

Introduction to **Talking with Strangers**

by Malcolm Gladwell

Many years ago, when my parents came down to visit me in New York City, I decided to put them up at the Mercer Hotel. It was a bit of mischief on my part. The Mercer is chic and exclusive, the kind of place where the famous and the fabulous stay. My parents—and particularly my father—were oblivious to that kind of thing. My father did not watch television, or go to the movies, or listen to popular music. He would have thought *People* magazine was an anthropology journal. His areas of expertise were specific: mathematics, gardening, and the Bible.

I came to pick up my parents for dinner, and asked my father how his day had been. “Wonderful!” he said. Apparently he had spent the afternoon in conversation with a man in the lobby. This was fairly typical behavior for my father. He liked to talk to strangers.

“What did you talk about?” I asked.

“Gardening!” my father said.

“What was his name?”

“Oh, I have no idea. But the whole time people were coming up to him to take pictures and have him sign little bits of paper.”

If there is a Hollywood celebrity reading this who remembers chatting with a bearded Englishman long ago in the lobby of the Mercer Hotel, please contact me.

For everyone else, consider the lesson. Sometimes the best conversations between strangers allow the stranger to remain a stranger.