

How to make yourself

IMPORTANT

BY

RONALD REAGAN

(As Told To Gladys Hall)



A FINE and fancy storyteller holds his punch for the story's end, I'm sure. But as I'm a plain guy with a set of homespun features and no frills, I may as well write accordingly.

So, then, the whole deal on how to make yourself important is, as I see it, to (a) love what you are doing with all your heart and soul and (b) believe what you are doing is important, even if you are only grubbing for worms in the back yard.

I am enormously in earnest about this. In fact, I believe I may say, with some pride, that I think I have something here. I hold that all of this business about making yourself important by means of externals is no good. Clothes, being seen in the Right Places, show, swank—No! They may make you seem important; but that is not what I am talking about.

Nor do I believe that you have to be a standout from your fellow men in order to make your mark in the world. Average will do it. Certainly if I am to serve as my own guinea pig for this little homily, it will have to do it. For I'm no Flynn or Boyer and well I know it.

The studio publicity department had to sweat ink out of its veins to turn out a biography on me. Mr. Norm is my alias, or shouldn't I admit it?

I like to swim, hike and sleep (eight hours a night). I'm fairly good at every sport except tennis, which I just don't like. My favorite menu is steaks smothered with onions and strawberry shortcake. I play bridge adequately, collect guns, always carry a penny as a good-luck charm and knock wood when I make a boast or express a wish. I have a so-so convertible coupe which I drive myself.

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RONALD REAGAN

I'm interested in politics and governmental problems. My favorite books are "Turnabout," by Thorne Smith, "Babbitt," "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," and the works of Pearl Buck, H. G. Wells, Damon Runyon and Erich Remarque. I'm a fan of Bing Crosby. My favorite actress is my wife. I like things colored green and my favorite flower is the Eastern



Four grins add up to a nice good-bye: Mary Livingstone, Jack Benny and Jane Wyman Reagan take a last-minute look at Officer Ronnie

lilac. I love my wife, baby and home. I've just built a new one—home, I mean. Nothing about me to make me stand out on the midway.

Lots of kids write and ask my advice about how to make their mark in an indifferent world. Seventy-five percent of them beef that they're not much to look at, haven't any dough, can't cut a dash. I could refer them to Lincoln, out of the backwoods, as plain as a calabash pipe. But they know all that.

I want to say, first, however, that I question my right or ability to advise anyone how to get along because, before I take any credit for any success that has come my way, I certainly must acknowledge the help of friends all along the way—people who were never too busy to give a young fellow a hand. Maybe that's my lead. I'm just trying to pass along some of the things I've learned from these same people.

So, what I'd like to tell 'em is this: Look, you must love what you are doing. You must think what you are doing is important because, if it's important to you, you can bet your last ducat that other people will think so, too. It may take time, but they'll get around to it. And one thing more, one really important thing: If, when you get a job, you don't believe you can get to the top in it, it's the wrong job.

NOW, of course, I don't mean that just believing you can get to the top will always get you there. But I do say that you'll never get there unless you believe that you can.

I'm not writing anything I don't believe myself, you know. Nor anything that doesn't come right out of my own experience. For me, the one job in the world I want to do is acting. Offer me ten times the money for something else, and I wouldn't do it. And right from the start, down there in "B" pictures where I began, through four years of "bit" parts (the "Poor Man's Errol Flynn," they called me), I was sure that I was in the right business for me. I knew I'd get to the top, if I kept on working and learning. That's not brash self-confidence, either. Put me in any other job and I'd eat humble pies by the dozen. I'd lack self-confidence because I'd be in the wrong job.

Of course, doing what I wanted to do didn't put me always in a favorable light. For example, in college I majored in sociology and economics. Not because I liked the subjects, but because they gave me the most time for the things I really liked, namely, college dramatics, football and a dive into campus politics. But even there maybe I learned something, because in the subjects I got poor marks. Whereas, in dramatics, I copped off the lead in most of the plays. In football, I won three varsity sweaters. And in politics I managed to corral a job that netted me about \$250.

