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Be Unassuming

*Your assumptions are your windows on the world.
Scrub them off every once in a while,
or the light won't come in.*

Alan Alda

I am not one in a million; I am one of three. A third, as in “the third” Stan in my family lineage. My grandfather was also named Stan, Stan Sr., but we affectionately called him Grumps, because as he grew older he could be a bit edgy at times. He was a softie at heart, though, and he loved people and sharing stories about who he met and the places he visited.

One of Grumps’s best qualities was that he was unassuming, which is a very likable trait indeed, but more importantly, one that helps open doors and creates opportunities.

In the early 1950s, Grumps, a passionate sailor, frequented the Newport Harbor Yacht Club in Newport Beach, California. There he would sit in the empty bar, alone, for hours at a time and sip his drink while making small talk with the not-so-busy bartender as they watched other sailors come and go. The window in the bar overlooked the sea and the small marina where boats would dock alongside the building. He spent many an evening there watching the sea swallow the sun.

One lazy sunny afternoon, as several boats moved like little ants across the horizon, Grumps spotted one in particular that made its way toward the dock that sat beneath the bar. As the boat got closer, its shape and size

became more apparent and soon filled the window. At least sixty feet from bow to stern, it was a schooner with two giant masts. Ropes were slung and the boat was moored and secured. A dark-haired gentleman, unshaven and a little disheveled, wearing ragged khaki pants, an old greasy sweatshirt, and dark sunglasses, hopped from deck to dock and walked up the ramp to the bar. “Ahoy, gentleman,” the man said as he entered the bar.

Despite his unkempt appearance, Grumps welcomed him, slapped the bar, and said, “Have a seat, good sir. I’ll buy you a drink.” And that he did. The minutes soon turned to hours and the sun began to set. Eventually, the man stood, slapped Grumps on the back, and said, “Thanks for the drinks, Stan. Great conversation and camaraderie.” He then walked through the door and walked down the ramp.

Grumps shook his head as he laughed and said, “Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world...”

The unkempt stranger had turned out to be Humphrey Bogart. Most would have dismissed him based on his appearance, assuming he was a handyman or boat mechanic. But not my unassuming grandfather. Throughout the afternoon, they spoke of their mutual fondness for the sea, of *Santana* (the name of Bogart’s great boat), of Lauren Bacall, and of Bogie’s adventures in Hollywood. They spoke of Grumps’s life and his family and his travels. Two strangers, sharing stories, became friends if only for a few hours.

Assumptions are self-imposed roadblocks! While it’s important to look for clues as to a stranger’s personality and circumstances, it’s also important never to jump too quickly to conclusions. Be unassuming. If you assume too much, you might miss the most important things the other person has to share. And you never know who you might find yourself talking to.