

Shmanners 368: Nicknames

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[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: For ordinary occasions! Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: Hey, do you remember when we used to do a joke to open stuff?

Travis: Yeah, it was a lot of pressure.

Teresa: [laughs loudly] I was just thinking about that. I was waiting for one.

Travis: No! I used to do that but it was like, then we had to—w—this is the thing that happens on My Brother, My Brother, and Me too that we talk about, like, with the closing bit. Is like, suddenly the thing that is completely inconsequential to the actual meat of the show takes twice as long to prepare than the actual show. 'cause you're like, "I don't know! I don't know! What is it?"

Teresa: Well, we were doing some banter before you hit the button, and I thought you were leading up to one, which is why I asked.

Travis: No, I have no jokes. Not anymore.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: They're all gone. I've used them all up. I used my quota early.

Teresa: Oh no. Oh no.

Travis: I know. And I'm only 23!

Teresa: [laughs] That's a good joke.

Travis: Uh, why? I don't understand.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: So, we're talking about nicknames.

Teresa: We are!

Travis: And this is—

Teresa: Welcome to nicknames.

Travis: Welcome to nicknames. I'm Nick Names. Um, the thing about—that was dumb.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: The thing about nicknames, I have feelings about this. I have—like, so, as a public figure, there is much known about me, including my childhood nickname, right? So, uh, Justin, myself, and Griffin are respectively Juice, Scraps, and Ditto, right? Those are the nicknames my dad gave us at some point in our lives. Me, Scraps was 'cause I was touch as scrap iron. Don't worry about it. Pretty cool. Especially compared to Justin? Drooled a lot. Griffin? Looked like Ditto, the baby from Hi and Lois.

So, of the nicknames, I think I win. But that's not important. What is important is everyone knows those nicknames, and I see nicknames as a

very, like... it's like when you have a pet name for someone. It's another nickname, right? Of like, it is a—

Teresa: Yeah, yeah. Endearment.

Travis: It is an endearment. But it is also, like, a level of familiarity that you reach with someone that you, like, have a nickname for them, right? And you use their nickname.

Teresa: Yes. But also, there are a lot of established nicknames.

Travis: Sure. And there are people who end up going by their nickname, right? Like I know lots of people, whether it's like their name's Robert and they go by Bob, or like, my friend Matt who I will always think of as Slice. Because there were two Matts in his freshman class in college, so somebody said, "Okay. Well, instead of calling you Matt and Matt, you'll be Home Skillet and you'll be Home Slice." And I don't know why that was.

Teresa: I don't know. [laughs]

Travis: And Skillet didn't stick for the other Matt. I don't know why Slice—

Teresa: But Slice stuck.

Travis: Slice stuck for him. So he'll always be Slice to me. But for me, like—

Teresa: I also tried to have a nickname in college. I tried to get away from my name—okay. So, my mom would often call me Resa, because you just take the Te off.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And then friends in high school would call me Tesa, because it was just, like, take the middle out.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Right? And I tried to get away from that, and I said—

Travis: [simultaneously] Oh, no, it's painful. Oh.

Teresa: —I wanted to be Terry.

Travis: You are not a Terry. You know that, right?

Teresa: I'm not a Terry. I know that now.

Travis: You are not a Terry at all.

Teresa: Well, and it didn't work because even if I introduced myself as Terry, on my college dorm room door they had our names, and they had written Teresa, so it doesn't really matter, right?

Travis: See, in college we did a lot of the, like, just calling people by their last names.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So I was McElroy to a lot of people. Um, which made se—like, I was the only McElroy there, so it wasn't a problem. It's not really something I can do now, for obvious reasons. I'm surrounded by McElroys, a whole gaggle of them. But I also just—I don't care for, like, Trav, and Travvy is like nails on a chalkboard to me. There's something infantilizing about it that I simply do not care for.

Teresa: Well, and that's another, like, nickname trend, right? So in high school we had lots of Johns. It was a very popular name in my school. So the youngest of the Johns was Little John, right?

Travis: Yeah. Cute.