Point being that success, for me, is

RONALD REAGAN

where the heart is. And my heart was in dramatics, football and politics.

After college, I got a job as a sports announcer and eventually I worked up to broadcasting many of the biggest sports events. The job wasn't very important at first but before long I woke up to find myself broadcasting sports events for which the sponsors paid my station hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. This meant that folks were listening to me, lots of folks. And they listened to me, I know, not because I had any experience in broadcasting or any diction, but because I was so keen about those sports events myself that I felt it urgently important that other people know about them, too, and nearly got high blood pressure telling 'em about them.

But all of this doesn't mean, of course, that you can just sit back like a pink cupid with wings, indulge in some wishful thinking and, presto, you're important! It's never enough to love anything, is it, not even a girl?

When you propose to a girl, you've got to be pretty convincing, use your heart as a mouthpiece. You've got to work for the thing you love, you always do.

WHICH brings me to when I first came to Warner Brothers, to the movies. I was certainly a nobody in, and to, Hollywood. I certainly hadn't learned to act by being a sports announcer. I wasn't any collar ad to look at. All I had in this world was confidence that, with the proper material, I could entertain people. And the only basis I had for this confidence was that I wanted to entertain people more than I wanted anything else.

Well, they threw me to the "B's." I made twenty to twenty-five "B's" before I got the part of Gipp in "Knute Rockne—All American."

Thanks to some good advice from a guy named Pat O'Brien, I played those "B's" as if they were "A's." You see, the boss only goes by results. If I do a part carelessly because I doubt its importance, no one is going to write a subtitle explaining that Ronald Reagan didn't feel the part was important, therefore he didn't give it very much. All my boss knows is what he sees on the film and someday he may look at that particular picture to judge my qualifications for a real film job.

It wasn't until the part of the Gipp came up that I felt, *Here is a job I can do.*

It was the first time, during all those four years, that I ever asked for a part. Because you've got to be sure, awful sure, that you can do something better than the guys lined up ahead of you before you ask for anything.

Quite a few times, before "Knute Rockne," parts came up in pictures that I thought I'd like to play. In "Dark Victory," with Bette Davis, for example, they handed me a bit part. I stewed around for a bit, wishing I'd got the part Bogart played in that picture. Then I realized I couldn't top Bogey in that. It was his dish, not mine. In "Kings Row," Parris was not for me, but Drake, I think, was. In "Desperate Journey" Flynn's spot is his, not mine.

But I knew that I could deliver the Gipp. I knew it because, when I was a kid, George Gipp was my hero, Rockne was my candidate for A Man. There was that love of what I was doing figuring in again. In addition, I knew I could play football and they wouldn't have to use a double for me.

That part opened a door for me. A few people on the lot knew me by name. The fans started to write in. (Folks, you fixed me!)

WELL, then, believe it or not, love walked in again and gave me another boost. Love of a girl this time, love of the girl I married. One of my handicaps in this business had been that of looking too youthful, because of which I lost a lot of parts, I know. Well, folks don't think of a guy as completely a juvenile when he has a wife and child!

I've just been told, here at the studio, of two very important parts that were to be mine. They are in

