

# THE POWER OF A NAME: MY REBIRTHDAY STORY



*Written by Autumn Meadows (she/her)*

Upon wholehearted contemplation of my past, and the REBIRTHDAY stories I might tell, I was reminded of two distinct experiences, that played significant roles in who I am today, one of which, I will share now.

As a disabled and chronically-ill girly, I have felt very little control over most aspects of my life. My health, limitations, and nearly every facet of my existence, are in some way tethered to the cards I've been dealt; I can choose to play my hand wisely, but no matter my wishes, the hand I've been given, cannot be redealt. Despite this recognition, I've found empowerment in the knowledge, that no matter my circumstances, I do have assured control, over one precious gem of my being, that which is, my identity. People can tell me who they desire me to be, or what their expectations are of me, but no one gets to tell me who I am, but me.

In the Fall of 2023, I legally changed my middle and last names, a reclamation of my identity, that was once a mere dream; it was on this day, that this one of two REBIRTHDAYS of mine, came to be.

My whole life, up to this point, I had never felt well-suited by my full name. My first name was a struggle to appreciate, but after befriending my bestie, Summer, I learned to love my "Autumn" label; Furthermore, I kept it the same because it was the name my late twin sister knew me by. Though I retained my original first name, to me, the power of choosing who I wanted to be, both in my own head and on paper, was empowering in its own way; But what really tied the bow on this experience, was choosing my last, and middle names. The process was long and arduous, but it was well worth it to me.

The realization of what I wanted my name to be started when I received a package, addressed to "Autumn Meadows"; at the time, it was an error, likely due to my old email address username, "autumnmeadows12", but reading that "mistake", I found the name that finally resonated in my heart. "Autumn Meadows" felt perfect, but I realized I also had to change my middle name (something I was glad to do, as I never really connected well with it either), as, wildly enough, my former middle name, means "Meadow", and I wasn't about to be, "Autumn Meadow Meadows". It was then that I chose my new middle name, "Kalea", a Hawaiian name that means, "the beloved", "flower wreath", "joy", and "happiness". I fell in love with this name all the way back in middle school, as a teen fascinated by Hawaiian culture and all things Hawaii, and hoped to one day have a child I would give the name.

As my journey into adulthood began unfolding, it became abundantly clear to me, that having a child of my own may've never come to be, and though I still had hope, at the very least, it would be years and years until my dream came to fruition.

In perhaps one of my greatest, most life-changing epiphanies, I realized that “Kalea” was a name I didn’t have to wait for, and a name that I loved because it felt most true to me, that is, my own self-identity. This epiphany continued with the recognition that I didn’t have to wait for a significant other that may or may not come, to break free of the traumatic ties and identity-disconnect, of my former last name, and to fully step into my most authentic self.

I made “Autumn Kalea Meadows” my author, artist, and performer name, and competed in poetry slams, amongst taking on other creative projects, with this name, prior to changing it legally; but it was the legal change, that truly proclaimed my freedom, to embrace myself, to the fullest.

Community became a critical component of my healing within this story also; it was friends and family that affirmed my name change, and the importance of it, that made me feel as though I could finally heal and let go of the chains of my past.

When I let go of my old names, I freed myself of pain I never thought possible to overcome. For the first time in my life, I’ve felt proud of my identity. My name is a reflection to the world, of who I am, but most importantly, it is a symbol, and a reminder to myself, that my life has meaning, and purpose, just as my name does. It is through this story, that I, have been reborn.



***Written by Autumn Meadows (she/her)***

Autumn Kalea (Kuh-lay-uh) Meadows (she/her) is a neurodivergent, queer, disabled, chronically ill, (& ambulatory wheelchair user), complex trauma survivor, Christian, artist, and advocate, from the Western Slope of Colorado. Aspiring to keep the legacy of her late twin sister flourishing through her creativity, while also embracing her own unique identity and encouraging others to do the same, Autumn is deeply passionate about using her art as a means for social justice, radical love, unity, and acceptance.

As a new addition to the YMN team (est. October 2025), Autumn serves as the Creative Arts Consultant for Youth MOVE National’s recently launched Y-CORE program. She brings a wide array of lived experience to the team, most notably championing awareness, inclusion, and the breaking of stigmas surrounding severe mental health conditions, disabilities, chronic illness, religious trauma, grief, queerness, and youth homelessness, as well as providing safe, affirmative, celebratory spaces for those who identify within these communities.

Amongst her most significant creative endeavors, Autumn self-published her debut book, *When My Heart Speaks*, in 2023; within its pages, Autumn shares a collection of heartfelt original poetry that she sincerely hopes will empower individuals of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, and experiences to let their beautiful hearts speak. Beyond sharing the words of her heart in the written format, Autumn is grateful to have been awarded for her slam poems, has enjoyed bringing laughs to her community through “sit down” comedy, and delights in pouring out the colors of her soul through singing/songwriting and jamming on her uke.

At home, Autumn is a proud cat mom to her beautiful, senior, grumpy kitty, Mabel Grace. She wholeheartedly loves and appreciates all things pink, floral, sunshine, kawaii, pastel, plushies, and glitter. And she will never stop talking about her favorite TV show, *The Big Bang Theory*.