Teresa: That's very infantilizing, too.

Travis: Well, I remember in high school, when I was taking Spanish class and we went around and got our Spanish names, and the teacher—the

incredibly appropriately named Mrs. Layman, who taught foreign language, she was going around and being like, "Oh, what's your first name? Okay, it will be this."

She got to Travis and she's like, "Well, there's not really, like, Spanish for—" but she was like, "But you could be *Travito*, which is little Travis."

And I was like, "No, thank you."

Teresa: Oh, yeah.

Travis: "That sounds like a nickname for m'nethers. No thank you."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I think that there's just something about—I really like the name Travis, and I think it really suits me. And also, if we're being honest, there's also a lot of, like, you gotta be careful these days with, like, parasocial relationships, and I think that jumping to nicknames and using nicknames is a level of familiarity that is, like—uh, can be uncomfortable, I think, in that way.

Um, so anyways... respect people and their nicknames and what they want to be called, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So let's do a little quick history of the nickname. Um, we understand what a nickname is, but it is a short name or a substitute for the proper name of a person, place, or thing. It can be a shortening, or it can be a completely different phrase meant to express affection, or amusement, or as an homage to—

Travis: Or like an in-joke or something.

Teresa: Sure, yeah. Right.

Travis: That's like a reference that you both get.

Teresa: Uh, so the etymology of the word "nickname" is very fascinating, because the nick in nickname comes from an Old English phrase, "ekename."

Travis: Okay, for a second—

Teresa: Which—

Travis: —I really thought it was going to be related to, you know, you shorten Nicholas to Nick, right? So it's like a nickname.

Teresa: No.

Travis: That's what I thought it was gonna be.

Teresa: No.

Travis: I was really hoping that it would be the long form would be Nicholas-name.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But that wasn't it?

Teresa: No, it's ekename, which translates to additional name, okay? And that's interesting because the eke isn't a term that means "to shorten," right?

Travis: Hmm.

Teresa: It means "also" or "to increase or expand," right?

Travis: So it'd be like, "Or you could also call," like also known as, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And over time it's assumed that eke began to sound like ick, meaning ekenames became icknames, and another theory over the course was when people would say "an ekename," right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: As you get it closer, an ekename, an ekename, a nickname, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: That's pretty cool.

Travis: That is pretty cool, that people did it so bad it became a different word. Power.

Teresa: [laughs] So, I mean, it's all encompassing, right? So a name that's other than their given name, for example—Alexx gave us this example. Her name is Alexandra, right? And everyone calls her Alexx.

Travis: With two Xs.

Teresa: With two Xs.

Travis: Don't get it twisted.

Teresa: But her friends in high school called her Boots because she wore boots every day.

Travis: There you go.

Teresa: Right? That's kind of like Slice, right?

Travis: Yeah. See, when I was in college all my friends called me The Lion.

Teresa: Hmm. Did they?

Travis: No. Not a single person has ever done that in my entire life. I also recognize, by the way, both in talking about how I don't like being called nicknames and joking about any fake nickname I could be called, know that I'm opening myself up to, like, the next time I do a signing someone coming up and doing it to, like, mess with me. Don't—hey, folks? Don't do that.

Teresa: That's not kind. Anyway, um, it can also be given as, like, a derogatory, right?

Travis: Sure, yeah.

Teresa: So for example during an economic depression during Martin Van Buren's presidency, his critics began to refer to him as Martin Van Ruin.

Travis: [gasps]

Teresa: Right? So it's kind of defacing that way, if you have some kind of, like, clever take on the sound or the way that it's spelled or something like that.

Travis: Like when people in elementary school called me Travis Macaroni. Oh, it cut to the very core of me! No, I actually remember—

Teresa: What's wrong with macaroni?

Travis: I even remember at the time being, like, eight years old and being like, "But macaroni's good. What d—am I supposed to be upset by this? What do you mean?"

Teresa: Nicknames also have a very societal, like, purpose, right? For example, in Viking societies people had nicknames that were used in addition to or instead of their first names. So giving a nickname had a special status in Viking society, and it was a relationship creator between the maker and the recipient.