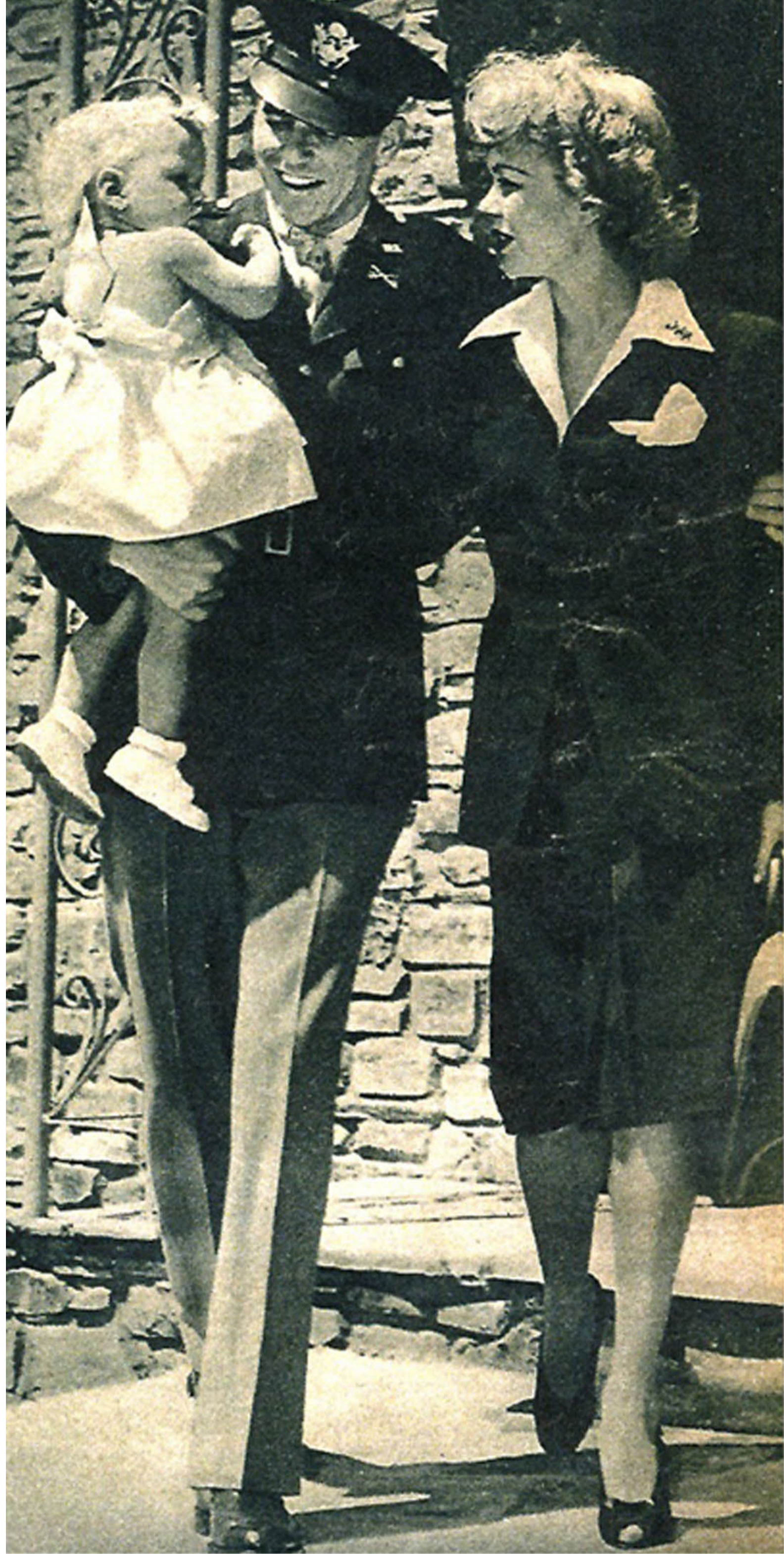
RONALD REAGAN

pretty big pictures, so I guess I can say my rules work. But I won't be doing those pictures. Uncle Sam has called me, a Reserve officer in the Cavalry, and I'm off to the war, still true to my two precepts: (a) to love what you are doing with all your heart and soul and (b) to believe what you are doing is important. I love the Cavalry or I would not have been with it for so long. And along with a few million other guys, I feel pretty strongly about my country. As for believing what you are doing is important—well, if fighting to preserve the United States and her Allies isn't important, you name it.

And who knows—maybe when I get back again, "when the world is free," there will be other good parts waiting for me and for my buddies.

So long!

The End



Officer Reagan with Maureen Elizabeth and his "favorite actress", wife Jane Wyman