

My Origin Story is a Volcano

By Molly Tansey

Everywhere I went as a kid, I would meet a Molly. All of them were incredibly friendly and eager to make my acquaintance. They were also all dogs. I only knew one other human named Molly when I was growing up. I was vaguely aware of other people named Molly. I'd heard of Molly Ringwald, a famous actress, the unsinkable Molly Brown from the Titanic, and of course, as soon as I started reading Harry Potter, I came across the indomitable Molly Weasley. Dogs and humans alike, I was never in bad company with my name. That story might have been different if my mom hadn't intervened in my naming process. Since she had gotten to name my older sister, my dad got to name me. Convinced he needed to give me a "proper" name and nickname me Molly, I almost became *gasp* a Margaret. I often think about how different my life might have been if my dad hadn't listened to my mom. For one, I've never met a dog named Margaret.

The fact that most of the Mollies I met as a kid had four legs instead of two is probably the least interesting thing about my name, though. Not many people can claim they were named after a volcano. I am one of the few. My full name is Molly Pu'u Lena Tansey, and I can say with complete confidence that there is not another person on the planet with my exact name. While my dad got to choose my first name, my middle name was a joint decision between my parents, their doctor, and in some ways, destiny. For many years, my dad was a science news producer. He often produced stories in and around the Washington, D.C. area, but on occasion, he traveled for stories. When he found out one story would take him to Hawai'i, he leapt at the opportunity to have the honeymoon he and my mom had never gotten the chance to take. Their trip to Hawai'i happened to coincide with the time in their lives when they were trying to grow their family. During their visit to Hawai'i, they stayed in a hotel on the crater of Kilauea, the most active volcano on the island of Hawai'i. Months later, when I was born, my mom's doctor made a comment that included the word "eruptive" (I'll spare you the details). In that moment, my parents knew they had no other choice. According to them, my middle name, Pu'u Lena, means "the cold winds of Kilauea."

Because of my unique middle name, I reflected on my name more than your average five year-old. It's strange to have to tell a story that spans months in order to explain your middle name when you're still learning how to read. It's also strange to accept at a young age that a volcano is part of your origin story. Growing up, I had mixed feelings about my name. I had no issue with the fact that Molly was a far more common dog name than human name, but my middle name was something I had to grow in to. It didn't help that my sister *insisted* she couldn't pronounce my name and took to calling me Poo Poo Lena. My affection for my middle name grew alongside me. With each passing year, I was more and more grateful to have a name no one else could claim. I recently learned that my first name means "rebellious" and "wished for child." It's almost eerie. You could describe a volcano as rebellious, and my parents were trying to have a second child. I'm still not sure I'm convinced our names and our destinies are interconnected, but maybe when Kilauea rumbles nearly 5,000 thousand miles away, I can feel a shift in myself, too.