Um, so much so that oftentimes the creation of a nickname was worthy of a formal ceremony and exchange of gifts.

Travis: Ooh! So it was like a t—almost like a—you earned—

Teresa: Like a title, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Because in Old Norse it is referred to as—I'm gonna butcher this—*nafnfester*.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Which is fastening a name.

Travis: Okay. You know, it's very interesting, because I—it just kind of occurred to me how much, like, usernames and handles on social media and stuff—

Teresa: Sure, yeah.

Travis: —have become basically nicknames. Where think about the people who are like, uh, you know, streamers who make a living doing it, like e-sports people, right? Their, like, professional name, their stage name, right? Is their handle on whatever they're playing on.

Teresa: Or YouTubers, right?

Travis: Right, or YouTubers, right? And it's like they become known as that. That's not their real names, right? Because that's what everyone knows them as, right?

Teresa: Right, right. Uh, in England, nicknames were generally associated with a person's surname, because surnames in Anglo-Saxon culture referred to their occupation, like Smith for blacksmith, Miller for someone who milled flour. But then—

Travis: Yeah. But if you meet someone named Tommy Assassin, get outta there!

Teresa: Get outta there! But then the interesting part of that is, you would have your occupation, right? And your last name might be Miller, but then people would give you the nickname of say, like, Dusty, right? Because you were always covered in flour dust.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Very cool.

Travis: Now you're Dusty Miller.

Teresa: Now you're Dusty Miller.

Travis: Which is a great name.

Teresa: Celtic cultures as well participated in this, and here's something, an old wives' tale that several people corroborated. Nicknames were essential in Irish communities as protection from fairies.

Travis: Yeah! You can't give 'em a real name!

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Once a fairy knows your true name—and listen. It's not just about knowing the words. It's about the pronunciation. Right? 'cause it's how you say your name. How other people say your name when they know you. They talk about this a lot in The Dresden Files. And so, like, when you say your name to a fairy, they get the pronunciation, having someone's true name, like the truth of it, how it's pronounced, how it—what you mean when you say it—

Teresa: It's like magic.

Travis: It's control, it's power over them.

Teresa: Uh, so—

Travis: Don't eat fairy food, either!

Teresa: No, don't do that.

Travis: Very important. Don't eat food in the fae realm. Don't eat food when you're down in, uh, uh, wh—hm—

Teresa: Wonderland?

Travis: Sure. Hades I think is what I was trying to think of.

Teresa: 'Cause it'll make you grow and shrink?

Travis: Well, that's true too.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But I mean, like... uh, how, you know, she ate the pomegranate seeds.

Teresa: Ohh yeah, Persephone.

Travis: Persephone ate the pomegranate, got stuck down there. Womp, womp.

Teresa: Um, another—

Travis: I don't know why I just "womp, womped" a woman being trapped in the after—womp, womp. Too bad for you! [laughs]

Teresa: Another old wives' tale is that if a child got sick when they were young and then they recovered, you might start to refer to them as their middle name so that the, quote, "Devil can't find them and take them away."

Travis: Hmm. Sure.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: I always—so when it comes to middle names, I don't think my parents did this intentionally, mind you, but all of our middle names were so—like, the names feel somehow the same as our first names in different way. So, like, Justin Tyler McElroy, right? He could've been Tyler Justin McElroy. It would've made the same sense. Griffin Andrew McElroy. Andrew Griffin McElroy. Would've made the same sense. Travis Patrick McElroy. Patrick Travis McElroy. Would've made the same sense. Like, there's no, like, "I've got a fun middle name!"

It's like, no, we have two first names for middle names across the board. Yeah.

Teresa: That's sometimes the way you gotta do it.

Travis: I mean, I guess? But what if my middle name had been, like, Thunder?

[pause]

Teresa: So, um, in Asian cultures, there are—

Travis: [simultaneously] Okay, we're not gonna talk about [crosstalk].

