

# MORE TRANSPOSABLE NAMES

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In the November 1995 *Word Ways*, the editor listed 26 different names such as EDNA DEAN or GARY GRAY. I have found 27 more, listed below:

Hank (Henry) Kahn 16	Mark Kram 2	Warner Warren 1
Ramon Moran 14	Noel Leon 2	Brian Rabin 0
Forest Foster 10	Bryan Barny 1	Nedra Arden 0
Warren Warner 9	Jason Jonas 1	Albert Tabler 0
Ruth Hurt 8	Lisle Ellis 1	Foster Forest 0
Cleo Cole 6	Nella Allen 1	Herman Hamner 0
Ramon Moran 6	Daymon Monday 1	Herman Harmen 0
Norma Roman 4	Gorman Morgan 1	Merill Miller 0
Andrew Warden 2	Morgan Gorman 1	Renaldo Leonard 0

Because my CD-ROM provides only a state-by-state list of telephone subscribers, I stopped searching for examples of a given transposition as soon as I found one. The editor provided nationwide statistics from his CD-ROM; curiously, several names did not appear there. (However, he noted the existence of Merill Miller in Social Security death records.)

To identify potential names, I worked from both ends, using given names from *The Name Game* by Christopher P. Anderson and surnames from *The New Dictionary of American Family Names* by Elsdon C. Smith. I also borrowed celebrity names from the *World Almanac* and even the *TV Guide*. Sometimes I just sat down and tossed common names around in my mind or on paper.

After finding either a likely given name or surname, I tried to create possible combinations. Once I had a combination, I checked the six or seven most populous states first for bearers of the name, hoping for a quick find. Unfortunately, that was not a frequent event.

Any attempt to draw conclusions from the statistics in this article or its predecessor has to consider two important factors: (1) most married couples with a single phone line list under the husband's name, (2) to avoid obscene phone calls, many single women list only their initials to prevent gender identification. As a result, female names are underrepresented: the two articles contain only 14 distinctively feminine names. I was sure I could find a female name to go with O'NEAL, but there was no LEONA, OLENA, ENOLA, ELONA or any other. Although Rhonda is frequently spelled RONDA, there were no RONDA DORANs. Note that short female names ending with A present enormous opportunities, and female names are more likely to have variant spellings.

My greatest disappointment was the absence of STEWART WATTERS; it

seemed the best chance for a seven-letter example. RENALDO LEONARD was one of the last names I found, and was one of many transposals that I tried using those letters. (The editor informs me that he found a LEONARD RENALDO in the Social Security death records.)

Three variations of this research may warrant further study. One is repeated names such as DEAN DEAN, a second is reversals such as MARK KRAM and NELLA ALLEN, and a third is matched pairs such as FOSTER FOREST and FOREST FOSTER.

One can only speculate whether these names are deliberately given by parents, are based on alliteration, or are merely coincidence. With female names, is the choice of a husband influenced one way or another by a match with the surname acquired by the wife upon marriage?

### Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk

The above-named book, written by Hugh Rawson and published by Crown Publishers in a \$25 hardcover edition, contains short historical essays on approximately two thousand "linguistic fig leaves"--words and phrases that take the sting out of death, race, sex and similar emotionally-charged topics. It is introduced by a lengthy discussion of euphemistic history (many arose before the Victorian era!) and a few ad hoc rules for forming them: foreign languages sound finer; abbreviations are better; indirection, understatement and length are valued. For the latter, he introduces the FOP (Fog Or Pomposity) index, which divides the number of letters in the circumlocution by the number of letters in the original, with additional syllables or words counted as additional "letters". Thus, the FOP of terminological inexactitude is 37/3.

To see how the book works, consider the euphemisms for whore (not an entry, of course): call girl, courtesan, working girl, streetwalker, trick, tramp, sporting girl, B-girl, natural, sex worker, unfortunate, V-girl, fallen woman, fille de joie and prostitute. Under the last heading one finds brief mention of a hundred more terms, mostly rare or obsolete, from abandoned woman to wet hen. Some of the euphemisms are rather specialized--how many readers are likely to encounter *white dielectric material* as a name for pigeon droppings (on an antenna)?--but the accompanying descriptions are almost always informative and entertaining. Under *vagina*, one finds an account of Shakespearean euphemistic wordplay; under *rubber*, one learns that condoms were used to protect rifle barrels from rain in World War II.