

Six Ways to Make People Like You

1. Become genuinely interested in other people.
2. Smile.
3. Remember that a person's name is, to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language.
4. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
5. Talk in terms of the other person's interest.
6. Make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely.

~Dale Carnegie from *How to Win Friends
and Influence People*, 1937

1 — Thelma is a knockout! She and Eddie are standing on the beach at Weston-super-Mare, a resort town across the Bristol Channel from Wales where they were married the week before. She is, as always, stunningly dressed. Her open overcoat reveals a woolen skirt and top. She wears nylons and—look at those heels!—she should be sinking into the sand, but instead rises Christ-like—Wow!—above it. Her huge purse, tucked under her arm, could easily hold a pony.

Oh, Eddie, poor Eddie, why is he not smiling? What's wrong, Ed? His hair is out of place, not like him. Is it windy? Maybe he has sand in his eyes. He is wearing a tie and sweater under his buttoned jacket, and he's holding his trench coat in his arms. I know it's England, for Pete's sake, but it can't be that cold, I mean it's June, 1946. Thelma has her hand looped over his arm. You don't mind, Ed, do you? You have always been a shy man. Are you embarrassed by this public spectacle of affection? Or do you sense what's to come? It's bad, what's to come, but you didn't know that then, did you?

2 — Oh, Thelma, look at you and Eddie both holding that baby. Eddie, he looks serious as he stares at the camera. But you, Thelma, you are beatific! There is no one else in the whole world except you and that little one,

swaddled in a blanket to protect it from...well, almost everything. It is March 1948, and you have just given birth. How come you look so good? Did you get a perm before going into the hospital? Your eyes and lips are made up and your coat is buttoned tight, but I see the three strands of pearls, three! that hang around your neck. You love this child, don't you, Thelma? Don't be afraid to tell me if you don't. You won't hurt my feelings? It's not me. It's my big brother Paul.

What's the brick building behind you? Is it the hospital where he was just born? Is it the tenement where you live? You have come a long way—baby, you live in the city now—from the bucolic farm in Wales. Of course, you can't walk in those green meadows, but you can pace back and forth back and forth back and forth in the tiny apartment on 19th Street. No sheep, Thel, but plenty of roaches. And why is it that every time you try to paint the dingy kitchen walls you fall off a chair and something breaks? Every damn time you try to make things a little bit brighter, something breaks.

3 — Thelma sits on the porch steps holding a can of Rheingold in one hand and a Chesterfield in the other. She is wearing shorts, oh my! I bet she didn't get to do that much in Wales. And of course, she has her purse. Not a pony-sized purse, just a regular black, patent leather purse that does not match her white high heel sandals. But she's so damned beautiful nobody cares. She has a goofy grin on her face—she must be tipsy.

The steps are to Aunt Kate's house in Rockaway Beach, the Irish Miami, where Thelma and Eddie rent a one-room bungalow for the summer a few doors down. Aunt Kate's beer can is upside down. I bet she's tipsy too. She is leaning against Robbie the Washman who curses in Yiddish and a young man in a white t-shirt who looks too young to drink but looks like he's already drunk. That's little me, three years old, very serious, sitting on the step in front of Thelma. I look goofy too. My ears stick out of my head like two baseball gloves. Paul sits on the step in front of me. We are dressed in identical outfits, though I must say I am handsomer than he is, don't you think? Paul is wearing a baseball hat that Uncle Pete gave him. He loves that hat. Is that why he's smiling? He's not done much of that, but then why should he? It is summer, 1953. Bad things have been planning themselves, but they haven't gotten around to happening yet. Not yet.

Thelma is happy for a change. She is having a good time, enjoying a beer with Eddie's family. They have never met anyone like her before—elegant, dignified and exotic—and they love her. By the way, where is Eddie? Oh, don't worry about Eddie. He is probably working on a construction site. He'll take the A-train from the city and will be home soon. Then he will walk his two sons down the street to the beach for a quick dip in the ocean before dinner. What are you cooking tonight, Thel? Steak for your husband? What about the boys? Another bowl of corn flakes? Why not. *They're Gr-r-reat!*

4 — OK, here it is...