Teresa: —different reasons for nicknames. Uh, for many Chinese communities and Southeast Asia, nicknames connote a person's status. Um, or their job, right? So you might call your landlord Boss, or you might call the bread seller Uncle Bread.

Travis: Ooh! I like that.

Teresa: Yeah. Um, Japanese culture uses nicknames to denote endearment and honorifics, right?

Travis: Yeah, there's a lot of like—I see that, like, calling someone Uncle even though they're not actually your uncle, that kind of thing?

Teresa: Sure. But, like, in—so, certain recipients of Japanese nicknames are allowed to restrict the use of the nickname to just a certain person, because it's so contingent on your relationship.

Travis: See? This is what I'm saying! I agree with that, right? 'Cause there's definitely things that if somebody called me I would be like, "You don't get to call me that," right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm. There are a lot of established nicknames, and I feel like for our kids we used several of them, right? So we've got a Barbara who we call Bebe, and then our other child is Dorothy. We call her Dottie.

Travis: Correct.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: I agree with both of those statements.

Teresa: So, uh, let's go through how some of the other more maybe common, maybe uncommon nicknames originated.

Travis: I would love that. But you know what? But Teresa, if I may, but real quick..

Teresa: Hmm.

Travis: How about a thank you note for our sponsor?

[theme music plays]

Travis: Teresa, we're married, right?

Teresa: Uh, last time I checked.

Travis: Do you enjoy being married to me? Like, day to day?

Teresa: Yeah. I would say general trend is on the up.

Travis: Okay, great. Do you think we could've maybe done the actual ceremony event a little bit better?

Teresa: Definitely. We could have made it so much easier.

Travis: Yeah. I wish that we had had Zola at that point, because Zola would definitely have made it easier, and if you are getting married, you know it's not just, like, the day of. It's all the things leading up to it, and Zola can help you on all those. They have beautifully designed save-the-dates and invitations. You can do, like, a wedding website with them with a built-in registry. It's amazing, you gotta check it out. Plus, they can even suggest venues and vendors and all kinds of things.

Teresa: That's so great, because sometimes you're just reaching around blindly.

Travis: Yeah. It did kind of feel like we were inventing the event as we did it.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Where we were like, "Oh yeah, people will probably want food, huh? Where do we get food from?"

Teresa: And then also, like, the second that you say wedding, like, the prices just jack right up, so.

Travis: "100%. I would like a three tiered, all white with, like, lace and fringe... birthday cake?"

Both: [high pitched hum]

Travis: "No reason cake, please. It's just a big old... "

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "And if you could put two people at the top and maybe they're fancy dressed—don't worry about it."

Teresa: Zola's gonna make it easier for everybody else.

Travis: So start planning at zola.com/shmanners. That's Z-O-L-A.com/shmanners.

[music plays]

Jordan: I'm Jordan Morris.

Jesse: And I'm Jesse Thorn.

Jordan: On Jordan, Jesse, Go! we make pure, delightful nonsense.

Jesse: We rope in awesome guests...

Jordan: ... and bring them down to our level.

Jesse: We get stupid with Judy Greer.

Judy: My friend Molly and I call it having the space weirds.

Jordan: Patton Oswalt.

Patton: Could I get a Balrog burger and some Aragorn fries? Thank you.

Jesse: And Kumail Nanjiani.

Kumail: I've come back with cat toothbrushes, which is impossible to use.

Jordan: Come get stupider with us at Maximumfun.org.

Jesse: Look, your podcast app's already open. Just pull it out. Give Jordan, Jesse, Go! A try.

Jordan: Being smart is hard. Be dumb instead!

[music and ad end]

Speaker 1: Okay. Zebras...

Carrie: Uh, hello!

Speaker 1: Orangutans—oh!

Carrie: Yes, sorry, hi.

Speaker 1: I'm not used to the animals talking. Who are you?

Carrie: Yes. My name's Carrie Poppy. I cohost a podcast called Oh No, Ross and Carrie! This is my cohost, Ross right here.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Carrie: We investigate spirituality, claims of the paranormal, and we were wondering if we could get on the ark.

