



How to Become a Sweet Peep

One woman's journey to become a kinder, friendlier person

Shelley Allsup

I have always admired those certain types of people who are able to waltz into a room and light it up just by being there - that rare secret society of individuals who never forget a name and who always seem to have the perfect conversation starter no matter what the situation. The type who approach strangers with the same warmth, openness and eagerness that I usually reserve for close friends. I like to call these types "Sweet Peeps."

I have never thought of myself as shy; in fact before, I would have said I am pretty outgoing. I just wasn't the type to make small talk with those around me

in the grocery line. It's not that I'm rude or don't want to talk with them but because I was constantly focused on my ever present, never ending to do list. I used to be friendlier, but over time, had fallen into this habit of giving a quick smile and moving on in a whirlwind and hadn't realized I had phased out simple social pleasantries along the way.

The day I became aware that I was not a Sweet Peep and was, in fact, on the brink of becoming unapproachable, was a typical day like any other. I was on my bike in spin class and was warming up just like I had done for the past six months, gazing around the room at all the other ladies there. Then it hit me. Aside from the instructor and one lady who might have been named Nancy, I didn't know any of them. It was the same bunch it always had been; regulars who came each Tuesday and Thursday and talked and laughed and knew intimate details about each others lives, and I didn't even know more than two names.

Soon the music started and forced us back into our own thoughts and I was able to speculate on the root of my reservations toward strangers and how I might possibly reverse it.

I wondered if these types were born with the gift of social grace or if they made conscious efforts every day to be nice. I thought about it as I peddled away and I questioned if I could be that



outgoing, uninhibited Sweet Peep who made everyone else feel energized, important and alive?

I decided the only way to find out was for the next thirty days I would make every attempt to change into the proverbial Sweet Peep, no matter the situation, my mood or any unforeseen circumstances.

Along with wanting to change how I treated people I also hoped this little test would help me to avoid acting negatively toward people who didn't accept my graciousness with open arms. Secretly, I felt this might be one of the reasons I didn't reach out to people. So the first time I was friendly and it wasn't reciprocated, instead of getting frustrated or embarrassed, I was able to laugh at myself and move on.

As the days and then weeks went on, I found myself smiling more and the act of approaching strangers became so easy I wasn't even consciously aware of it anymore. I built up a nice group of friends in no time and the awkwardness only popped up occasionally when I laid it on a bit too thick. One time I had to thwart the advances of a male tennis instructor who had mistaken my sweetness for flirting!

But there were days when I just didn't feel like being a sweet peep and a few times I reverted back to my old habits. There were some people I ran into that made it very difficult to be nice and before embarking on this experiment, I wouldn't have tried to treat them with love. But God often teaches us important things about ourselves in the most adversarial moments and it was during one of these times I learned some invaluable lessons about myself.

One day I was at the dentist and the assistant just wasn't being pleasant. Instead of taking it personally and becoming defensive or upset I made the decision to treat her the same way I would have treated anyone else. I had to come back to that office a week later and this same girl was completely different. She was nice and outgoing and friendly. In fact, she talked my ear off. I was able to see that she, like all of us, had simply had a bad day.

Another time, I was playing tennis with an older lady who did nothing but insult me the entire time by calling me a liar, a cheat and worse. I really wanted to lay into her and it took all of my willpower not to give in to my weakness. It wasn't that I was allowing her to walk all over me. I just wouldn't let her see that she was getting to me which was obviously what she wanted. Fortunately God gave me the wisdom to see this and this is what I know: If I had given in to her and let her have it with all my pent up frustrations, I would have permitted her to alter who I am. And that would have upset me more than being called a cheater.

I learned so much about both myself and others during this time and after meeting and talking with several honest to goodness Sweet Peeps I've come to the conclusion that Sweet Peeps are born that way. God made us all beautiful and different and each of our personalities are unique and special. What some find effortless others may struggle with. But everyone has the capacity to be kind.

The most important thing I've come away with is that we can all aspire to be Sweet Peeps. All of God's creatures are hardwired to love no matter what our circumstances. The only thing that gets

in the way of that is our free will. But isn't doing the right thing even when you don't want to, really what being a Christian is all about?

No so, I was not born with the ability to walk into a room and put everyone at ease as they subconsciously gravitate toward me. But with a big smile and the comfort in knowing that God will always give me strength and forgive me when I

fail, I am now convinced it is possible, with a little effort and a lot of grace, to be mistaken for an honest to goodness, born and bred, Sweet Peep.

Shelley lives in Arizona with her husband of 16 years and her two beautiful children. She is currently working on her first novel.



PRECIOUS WORDS

by Maria Ellis

Have you ever heard a child say something concerning God or other spiritual matters that was very profound or just plain cute? Here are a few treasures uttered from the mouths of our little ones.

Keeping Afloat

At the Consecration one Sunday, my husband whispered to my 5-year-old son Dominic that Jesus was in the chalice of wine that the priest was holding up. My son thought about that for a moment and then asked, "Can Jesus swim?"

Monkey Business

One day my two year-old son Joseph took his stuffed monkey, Mooch, outside to play. After a few minutes he returned to the screen door without Mooch and looked at me. "Where's your monkey?" I asked. "Mooch got baptized," Joseph answered. Puzzled, I went outside to look for him, and there was Mooch in the watering can!

Special Caller

My three year-old was talking on the phone to her godmother. When I tried to interrupt to tell her something, she pulled the phone away from her ear, covered the mouthpiece, and with a scolding look on her face said, "Shhh, I'm talking to my fairy godmother!"

A Child's Offering

My four year-old son Joseph did not want to drink his now warm apple juice. Without thinking about it I said, as I sometimes do with the older children, "Maybe you'd like to offer it up as a sacrifice." Without hesitation he called out to his brother and sisters, "Would anyone like my apple juice?"

"...the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Mark 10:14

To have your child's "Precious Words" printed in this article, please email preciouswords@catholic.org for consideration.