

2012 Name of the Year

CLEVELAND EVANS

Bellevue University, Nebraska, USA

The ninth annual Name of the Year vote was held at the American Name Society meeting in Boston, Massachusetts on January 4, 2013.

For 2012 we had thirty total nominees, 50% more than the previous record. Twenty-one nominations were made by email before the meeting, and nine were nominated from the floor.

There were originally four nominations for Trade Name of the Year. Pinterest, the popular website that allows users to “pin” photos from the Internet and share their collections, was one of two website names nominated. The other was FiveThirtyEight, the blog founded by Nate Silver (later bought by *The New York Times*) which aggregates polling data to more accurately predict elections.

Two persons nominated Obamacare, the informal name for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The term was originally created by those opposed to the legislation, but during 2012 it was also embraced by the Obama campaign. Romney-sia, a satirical blend of “Romney” and “amnesia” used to describe an alleged medical condition, was another nominated campaign term.

Nominated from the floor during the meeting were Fiscal Cliff, the moment when all of the Bush era tax cuts would have expired and drastic spending cuts implemented if Congress had not acted; and Pussy Riot, the Russian all-female rock music group that created worldwide controversy when some of its members were arrested for disrupting Orthodox church services.

In the first ballot none of the nominees received over 50 percent of the votes, so a run-off was held between the top two, Pinterest and Fiscal Cliff. Fiscal Cliff won with three-quarters of the votes.

There were four initial nominees for Place Name of the Year. Aurora, Colorado, site of a July mass shooting incident in a movie theater; and Sandy Hook, the name of an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, that was the site of a December mass shooting, were among them. Newtown itself was also nominated from the floor. Gaza, the Palestinian enclave that was the site of much armed conflict during 2012, was another nominee associated with violence.

Three persons sent in nominations for Gangnam. The name of this affluent district of Seoul, South Korea, became known worldwide during 2012 because of a YouTube video of a hit song by Korean rapper PSY called “Gangnam Style.” The video had over a billion views as of January 4, making it the most watched YouTube selection ever, and hundreds of parodies with various celebrities and political figures imitating PSY’s dance moves have appeared. The place name means “south of the Han River.”

Gangnam won as Place Name of the Year on the first ballot with 62 percent of the vote.

Ten nominations for Personal Name of the Year were received before the meeting. These included Pedericia, which the nominator said was “the name of a woman on a TV quiz show,” and Kony, the surname of Joseph Kony, head of the Ugandan guerilla group The Lord’s Resistance Army, who was the subject of a controversial documentary film released in March 2012. Trayvon, the first name of Trayvon Martin, a Florida teenager whose fatal shooting in February sparked national outrage, was another nominee.

Higgs was nominated because of the discovery in July by European physicists of a particle that behaves like the Higgs boson, a subatomic entity whose existence was originally postulated by Peter Higgs of the University of Edinburg.

Two athletes saw their names nominated. Jeremy Lin, point guard for the New York Knicks, was cited because of how his newfound fame led to a series of newly invented words such as Linsanity, Linspirational, and Linderella. RG III, the nickname by which Robert Griffin III, first year quarterback for the Washington Redskins, is called, was nominated because of how his excellent debut season has made RG III well known to football fans, many of whom do not know his full official name.

Presidential candidate Willard Mitt Romney’s name was put forward because of his use of his middle name, and how that middle name was originally the nickname of his father’s cousin, Milton.

The next nominee, Malala, is the first name of Malala Yousafzai, a teenage Pakistani girl who was shot by the Taliban for refusing to abandon her advocacy of education for girls. Her first name became a world-wide symbol for human rights while she was being treated for life-threatening injuries in a British hospital.

Three persons nominated Sandy, the name of the hurricane and “superstorm” which dominated the news at the end of October 2012, doing \$66 billion dollars in damage and taking 253 lives in the Northeastern United States.

The celebrity baby name nominated this year was Blue Ivy, daughter of Jay-Z and Beyoncé, born January 8, 2012. This name is of special interest to onomasticians because her parents later attempted to trademark it, and were turned down because a Boston events planning company had previously trademarked “Blue Ivy.”

There were three nominees for Personal Name made from the floor. The first was Honey Boo Boo, nickname of six-year-old Alana Thompson, star of the reality television program “Here Comes Honey Boo Boo.” Petraeus, the surname of CIA director David Petraeus who resigned in November after admitting to an affair with his biographer; and Whitney Houston, name of the famous singer who accidentally drowned under the influence of cocaine in February, also received nods.

With so many nominees, it was no surprise that none received over 50 percent on the first ballot. The runoff between the two top vote-getters, Malala and Sandy, resulted in a narrow 54 percent victory for Malala.

Three nominees for Fictional Name of the Year were received before the meeting. Two persons nominated Katniss Everdeen, the name of the heroine of Suzanne Collins’ “Hunger Games” series of dystopian novels, for how it fit the character and cleverly used the name of an edible aquatic plant for the given name. The film based

on the first of these novels came out in March 2012, greatly increasing public awareness of the character's name.

Amy was put forward by a nominator who said "a spate of Amy characters" had been created in the popular media in 2012, including characters on the TV series "Enlightened," "Veep," "Up All Night," "Secret Life of the American Teenager," and "The Big Bang Theory." The protagonist of Gillian Flynn's novel "Gone Girl" and the character Fat Amy in the film "Pitch Perfect" were also mentioned. The nominator said creators of these characters had probably been born during the 1970s while Amy was one of the most popular names for newborn girls, and so grew up "in a sea of Amys."

Grey, surname of the protagonist of the publishing phenomenon "Fifty Shades of Grey," was also nominated. This prompted those at the meeting to separately nominate the book title "Fifty Shades of Grey" from the floor.

Also nominated from the floor at the meeting were Bilbo Baggins, the name of the hero of J. R. R. Tolkien's children's novel "The Hobbit," because of the Peter Jackson film "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey," released in December. Finally, Downton Abbey, the name of the fictional Edwardian British estate which is also the name of the PBS "Masterpiece" television series which has received wide acclaim and more viewers than most public television programs, received a nod from the floor.

Downton Abbey almost won on the first ballot when it got exactly 50 percent, and in its runoff with Katniss Everdeen received 61 percent of the vote to become Fictional Name for 2012.

The four winners in the overall categories automatically became nominees for overall Name of the Year. Sandy was again nominated from the floor. The first round of voting was Downton Abbey, 1; Fiscal Cliff, 2; Gangnam, 3; Malala, 7; and Sandy, 11. In the runoff between Malala and Sandy, Sandy was victorious with 17 votes vs. 7 for Malala. Voters may have been swayed by arguments that Sandy would become better known for a longer period of time in the United States than Malala, and that having five winners instead of four would gain more publicity for ANS.

Sandy becomes the second hurricane name to win the title of ANS Name of the Year, since Katrina was the winner for 2005 in the second Name of the Year contest.

For 2013, the American Name Society will again vote on Names of the Year in the four categories of Fictional Names, Place Names, Personal Names, and Trade Names before choosing an overall winner. Send nominations to Dr Cleveland Evans, either by email at cleveland.evans@bellevue.edu, or by postal mail to him at Psychology Department, Bellevue University, 1000 Galvin Road South, Bellevue, NE 68005-3098, USA. Please include a rationale for your nomination, which will be included on the list of nominees presented at our annual meeting in January 2014.