[thunder]

Speaker 1: You did come two by two. I appreciate that.

Carrie: Thank you.

Speaker 1: Though most of the things I'm letting on the ark don't talk.

Carrie: I'm gonna be talking all up on this boat. Do you mind boat?

Speaker 1: I prefer ark, or barge.

Carrie: Okay, I'm not listening. But if you let me on, then I will make my really good podcast on your... boat? Barge.

Speaker 1: Can you at least help clean up all the poop?

Carrie: I guess I don't see why not.

Speaker 1: Well, I'll check out the podcast. Where do I find it?

Carrie: It's on Maximumfun.org.

[music and ad end]

Travis: Okay. So I need to know, there's definitely gonna be some—I hope on here we talk about, like, how John becomes Jack.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? How William becomes Bill. 'cause it ain't Billiam.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Travis: Right. Gimme some of these. Lay it down.

Teresa: Okay. So a lot of this comes from How Stuff Works. They wrote a really great article.

Travis: Love those guys.

Teresa: Where they reached out to, um, Cleveland Kent Evans, who is a psychology professor and the author of The Great Big Book of Baby Names.

Travis: And they call him The Cleve!

Teresa: And he was also the former president of the American Name Society.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Seems trustworthy.

Travis: So he's got bona fides.

Teresa: So, first. Charles into Chuck.

Travis: It makes no sense.

Teresa: There are two prevailing theories on this. So, the first one is pretty simple. Charles in Middle English was Chucken. So people assume this could be the origin, but...

Travis: That does make sense.

Teresa: But the nickname didn't really catch on until the 1800's, which is way after Middle English, right?

Travis: Yeah, but if I had a friend named Charles and in the 1800's I find out that people named Charles used to be called Chucken, I'm calling him Chucken, right? Like, as soon as I find that out I'm like, "Oh, okay. You're Chucken now."

Teresa: So here is a little more scholarly theory.

Travis: Eh.

Teresa: The nickname Chuck may have come from Chinese-American culture.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: In the 19th century, New York City, there was a very famous gangster named Chuck Connors who grew up in the Chinatown neighborhood of Lower Manhattan.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, he is actually one of the main players in the five points kind of mobster era., which is what the movie Gangs of New York is based on.

Travis: Now, you have to remember, the only time I saw Gangs of New York, I was on painkillers in the hospital. So I vaguely remember, and I just—here's all I remember about Gangs of New York. I kept, like, falling asleep, and then waking back up, and falling asleep, and waking back up,

and it was still on every time that happened. And by, like, the fifth time I said out loud to the nurse, "How long is this movie?" and I fell back asleep.

Teresa: [laughs] I've never seen it because I don't like watching violence.

Travis: It's, from what I remember, eight hours long.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay. But—so he spoke enough Chinese, right? And knew his home really well that he was known as the other unofficial nickname the mayor of Chinatown.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and Chuck wasn't his real name, but Charles also wasn't his real name.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: If you asked him where the nickname Chuck came from, he would tell you that it was his love of chuck steak, or that he loved to eat in general. But Evans, the professor, has another theory. He told *How Stuff Works* that if you look at the census in 1850, which was the first list to pull names, almost all the people who had some variation of Chuck in their names had Chinese origin.

Travis: Huh.

Teresa: Based on that evidence, evidence—Evans thinks, based on that evidence, Evans thinks... [laughs]

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That it was much more likely that Connors picked up the nickname from growing up in Chinatown. When he passed away in 1913, New York papers printed his named as Charles. And that was the connection between Charles and Chuck.

Travis: Okay. I don't know. That one feels so specific. This is tough, right? Because, like, that one has a lot more tracking to it, it has a lot more data to it.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: But telling me that, like, in Old English Charles was Chucken, is like, okay! Yep. That—like, that's—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Because whenever we talk about the origins of like—this happens in our idioms episodes, too.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And it's like, it's either this big but nonspecific thing, or it's this one specific occurrence. It's easier for me to believe a big thing caught on than this one guy's name made a connection for everybody in the whole world.

