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### Chop? P-Pop? In blended families, kids develop creative nicknames for multiple grandparents.

### In blended families, kids develop creative nicknames for multiple grandparents.

Posted: 12:05 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 4, 2013

Feedback

BY STACI STURROCK - PALM BEACH POST STAFF WRITER

Call it one more sign of the times: Some grandmothers enjoy being called "chopped liver."

At least, Deborah Bigeleisen doesn't mind. After all, the West Palm Beach artist's nickname – since shortened to "Chop" – was bestowed from the mouth of a babe during a spontaneous expression of affection.

By the time Bigeleisen's oldest step-granddaughter, Jessica, was 3 years old, Bigeleisen still didn't have a grandmotherly nickname to call her own. "Admittedly, I wasn't too thrilled at the prospect of going through life being called Debbie by my grandkids," she says.

One afternoon, five members of Bigeleisen's family were eating lunch in a New Jersey restaurant. Jessica "was very chatty and excited about something," Bigeleisen recalls. "She was running around the table, all excited, calling out, 'Pa! Pa! Pa!' As she ran past me, I said, 'Hey, Jess, what am I, chopped liver or something?'"

When little Jessica finally returned to her seat, she blurted out, "Chopped Liver Debbie, I love you!" And so, "Chop" was born, and 18 years later, endures.

It takes creativity – and a multi-branched family tree – to classify each member of a blended family, and more Americans than ever are playing the name game.

According to a 2010 report from the Pew Research Center, 42 percent of adults say they have at least one step relative. Among Americans ages 65 and older, 34 percent report at least one step relation. Declines in the marriage rate, plus increases in the divorce rate, as well as a significant bump in the number of babies born out of wedlock equals

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Joan and Bill Aaronson, married for 44 years, at their home in Boynton Beach. (Gary Coronado/The Palm Beach Post)

the prevalence of step relations.

A child can have “mom’s parents, dad’s parents, step-dad’s parents, step-mom’s parents (that’s eight) and any great-grandparents,” says April Masini, the Naples-based relationship expert behind AskApril.com. “Then don’t forget that an adult parent often has divorced and re-married parents, so the number of grandparents can become exponential.”

But grandparents don’t want to be lost in the shuffle, Masini says, “and they want to feel special, so they name themselves something none of the other grandparents will take on.”

When author Dene Low’s first grandchild was on the way, she says she “realized that complicated family relationships had supplied this little guy with at least six grandmothers, and all the others wanted to be called ‘Grandma’.”

Low opted for “Nana.” “It’s worked out very well, and it gave my new sons- and daughters-in-law and step-grandchildren a name to call me that didn’t interfere with their own family relationships. I like it because I chose the name, and I didn’t end up with something horrible that I hated.”

Inspired by her own experiences, Low has written “Grandparenting the Blended Family: How to Succeed With Your Step or Adopted Grandchildren,” due out this October.

Names are no small matter, she says. “Names indicate position and belonging, so names for everyone in blended families, with every imaginable relationship, can be a can of worms. Not knowing where you fit in your own family causes anxiety and confusion. What do you say when you call up a step-grandchild on the phone? That could be awkward. How can your family members introduce you to someone else? It’s hard enough for the parents.

“There could possibly be more than one mother and father, and possibly from multiple marriages. But then every single one of the parents could have parents, and that complicates things because there are only so many traditional names for parents and grandparents.”

When Bill and Joan Aaronson’s grandson David was a toddler, he called out to Bill one day, “Abu, Abu!”

“We had no idea where this word came from, nor why the baby insisted that ‘Abu’ was definitely and forever the name for ‘Grandpa’,” says Joan Aaronson, who did some research and found that in most Semitic languages, Abu means “father” or “father of.”

“Though my husband is the baby’s step-grandfather, both the mother and he share a Jewish heritage,” says Joan, who lives in Boynton Beach.

As grandparents have undergone a cultural makeover since the days of Grandpa and Grandma Walton – now, “they’re glam. They’re at the gym. They’re dating. They’re hiking, biking and buying sexy clothes,” Masini says – it only makes sense that names are getting a 21st century upgrade, too.

Consider this hip hop-suitable *nom de Papi*: P-Pop. That’s what one of Fritz Foster’s step-grandsons dubbed him at a



David Aaron Warren, of Chicago, with grandfather Bill Aaronson, of Boynton Beach. The photo was taken 20 years after David was born. (Photo Courtesy the Aaronson Family)



Deborah Bigeleisen’s step-granddaughters affectionately call her “Chop” as in “Chopped Liver.” Bigeleisen is an artist and is photographed in her home. (Allen Eyestone/The Palm Beach Post)

Christmas dinner, as a way to distinguish from the boy's related-by-blood grandfather, Poppy.

"From then on, I have been P-Pop to everyone - even some adults," says Foster, who lives on Singer Island. "There have been many spellings: P-Pop, Ppop, pPop. I answer to them all, but I have never been Poppy. ... There are some great-grandchildren coming along, and I expect that P-Pop will stick with some of them also."

Bigeleisen adds a postscript to the story of how she became "Chop."

Several months later, the family gathered for Rosh Hashanah. "When the other grandmother said, 'I'm making chopped liver,' Jessie was like, 'Wait a minute!' She didn't know chopped liver was food."

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