

FACTS & ARGUMENTS ESSAY

I thought I was the only Galadriel

Galadriel Watson

Contributed to The Globe and Mail

Published Thursday, Jul. 08 2010, 4:47 PM EDT

Last updated Thursday, Aug. 23 2012, 3:23 PM EDT

It was a lovely late-winter morning when I brought in my car for servicing. I pulled into the garage of the dealership, got out, gave my name and handed over the keys.

Looking at my information on her screen, the woman who worked there said, "Do you bring a Saturn in here too?"

"No," I answered.

"Strange, we have another Galadriel who does. I was just telling her how pretty her name is."

Another Galadriel. In my community. At my dealership.

I pulled my lips into a smile. "Interesting. That's neat to hear."

I was lying through my teeth.

Chances are, you've never met a person named Galadriel. You may recognize the name, though perhaps be fuzzy as to where from. *The Lord of the Rings*, I explain monthly, if not weekly. Queen of the Elves. Played by Cate Blanchett in the movies.

Ah, yes, that's it.

I explain how to pronounce it (gal-AD-riel, rhymes with Louis Riel). I explain how to spell it. I've been explaining my name for 40 years.

And in 40 years, I've never met another person with my name. I've never knowingly shared breathing space with another Galadriel. I've been the one and only.

Every few years I'd hear rumours about others with my name. A Galadriel who used to attend my university, but who graduated before me. More recently, a Galadriel who worked in the HR department when my husband applied for an out-of-town job.

But rumours are easy to dismiss. And dismiss them I did. I can't explain my aversion to hearing about other Galadriels. Even typing it, my fingers protest, can't manage the word in plural. My pinkie inserts an apostrophe before the s, whether I mean to or not. An s on the end means possessive, not plural. There is one Galadriel: me.

My family doesn't get it. Maya is 8 and has another Maya in her class, and has met countless other Mayas. Taryn has run into both boys and girls with his name. My husband Colin is, well, Colin.

"You don't honestly think you're the only Galadriel in a world of billions?" Colin asked.

"Certainly," I answered, though only half-heartedly. I didn't think I'm the only Galadriel. I just refused to think otherwise.

My discomfort makes me wonder how much my name has shaped who I am. I am creative; did having a creative name lead me down that path? I am independent; did having a name shared with no one else set me apart? In my youth I was a performer, both onstage and in everyday life; did having a name that put me in the spotlight make me want to be in the spotlight too? If I were Mary, would I be the same person?

There's no way to know.

When my grandmother was told the name of her newborn granddaughter - my parents loved *The Lord of the Rings* - she reacted to the tune of, "Why would you saddle a child with a name like that?" But I haven't been saddled. I love my name. I love the way it makes me different, in a world in which it's hard to stand out.

But the existence of another Galadriel? Or multiples? Does that mean I'm not so special after all?

After hearing about the Saturn-owning Galadriel, I knew I had to do something. It was the second Galadriel I'd heard of in a month. Things were spinning out of control.

How could I stop feeling like I'd been hit by a car at each mention of a new-found Galadriel? By finding them first.

I searched the Internet. Within minutes, I located three in the United States - an actress, a knitter, a librarian - and one in France. I followed them on Twitter. I asked to become their friends on Facebook. I was sending messages like, "Hi Galadriel. I'm on the search for other Galadriels. Have a great day! Galadriel." I'd never typed my name so often, and never without referring to myself.

And then came a blow. A Facebook reply. "Did you know there's a group called Glad to be Galadriel?"

Good thing I was sitting.

Nineteen Galadriels. That's how many I'm now friends with on Facebook. Accepting their existence was hard. At first I felt like they had stolen a piece of who I am, had stolen a slice of my history. They explain their names constantly, they said. So do I. Some have the nickname Glad. So do I. One was called Glad Garbage Bags as a child. So was I. Many of us are roughly the same age, products of the sixties and seventies.

But the more I receive their posts, the more I sneak peeks into their online photo albums, the more I realize being Galadriel doesn't make us the same. One is an avid churchgoer. One rides motorcycles. One hangs out on beaches in bikinis. One lives in Britain. One is called Auntie Gahoo by a friend's child (taken from the child's constant question when trying to pronounce the name: "Ga-who?"), which makes me laugh.

I've never been called Auntie Gahoo. See, we're not the same.

I've come to like the Galadriels, my sisterhood of like-named women. I've come to enjoy the glimpses into their lives. I'd even like to meet one or two - or all. I've already named what our reunion should be called: Gathering Galadriels. It has a nice ring. Perhaps I'll organize it for 2012, the 120th anniversary of the birth of J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, the man whose imagination created the name.

I now know it's not a personal affront that others share my name. It's proof it's a great name to have.