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: I know.

Teresa: I don't know. So here's another one. Harry or Hank is short for Henry.

Travis: Yeah. This is—there's some in here—I'm always thrown off when a nickname is the same length as the original name. So, like, Harry, it's five letters. Henry? Five letters.

Teresa: Yeah. So again, a little murky as far as the origin, but we probably have the Dutch and the French to thank for this one. So the most likely explanation is that Henk is a Dutch nickname for Henry, right? The same E sound.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And it would've been used by large communities of Dutch settlers that made their homes in New York and New Jersey in the 18th and 17th centuries.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But before long, Henk with an E turned into Hank with an A.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: And Harry as a nickname for Henry, which is probably another mispronunciation. So Harry isn't exactly nickname, right? Because you can—you name people Harry. There's always been people named Harry. But it is probably a misunderstanding of the French name Henri.

Travis: [gasps] Of course! *Zut alors!*

Teresa: And that arrived in England during the Norman conquest in the 11th century.

Travis: Henri. Harry. Yes.

Teresa: Since most people in Medieval England couldn't read or write, they pronounced the new name as best they could, which made Henri sound more like Harry than it did Henry.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And this is something that we see today, because Prince Harry's real name is Prince Henry.

Travis: I love this. Okay. I'm learning new things and growing as a person. I'm loving it.

Teresa: Here's another one.

Travis: Yes please.

Teresa: Why is Dick short for Richard?

Travis: Um... uh... I'm gonna guess something to do with Ancient Egypt.

Teresa: Uh, no.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Another very common English name which appears a lot in Medieval literature, right? This is something where, again, occupation and lineages took the place of your last name. So you were John the Smith, or Robert, son of William, right? But every dude in England for a very long time was pretty much—that's been written about—was named John, William, Robert, or Richard.

Travis: 'Cause of the kings.

Teresa: 'Cause of the kings.

Travis: You wanted to name your baby after the kings.

Teresa: So it was important to distinguish Richard, your brother, from Richard, your husband, right?

Travis: Yeah! Oh, for a lot of reasons!

Teresa: [laughs] And Rick was a common nickname for Richard, because it's a shortening, right? So then you can make rhyming nicknames of Rick, Hick, Dick, all became acceptable.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Similar thing happened to Robert, right? Because shortened to Rob, could also be Hob or Dob, and Bob.

Travis: It is interesting, though, isn't it? That, like, that makes complete sense to me, but only certain ones of those continued on. People were like,

"I'm not calling him Dob." But people were like, "I love Bob. I'll call him Bob all day long. That's fun to say, you see."

Teresa: So you mentioned earlier, why is Bill short for William?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: This is probably because of the Irish Gaelic sounds that are contained in the words. So the Irish Gaelic W sounds kind of more of a B sound, depending on whether the word is the subject or the object of the sentence, okay?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And that's why a sensible nickname for William, like Will, could become Bill, depending on how you were speaking about the person.

Travis: Whoa.

Teresa: So the name doesn't change, but the sound changes, and eventually that changes the name, right? Um, it's also possible...

Travis: Oh! Twist.

Teresa: ... well, that using B was a way to infantilize or shame someone. So this is an example of it, right? There's a song about William, King William, being called Bill in the 17th century when the Irish people mocked him, King William III, by calling the hated protestant conqueror King Billy.

Travis: Hmm! Okay.

Teresa: Here is one you mentioned earlier. John and Jack.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Again, we don't really know for sure, but there are a couple of possible ones. The naming practice in Middle Ages when people would add

maybe kin to show affection, William became Wilkin, Peter became Perkin, maybe John became Jenkin?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Which was shortened to Jenk, which became Jack?

Travis: Hey, listen. We should've kept it at Jenk, baby. If I had a friend named John and I could call him Jenk, I would do it in a heartbeat.

