Why do some of us slip into 'girly voice'?

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Girly voice .... some women slip into it so naturally, and then out of again, on a daily basis.

I lose everything. Stamps especially. I know I have enough stamps to last a lifetime, but they're tucked away somewhere secret, somewhere clever that felt self-explanatory at the time. I lost my little proof of service slip from jury duty recently, and, as I live in the US, I then got another jury duty notice, but in Brooklyn this time, because Brooklyn and Manhattan don't really talk, they just wave casually at each other across the water and go on with their day.

I called the Manhattan county clerk about twenty times, trying to get evidence that I'd showed up. No one answered. Finally, on my fifth call of the day, a man picked up the phone. I quickly explained the situation.

"When you're given proof of service, it is a very important document," he informed me sternly. "It is not something you can just put down and forget about. You need to be more responsible."

And this is when my voice changed. "I understand," I said in a breathier, higher, more excitable voice. "It's just that I've moved a lot."

"There really isn't an excuse," he countered.

"Okay," I said, repentant and slightly childish. "But can you help me out and send me a new one?" My tone went beseeching. It was wringing its delicate hands. It was wearing a little pink dress.

He decided he could find it in his heart to do that. And then there was the complicated matter of my last name, which has always refused to be categorised. The name on my birth certificate is Kate Mende-Fridkis, a name without a single nice-sounding syllable, which intimidates the new viewer and twists the tongue. The unhappy man at the country clerk searched under "Fridkis," and then he searched under the hyphenated name, but it turned out to have been filed without the hyphen, and by the time we figured out the problem, he was in an even worse mood. What kind of self-respecting person would ever go around with a name like mine?

Me! Adorable little me! A girl who sounded like she had wide, startled eyes and dewily available cleavage. A girl who I could suddenly picture: glossy, shaggy hair falling in her clear-skinned face, a tight white tank top, push-up bra and little jean shorts. Her legs had never betrayed her with stray stubble. She liked heart-shaped jewelry. She thought it was funny that her name was complicated, because she had a great sense of humor. She was tons of fun. She would play sports with the guys at a picnic, but her pitching arm was weak.

It wasn't that I was flirting with the man -- I wasn't! I wasn't saying anything cute or seductive or teasing. It was just my voice. It had automatically transformed.

Which shouldn't be easy, because I think I modeled almost all of my speech patterns off this girl I hero worshipped when I was 12 and 13 and 14 and 15. She was a couple years older, wore work boots and tough canvas pants, kept her hair in a braid and prided herself on being able to lift really heavy things. She talked in a predictably no-nonsense way. Her voice was slightly nasal, and she employed a captivating mix of fancy vocabulary and southern slang. God, I wanted to be her. Right down to the beat-up Ford F150 we both fantasized about driving one day (she eventually did, while I eventually drove my mum's Toyota Previa, the ugliest minivan in the world). When she liked my boyfriend, I was happy to pass him along to her.

Around the same time, I had another friend who had mastered the girly voice. She slipped into it whenever a guy was within hearing distance. She did it to all grownups, actually, and she dimpled at the same time. She simpered sweetly, she played absently with her hair, she was always looking up through her eyelashes. Except of course when we were alone, and then she was just normal, straightforward, her eyes on the same level as mine. I couldn't understand it. It made me angry, but I didn't know why. I didn't know where she'd learned to do it, and why she thought she should. She sounded like she was 7 when she did it, but not loud and self-satisfied, the way I'd sounded at 7. The way someone imagined little girls sound when they are 7. The way 7-year-old girls on TV used to sound, before they were fast-talking and sarcastic and already knew about sex.

What is that voice? I hear women do it on the street when they are talking to a man they want to quickly placate. I heard one of my college roommates use it every night on the phone with her boyfriend. Girls and women slip into it so naturally, and then out of again, on a daily basis.

And maybe I'm one of them. I have somehow learned how to do it, using it while on the phone with the guy at the county clerk's office so that he will be nicer to me, hopefully. I don't remember learning it. I don't remember practicing it. I don't remember making any decisions about it except for the one that I made when I was 12 and 13 and 14 and 15, to never, ever talk like that, because, come on, it's stupid.

"Thank you SO much for your help!" I was exclaiming in the girly voice.

"No problem," he was saying, pacified, "Just make sure you're more responsible in the future."

"I will! I will definitely try!" The girl in my voice was twirling her glossy hair, leaning eagerly forward. She could do cartwheels and they showed off the tattoo of Stitch from *Lilo and Stitch* on the small of her back. She had very long eyelashes, top and bottom. She sometimes bit her lip, and it did not make her look like a rabbit.

We hung up. I stood there, and I thought about what I should have told him. It would've gone something like this: "Listen, George. I'm sorry if this is an inconvenience for you, but I need that proof of service. I don't need a lecture about responsibility. Life is busy and hectic, and I don't have time to explain mine to you, or apologise for it. I'd appreciate you getting me that slip of paper so that we can both get on with our day."

George and I, we're like Manhattan and Brooklyn, we should just wave casually at each other across the water. It doesn't need to be more than that.

George sent me my proof of service, and I was about to send it to the Brooklyn court when I realised that the names are different. This jury summons is for [a married Kate with a new last name that I still sometimes find myself stumbling on](http://www.eatthedamncake.com/2010/12/22/taking-a-name/). The last one was for a Kate with a hyphenated last name without a single decent syllable. It's ironic, since I usually just go by Kate Fridkis, which isn't either of those, but which has grown to sound right in its quick awkwardness.

"Shit," I yelled, in my real voice. "Shit! They're not gonna accept this! It's under different names."

"Just send them a copy of our marriage certificate," my husband called from the other room.

And I would have, except that I can't find it anywhere. It's probably with the stamps.