NEWPORT WALES NOV 1953

MR ED MURPHY 315 WEST 19TH STREET NEWYORKCITY
DONT BOOK PASSAGE FOR ENGLAND DIDA ILL WILL
NOT ACCEPT THELMA OR CHILDREN YOUR RESPONSIBILITY
CANCEL BOOKING STAND BY FOR PHONE CALL
JIM

November, 1953

Dear Dida & Jim,

After the treatment I received from you, I wouldn't bother this letter except that Dr. Lukas consulted me about the wire you sent to him, you said in it that you intend would be seeing him soon if that means that you intend coming over here dont bother on my account because you will be no more welcome here than I am over there. What makes you think Im in a hospital I don't know. All I know is that when I needed someone to turn to in my trouble you refused to have me, it is quite a shock to learn from your own family that all they are worried about is whose responsibility I am, yours or his. It was like a knife going through me to hear you say you didn't want me. This will be my last word to you, I dont wish to hear from you either. Because I'll have nothing more to do with you.

Thelma

5 — Thelma, until your nieces sent me the snapshot of you at twelve years old it never occurred to me that you had ever been twelve years old but then they were not your nieces but your cousins and your sister wasn't your sister but really your mother which everyone knew but you even the shepherd I met in your village decades later when I told him I was Thelma's son and he said Thelma that's Dida's daughter and I said no Dida's sister and he said No Boyo Dida's daughter and I told him he was drunk.

Even twelve years old beautiful your life like meadow grass shooting out of the soil blooming more beautiful even under the waves of bombs dropped by Nazis beautiful even under the wave of a sister/mother who never told you who you were who you were supposed to be.

No wonder when Eddie came marching along before assaulting the beach at Normandy in the first of many waves to crash against the Fuehrer no wonder you played coy until he could not help returning after his wounds to marry you in what must have been the most photographed wedding in the history of Wales.

When the burglar broke into my house and stole my wallet he stole my only picture of you lying on a rocky beach in Wales with a girlfriend nobody remembers but it all came back and I have been bequeathed with a box of documents and papers and *happy snaps* that reveal more than just the splendid wedding of the Welsh girl to the handsome Yank who took her away from her troubles but who took her troubles with her.

6 — I tell people I do not remember you touching me, Thelma. I look through the photographs hoping I am wrong. I have been wrong about most things. I want to be wrong about this too. I pick up the last picture, a portrait of the family posing in the dull apartment. Eddie sits on a chair in the living room. Why do they call it a living room? They don't call your bedroom off the same hall a *giving up* room, a *dying* room, a *killing yourself* room. Eddie wears a gray suit, white shirt, striped tie. He is probably wearing cufflinks, but I can't see them. He's put on weight. Marriage has been good to him. Ha. Ha. He looks serious. He would probably like to smile, but he knows better. On a stool between his legs totter his two boys. They're not smiling either. They know better too. First Paul, looking worried, and on the edge next to him, there's four-year-old-me. Blonde

hair. Ears sticking out. Lips squeezed tight. My left hand clenches my right hand, and it won't let go.

To the side of this beautiful family is the squiggly jade-colored lamp that has lit up the rooms of memory for decades, rooms furnished in dust and shadow. What happened to that lamp? What happened to your jewelry, Thelma, those magnificent pearls that are missing in this picture from your neck? Were they buried with you? Who decided what to do with the toys Paul and I never played with again? Were they tossed in the trash cans in the alley on the side of the building? Were they donated? Was there Good Will back then? An army of salvation?

Nothing saves us.

You poise on the arm of the chair carefully touching no one. One hand holds the other, your fingers itching for a cigarette. Your hair is frozen in a beautiful permanent wave. It couldn't move if it wanted to. Your face is clear. You are almost smiling. Your eyes, for the last time, are bright. You wear a muted red suit that must have cost a fortune. How could Eddie afford to buy you those clothes? Did he go shopping with you? Did you take me with you or shop by yourself, leaving me alone in the apartment? Your jacket has a black velvet collar, and your shoes, your shoes! How could you walk on those things? Is that why you were always falling down?

7 — Here's what she wrote on the back of a photograph.

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- 6.