Teresa: Another theory is that the French name Jacques came from England during the Norman invasion, right? And it merged with the name John, Jacques and John. Both were also—

Travis: That makes sense, because in Frere Jacques you say Brother John!

Teresa: Mm-hmm, Brother John.

Travis: You don't say Brother Jack!

Teresa: That's right.

Travis: [gasps loudly] Mon dieu!

Teresa: And—and both were usually used as, like, a placeholder, right? Like John Doe.

Travis: I actually just got chills putting that together, by the way. I got very excited about it.

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, and so over time the name Jacques and John merged together to create the name Jack.

Travis: Oh my glob.

Teresa: Another theory, thank you Mental Floss, is that John and Jack were just generic names for peasants in English, like John Doe, right? Because we see this in the words steeplejack, lumberjack.

Travis: Jackanape.

Teresa: Sure. Um, and that became interchangeable, right? John and Jack became just kind of interchangeable.

Travis: Then how come we don't say lumberjohn, which is, I think, more pleasant to say?

Teresa: [laughs] We've done some traditionally masculine names. Let's do some traditionally feminine names now.

Travis: Okay, cool.

Teresa: There are 1.7 billion nicknames for Margaret. Why is that?

Travis: 'Cause it's common?

Teresa: Hmm...

Travis: 'Cause it has a lot of letters in it?

Teresa: Hmm...

Travis: 'Cause... I don't know.

Teresa: So, both Peggy and Daisy can be nicknames for Margaret.

Travis: Get out. At that point, anything can be a nickname for—we could call it—the nickname is The Moon, right? Like...

Teresa: [laughs] This is probably one of the most, like, concrete evidences for rhyming nicknames, okay? So in the 1500's there was a fad where people with M names would rhyme themselves with P names, okay? So that kind of explains the Margaret to Peggy.

Travis: So that's like Maggie to Peggy? Is that it? Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah, kind of like that. So we've got Margaret, who might be named Marg. That could become Mag, which might become Meg, which might become Meggy, which then turned to Peggy.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Sure?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Maybe?

Travis: Listen, as someone—as you pointed out—

Teresa: Or Margaret to Maggie to Peggy, maybe.

Travis: Listen. Bebe—like, Barbara has lots of nicknames. Dorothy has different nicknames. So I get it. We call our kids all kinds of different things, right? Just like you would call—like, people give their animals, their pets, a million nicknames. I can see how if you did that enough, or if you were someone who was like, a Lord, very prominent, and your child went through a bunch of different nicknames, that people would be like, "I would like to emulate them, so I will call my child that." Sure. I absolutely see that.

Teresa: So, here's one, right? Martha has a very similar nickname evolution. It started with the name Math, which became Matt, then Pat, then Patty, eventually Patsy as well. In fact, Thomas Jefferson usually referred to his wife as Patty, so people often assume her full name was Patricia, because that's very close. But it wasn't. It was Martha, because that was a very typical, like, just kind of, like, down the chain nickname for Martha.

Travis: Yeah. Did you know that, like, not mine, but Travis can actually be short for another name? Traaaviis.

Teresa: [laughs] Alright, you got me with that one.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: As far as someone calling Daisy, like I mentioned earlier, if their real name is Margaret, this does make a little bit of sense, because the French word for the oxeye daisy, that beautiful—like, the one that we associate most often with the daisy, is Marguerite. so this nickname is a play on the translation.

Travis: Okay. That makes sense.

Teresa: Um, this is one that I had never heard of. Nancy is a nickname for Ann.

Travis: Now, hold on. Okay. Alright. If you let go... of thinking of a nickname as a shortening of someone's name and think of it just as an additional name, okay. Is it, like—

Teresa: Ann? Nancy? Ann? Maybe?

Travis: Maybe. Maybe that child's named Ann and she has a lot of energy and you call her Antsy. She's Antsy. Then it becomes Nancy. Okay.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Also, older English dialects would use the word "mine" in place of "my" when it comes to pet names, right? So if I called you—

Travis: Oh!

Teresa: —instead of my Travis, mine Travis...

