

## Changing your name

Posted by Peter on 24 November 2009



Pudsey Bear (the real one!)

Every year the BBC asks its TV viewers to give money to a special appeal called [Children in Need](#). The money is used to help charities which work with sick or [disadvantaged](#) children. The last Children in Need day was last Friday. For the whole evening, BBC television had programmes which asked people to give money to Children in Need, and appearances by celebrities who told us about all the wonderful things that Children in Need was doing, and news about special fund-raising events all over the country. Children in Need has been very successful. Since 1980 it has raised over Â£500 million to help [needy](#) children.

Children in Need has a [mascot](#). He is a large yellow bear called Pudsey. There is a picture of him on the website and, I hope, on your iPod screens. Pudsey has a bandage over one eye. Has he injured his eye? Or perhaps he is a pirate? I am not sure.

Last year, a woman who lives in Wales, called Mrs Eileen de Bont invented a new and interesting way to raise money for Children in Need. She asked people to sponsor her to change her name - that is she asked them to promise to give money to Children in Need if she changed her name. She even allowed her sponsors to choose her new name. And the name they chose was - Pudsey Bear.

In Britain, we often complain that we do not live in a free country any more. There are too many rules and regulations which prevent us from doing what we want to do. But in one area we still have perfect freedom - we can call ourselves by whatever name we want. There is a simple legal process called a [Deed Poll](#) which allows anyone who wants to change their name to whatever new name they like.

Over 50,000 people change their name by Deed Poll every year. Many of these changes are connected to marriage or divorce. For example, when people get married they may decide that they want to use the woman's family name (or surname) instead of the man's name. Or they may decide to use both names. When John Smith and Wendy Brown get married they might want to be called Mr and Mrs Smith-Brown. And then, a few years later if their marriage breaks down, they might want to go back to their old names. These changes of name are not a problem in Britain. John and Wendy just need to fill in a few legal forms, and they have new names.

Naturally, a few people change their names for more [frivolous](#) reasons. Last year a football fan in Scotland changed his name to Motherwell Football Club. Another young man thought he would be more attractive to

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the girls if his name was Elvis Presley. And the former Mr Daniel Westfallen is now called Mr Happy [Adjustable Spanners](#). These people are mad, of course, but in Britain you are free to be mad if you want. So, it was no problem for Mrs de Bont to fill in the forms to change her name to Pudsey Bear . No problem to get her employer, the gas and electricity companies, her bank and the tax people to change her name in their records and computer systems. Then she applied for a new passport. She received a bureaucratic letter from the Passport Office saying, no, they could not give her a passport with the name Pudsey Bear because ...well, because it was silly. Mrs de Bont (or Mrs Pudsey Bear as we must now call her ) said that her sponsors had paid a lot of money to Children in Need for her to change her name; and that everyone now called her by her new name, and even her children called her Mummy Bear.

Mrs de Bont (sorry, Mrs Bear) then told the newspapers what had happened, and for a few days we could read all about it. The newspapers were on Mrs Bear's side (I got it right that time). The Guardian, for example, roared "The right to call yourself whatever name you please is one of the small but great British liberties. Who do the passport people think they are? If a citizen can change her name, she must have a passport in that name too."

And then we heard no more. The story disappeared from the newspapers. So we never heard whether Mrs Bear or the passport people won. Perhaps you can help. If you meet any British tourists in your country, ask to see their passports. And if you find a passport with the name Pudsey Bear on it, send an e-mail to Listen to English.

In your country, are you able to change your name if you want to? And have you ever thought that it would be wonderful to have a new name? Please put a comment on the Listen to English website to tell us about it.

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