-changers is I have worked hard to create a name for myself in my career as a writer, editor and blogger. That "Suzanne Broughton" is my brand, my identity, and without it people who want to find me will wander around aimlessly on the Internet, Googling it until they throw their computer out the window in frustration. My new name will render me as a search-engine loser and that quite possibly my own mother would walk by me and not even recognize me. In very uncertain terms these people think my name is "me."

I don't agree.

In the words of one of my favorite women, Audrey Hepburn, "If I get married, I want to be very married." To me, my marriage is more important than my brand. My union with my future husband is a bond that is not only biblical, but one that I embrace happily and with a heart full of gratitude.

When thought of in that way, it seems silly to let the admitted pain of changing my Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest handles. Don't get me wrong, I did search my new name to make sure it's open as a .com. And it is, but even if I had to go .net, I would still change it.

Besides, that is not giving you (the reader) very much credit. I think you can remember me, right? My married name will be Suzanne Moshenko. Let's say it together: Mo-shen-ko. It's kind of fun to say. Mo-shen-ko.

From my column at the Orange County Register.