

Does the name "Krey" mean "Crow"?



That the name "Krey" probably means "crow" may be a little unsettling to some of us, but with a little understanding of the German background, it may not seem quite as unsavory.

As one can expect, there are many different spellings of family names over the ages. Some of the different spellings of the Krey name have been Krähe, Krah, Kray, and Krei. In German, "Krähe" is the accepted translation for crow and "Krähen" (or "Kreyen") is the plural form.

The members of the Krey Family Association also seemed to agree that Krey means crow as a large crow is at the center of the Krey family crest. There is also the title "Die Kreÿen" over the crest on the book cover of the 1932 book which seems to imply that "The Kreys" can be interchanged with "The Crows." And there are many pronunciations according to the dialects of the different areas. The Krey name could end with an a, eh, or i sound and it is suggested that in the Holstein area it was pronounced as "Krei" or the English, "Cry".

So why were the original Kreys so proud to call themselves a flock of crows? For one thing, this provided a symbol to unite the family group. It is common for family organizations to adopt traditions, shields and mottos to foster a sense of community. Their motto at the top of the crest (loosely translated) of "**As long as we stick together, no one can harm us**" sends the message that the Krey family wanted to have close associations and support each other - just like a flock of crows. There is an English proverb, "Birds of a feather flock together," that can be compared to the German saying of "Eine Krähe hackt der Andere die Augen nicht aus" or "One crow does not peck out the eyes of another." This could also make a light-hearted case for crows being known to have a sense of loyalty to the group as they are known to preen each other gently around the eyes.



The Crow is featured on the The Krey Family Crest "**As long as we stick together no one can harm us**" (The original was a wood carving for the 1924 reunion.)

What is so special about crows?

Aside from just providing a symbol, the crow is actually a very inspiring identity for a group of people. Crows are dark, handsome birds that are intelligent, strong, graceful, monogamous - and they stick together. This may have been why the first Kreyes were given the name Crows - maybe they were dark and handsome and strong and stuck together. And the image of a crow may have been more of what we think of as a raven since ravens are a member of the crow family. Actually the type of crow that is most common in Europe is the Carrion Crow and this looks similar to the crow on the Krey Family Crest.



The Carrion Crow, common in Europe

Following are a few **facts about crows** (or Kreyen) that might help improve their image for us:

1. "Crows" can refer to an entire group of large birds with a highly developed song and a unique perching style. They are of the genus *Corvus*, of the family *Corvidae*, having a long, stout bill and lustrous black plumage. There are 39 different species of the crow family including Crows, Ravens, Magpies, and Jackdaws.
2. Crows are handsome and graceful. From the book, *Crows* by Bora Sax, we read: "From the tip of a crow's beak to the end of its tail is a single curve, which changes rhythmically as the crow turns its head or bends toward the ground. Foraging on their long, powerful legs, crows appear to glide over the earth; they take flight almost without effort, flapping their wings easily, ascending into the air like spirits."
3. Crows are intelligent. According to *Neuroscience* magazine: "Crows are among the planet's most intelligent animals, teaching their young to use tools for foraging and banding together to fight off intruders." According to the PBS Nature Program, "A Murder of Crows," these birds may be able to distinguish between one human and another. Also, they seem to be able to communicate to others about whether a certain human is to be feared by recognizing features and remembering past actions.
4. Crows work together in their flock. Crows are very social and live in large extended family groups. In fall and winter, crows roost in large flocks numbering in the thousands. They may fly as far as 50 miles each day to join the roost. They direct each other to food sources and will "mob" or attack other creatures to protect their young.

So, hopefully, with this information, those of us who are Kreys, can accept the possibility of the name meaning "crow" and see some merit in it. The Family Federation of Kreys implied that this symbol of crows flocking together and their motto of "standing firmly together" would be an inspiration to others. In an epilogue to one of the large family reunions, the writer expresses the family's great desire that the motto of the Krey Association would inspire a community spirit or "Gemeinschaftssinn"* that would grow, not only among the Kreys but throughout all of Germany - and possibly the world.

* Note: In German, the word Gemeinschaft (or community), refers to relations based on a relatively homogenous culture, tending to be intimate, informal, cooperative, and imbued with a sense of moral obligation to the group.

Notes on the Motto:

The following is part of the German text from the 1932 book with the description of how they hoped the motto would bring people together:

"...es ist zu hoffen, dass der Gemeinschaftssinn wieder erwachen wird, nicht nur bei den Kreyen, sondern in ganz Deutschland nach dem Wahlspruch des Kreyenverbandes:

Sodra wi fass tosam hefft stahn,
Denn hett uns na keen Minsch wat dahn."