

Can You Make New Friends?

Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?

- Thomas Wolfe, novelist (1900-1938)

As depressing as this quote sounds, it's actually the key that opens an understanding of human nature that can bring a person internal peace and give him a tool by which he can manage more easily the stresses of dealing with others who are unreasonable. And to make friends.

That in itself is a grand statement. However, let's think it through a little further.

We are strangers even to ourselves, in a sense, because we make decisions daily that we didn't anticipate having to make and those decisions affect our lives. If we choose to watch a movie, for example, we choose to eliminate the possibility of doing other activities, of learning new things, of having new experiences, of meeting new people, of facing new opportunities.

Not that watching a movie has anything inherently wrong with it, any more than any of the other options listed. It's just that we can't do many other things when we choose to do one in particular. A movie can change a person's life just as much as meeting a new friend or business associate, creating something new in the basement or riding a bicycle across the country.

Because each little decision we make during a day in effect alters the course of our lives (some only minimally), and the situation works the same way with a spouse, parent or child, we tend to know very little about even those closest to us. We may think we know them well, but we don't even know what they are thinking for more than a few brief moments in any given day.

What we do know are ourselves and our experiences. When we generalize about the world based on our own experiences we may often be wrong because others don't perceive events and choices similar to ours the same way we do. We know ourselves but others are not like us. We are unique in many ways.

As Wolfe said, each of us is a stranger to all others (at least to some extent) and alone unto ourselves for much of what we do and think.

Then it becomes important how we treat our time of aloneness and how we interact with others when we have the opportunity. Being alone is a reality, but being lonely is a choice made by those who decide to not enjoy their own company. That may sound cruel to lonely people, but the fact is that those who are lonely either don't like their own company or don't know how to befriend others. Either way it's a choice.

Most people learn their skills of socializing through experience. That is, accident and coincidence play a large role in how most of us learn to interact with each other.

Social interaction skills can be learned. Some colleges have evening courses with this as an objective. However, most people who learn their social skills from lessons do so in therapeutic situations, such as from therapists. Sometimes specialized non-profit companies provide services for people who want to enhance their social skills.

We can't decide how much of our own company we are prepared to enjoy unless we have the skills to allow us to enjoy the company of others when it suits our pleasure. That is, we can't decide to be alone if being alone is the only option.

Mounting courses to teach people the skills of social interaction (how to make and keep friends) requires a bit of work, but it can be done by ordinary folks who get together with others who want the same thing. Finding others with the same desires and objectives is, in itself, an act of communication and social intercourse.

It's easier to make friends if you get together with others who share the same goals as you. If you want to start something of this nature, talk it up among those you know and those you meet even casually. Or put a carefully worded note on a notice board about your interest (perhaps with a web email address for contacting). Eventually

you will have a few who want to make something happen together.

It's not only a form of self help, but a way of helping others. Helping others or working together with others is the way that most friendships begin.

Bill Allin

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Author: builder

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