Travis: Yeah. You hear it a lot i—I don't know where you would hear it a lot but I listen to a lot of English, like, you know, turn of the century literature, and it's like, Nancy mine, right? You would say like, "Oh, John mine." or like, you know, "Bobby mine." To, like—yeah.

Teresa: Sure, yeah. So them Ann has always been a pretty popular name, and so maybe over the years people were saying mine Ann, and it got shortened to Nan, which became Nanny and Nancy and...

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: All that stuff.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Right? This is how the nicknames for Every day and Ellen work as well. So Edward gets moved from mine Edward to mine Ed to Ned.

Travis: Yeah. Also Ted.

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: But I bet that was a rhyming thing too, 'cause there was lots of King Edwards. And there was probably, like, "Alright. You're Ed, and Red, and Bed—sorry."

Teresa: [laughs] Same thing with Ellen, because mine Ellen to mine Elly to Nelly.

Travis: Sure, yes. Listen, I'm convinced. You've sold me on this. Where do I sign up? How do I invest?

Teresa: But you don't want a nickname. You just want to give people nicknames? Is that what you're saying?

Travis: No! I just want to be able, when someone goes "Oh yeah, my name's Nelly," be like, "Do you know why?" [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Because everyone loves that person. Everyone enjoys them!

Teresa: Well, I feel like maybe I could've gotten another nickname if I wanted one, but, like, I don't feel like I've met a lot of Teresas in my life, so I don't need a lot of, like, distinguishing from other Teresas. And now, you know, the two most important people in the world call me Mommy.

Travis: Me and Bebe? What about Dot?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Oh, right, I see. This is another thing, 'cause you just made me think of it. You? Hey, listener. If you take anything away from this let it be this. You never have to justify to anyone what name you go by, what name, if you choose a name for example, if you change your name for example, but also if you just go by a nickname, if you go by a name you like, because it's always weird to me. It doesn't happen so much anymore, because being a public figure. But I used to get asked all the time in, like, an angry tone, "Why isn't it pronounced Mick-EL-roy?"

Teresa: Because it isn't.

Travis: 'Cause that—'cause that's just not—because when I was learning to talk and my parents taught me my name, they said McElroy, so I've always just gone with that, man! I don't know what to tell you."

Teresa: I have heard specifically for that that if it's an M-C—

Travis: You heard this from me, yeah.

Teresa: Yeah, if it's an M-C with a vowel, it's Mac, but if it's an M-C with a consonant, it's Mick, which is why it's McDonald's, not MacDonald's.

Travis: But there's plenty—you can find plenty of exceptions to that in every day—

Teresa: Of course.

Travis: Like, at a certain point if I meet someone whose last name is spelled the same as mine and they go "Mick-EL-roy," I'm not gonna be like,

"Traitor." Right? [laughs] I'm gonna be like, "Okay. Cool, man! Sounds great."

Teresa: That's also a syllable difference, right? An emphasis thing, where it's MAC-elroy instead of Mick-EL-roy.

Travis: Absolutely. Now, for a long time my dad was called Mac, right? And his dad was called Mac. And, like, we still call my dad Mac. And they have the same name. I think my dad was, like, Clint McElroy III or something. And he hated his middle so much, 'cause it was a family middle name that his family had and that he refused to name any of us to keep it going. And then none of us got the nickname Mac either, I think for that very reason. Or it was, like, who decides?

Teresa: Who decides?

Travis: Who decides who gets to be Mac? Anyway, that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you so much to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we could not make this show. And thank you to you for listening. We could make the show without you, but it'd be so lonely.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm so happy you're here. I'm, let's see. Got a couple quick announcements for you. Wanted to make sure you've checked out all the great merch in the merch store that was new this month. 10% of all merch proceeds this month will go to the World Central Kitchen, and next week I'm going to be in Gen Con! so find out all about that and all of our upcoming appearances at bit.ly/mcelroytours. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also thanks to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners! If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today. We are always taking topic submissions, and you can email those to us at shmannerscast@gmail.com. Make sure that you say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners...

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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