Trendy or fuddy-duddy, your child's name is a life sentence. No wonder it's such agony to choose one.

By Rob McGibbon

How I laughed last week when I read that several names for children had become more or less extinct during the past decade. The likes of Walter and Percy, Edna and Olive have all but disappeared. I can't help but wonder what names for children were wildly rejected hundreds of names for being too modern, too exotic, too passive, too portly...and on, oh, the list goes on. But the point being, if you're thinking of naming your child, I'm amazed anyone gets named at all.

I realized that naming our baby would be an experience to remember when we went on a shopping spree for names. We ran all over town, including a second-hand bookshop in the earliest days of the pregnancy, looking for a suitable name. We eventually found 40,000 Best Baby Names. Surely we had the information and imagination not to resort to such crass measures? But it's just a starting point, it will give us some ideas, said Emma. Forty names is about a quarter of the book, I thought. We then went on a shopping spree for names.

The moment — like when I look into my baby's eyes — and find that it fits. Oh, hello — Sharon.

But I suppose we have to be a bit pernickety, as I go with the flow while Emma calls out names. Like when she mentioned and I looked up, I've become the resident Mr. Negligible.

In fact, I have been amazed to discover how strongly adverse feelings I have towards so many names. Some are like irresistible pressure points that release a torrent of racist memories.

James — no, he's a nasty bully at school. Allegre — an ex-girlfriend that, obviously, I've changed that name and of course I didn't reveal the real reason when it was initially floated. Entire lists of names are clearly ruled out because they are friends, or the names of their children. Leaving them aside as late as I'm aged 43 — delayed decision-making again — you find that great list of the Best Baby Names book have already been knocked out.

And it's alarming quite what a subtle impact society has on your selection, too.


Jodie, Lou, Cameron? Dear or, worse, David. The association hadn't been quite enough.

Even if I dismiss all the preconceived ideas as hogwash, the baby book also gives the meanings of names, which presents yet another barrier. We could probably live with Jude except that it means 'prodigal son of lost causes'. Er, no thanks.

While we were watching television one night, I finally realized I had to up my tempo in this game. I might as well plucking out names from the 40,000 Bible like a bingo caller. "Charlie? "No, too French." "Kester? "Even more French? Now!" "How about Martha? Or Constantia — that means loyal!" "James, smart-ass, definitively!"

I could watch TV while editing names of names. I was multi-tasking effortlessly and knew I could get this list down in 40 before delivery day. I do a love a deadline. "Bob — have you got ANY suggestions?" I pressed. "Um, how about, Martin? I'm sure we'll warm to it. The book hit the floor with a heavy, definitive thud.

Since then, I have been more productive, but we are still alarmingly thin on the ground.

ANYWAY, what is it, we are looking for? We are asked that we want something that feels original, a bit rare, but not so out there — Apple, for example, that it will make us, or our darling little one, around a bit dated. The last thing I want is this to be a pretentious 'Try Hard'.

A name with a worthwhile meaning would be a bonus, but does any of this really matter? These days everyone likes to be a bit different and the moment the pack is opening, that's when I instinctively want to go the other way.

The moment we've a name, we have a name for a girl. It's a bit old-fashioned, but we like a bit of simpleness, just right. I can't say what it is or you will all think it up and before long it will appear on one of those Most Popular lists, then we'll all hate it. Anyways, it couldn't be utterly pointless because Venus is indeed a Venus and she is having a boy — and we don't have any single boy's name without a line through it.

Hang on, I just looked at that ever-so-shrill list of fuddy-duddy dying names and, you know what, Percy is growing on me. Yeah, that'll do.