

# IMPRIMIS

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## "What Makes for Success?"

Dave Thomas

Founder, Wendy's International

**D**ave Thomas started in the restaurant business as a busboy at age 15. He also gained experience as a food service provider in the U.S. Army, as a short order cook, and as a restaurant owner. In 1962, he took on the challenge of turning around four failing Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants. Six years later, he became a millionaire at age 35.



Mr. Thomas opened the first Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers restaurant in 1969 and established the Wendy's franchise in 1973. Instead of selling single franchises, he pioneered the practice of selling city and regional franchises.

Today, there are more than 5,000 Wendy's restaurants throughout the world earning \$5 billion annually.

Mr. Thomas is also a noted philanthropist, working with many children's hospitals, medical research institutes, and private charities. In 1992, he established the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, which is supported by sales of his books *Dave's Way* and *Well Done!* 🍌

*As a self-described "hamburger cook," Dave Thomas makes it clear there are no secrets to business success or to successful living. The principles are so simple that they have become everyday platitudes. We put them on posters and buttons, and we give them lip service in speeches and how-to books. But just how well do we put them into practice? Understanding the principles of success is easy—"living" them is hard.*

*Mr. Thomas's presentation was delivered before an audience of 1,600 students, faculty, staff, and guests during Hillsdale College's Center for Constructive Alternatives and Ludwig von Mises Lecture Series seminar, "The Future of American Business," in March.*

### A First Word

**T**here are all kinds of success and all kinds of ways to achieve it. I know bus drivers who are as successful as bankers. I know anonymous computer programmers who are now more successful than some of the biggest sports celebrities. I also know glamorous Hollywood stars and leading political figures who are failures. Sometimes you can spot true success. Sometimes you can't. Success can take many forms, but one thing's for sure: There are certain ingredients that are necessary in any recipe for success, and they may be applied by anyone.

In other words, success comes through doing the right things—developing proper skills, attitudes, and values. As I've thought this through from an ordinary guy's perspective (which, above all else, I am; Lord knows, I'm no scholar), I have come to identify twelve ingredients. We know them as

“character traits” or “values” or “virtues.” People have been making lists of these ingredients ever since the Bible was written—and even before then. I’ve seen lists that are longer and some that are shorter, but twelve feels just about right to me. They are the ones that have made the most sense and have proved most valuable in my walk through life.

But I should warn you, making lists is not enough to achieve success. You have to *show* people what success is. For example, I don’t think that we really need to define generosity; we need to show what it means to be more generous—with our time, our talents, and our treasures.

My list of ingredients for success is divided into four basic groups:

Inward—these have to do with getting your own act together successfully.

Outward—these are all about treating people right.

Upward—these are skills you need to know if you want to go beyond just doing an okay job and truly excel.

Onward—these are attitudes you need to have in order to put yourself second and other people first. I think that onward values may be the toughest and the most rewarding values of all.

Added on to these ingredients are some others. Since I’m a hamburger cook, I call them “toppings.” They are the pickles and onions of how I look at success:

Anything is possible within the laws of God and man.

You can’t cut corners on quality.

Give back—early and often.

When you help someone, you really help yourself.

Pay attention to the basics.

You can’t make much progress walking forward if you don’t keep your balance, and that means balance in every part of your life.

“Success comes through doing the right things—developing proper skills, attitudes, and values.”

Have a sense of urgency about most things you do, and you won’t end up as the caboose.

Focus on only one thing at a time, and on just a few things in a lifetime.

Don’t waste time trying to do things you know nothing about: Either learn the basics or steer clear.

Remember that life is short and fragile. Live it as if you don’t know if you are going to be around for the next breath.

Don’t take the people of our nation—or their freedom—for granted.

Be yourself—don’t take yourself too seriously.

Do the right thing—even when it may seem like the hardest thing in the world.

Put more into life than you get out of it.

## **Inward: Getting Your Own Act Together**

Success starts inside. Unless your own attitude and beliefs are right, you can never be a success. That goes for being successful in raising your family or helping to lead your church or synagogue or just making a buck. People never really have their act together unless they are honest, they believe in something, and they develop basic discipline.

### ***Honesty***

Many good people may look at honesty backwards. They think that it’s okay if they don’t come forward with the whole truth until someone challenges them with the right questions. But honesty doesn’t mean hiding in the weeds; it means stepping out and telling the whole truth. Honesty means being sincere. It also means being fair in all your dealings with others.

Honesty is the number-one ingredient for success. I learned this the way most people do: through trial and error. I was born out of wedlock in New Jersey in 1932. A Michigan couple adopted me just after I was born. My adopted mother died when I was only five, but I had the good fortune to have a wonderful adoptive grandmother, Minnie

Sinclair, who looked out for my welfare and helped shape my beliefs. I did not discover that I was adopted for many years, and, I have to admit, this made me angry and resentful for some time. I wish I had known from the beginning.

Yet after I learned the truth, I didn't always share it with others. One day, an African-American Wendy's manager buttonholed me and said, "Dave, when you gave your speech today, you left out the part about being adopted. Why did you do that? I always related to that because I was adopted myself." The comment hit home. From that point on, I made it a practice to be fully honest—and proud—about my past.

### **Faith**

Honesty doesn't come from out of nowhere. It is a product of your moral convictions. But what do you do when your convictions are challenged? It is faith that gives you the strength to go on believing. Though I am a Christian, I respect the religions of others, and I think that they play a vital role in our society. But I don't support convictions or cults that are negative and lead only to hatred and fanaticism. Faith must be positive.

Live your faith. Don't wear it on your sleeve; roll up both sleeves and do something about it. When I was eleven years old, my adoptive grandmother took me to Michigan's Gull Lake to be baptized by immersion. I really felt that I was accepted by God when I was baptized. But what I remember most about my baptism was that my Grandma Minnie made it happen. For her, Christianity meant more than doctrine you talked about on Sundays. It meant working hard in a restaurant, seeing to the lodgers she rented rooms to, tending a big garden, doing the canning, and taking care of the farm animals every morning. And it meant teaching her grandson about faith.

At night we would listen to a gospel radio station that broadcast out of Chicago, and on Sundays before church we would listen to shows like the *Cato Tabernacle* out of Indianapolis. The public praying and singing part of her faith might not have stuck with me all that much, but I got baptized into the roll-up-your-sleeves kind of faith of Grandma Minnie. And I believe in it to this day.

### **Discipline**

Routine lies at the heart of discipline. Routine is what keeps us focused on the main things in life. But routine doesn't have to mean boring. Unless

you have a strong, healthy routine, I doubt that you can live a successful life. Discipline means keeping things and people in their proper places. For example, I think that taxpayers should discipline their politicians so that they don't get too uppity! Children need discipline, too—plenty more than most of them get—and that's the fault of their parents. Discipline means direction—clear and firm direction—not physical or mental abuse. Discipline helps you keep track of your own thinking and also keeps such thinking simple and to the point so that you don't mess up by dreaming up fancy, big-shot thoughts when you shouldn't.

Roy Tuggle, one of the pioneers of the modern restaurant business, is a classic in discipline as far as I'm concerned. When he was fourteen years old, Roy—the sixth of twelve children—left Ravenna, Kentucky, during the Great Depression. With only two years of school under his belt, nine pennies in his pocket, and cardboard soles in his shoes, he hopped a freight train to Columbus, Ohio. After unloading stoves and refrigerators and working as a dishwasher, he became a fry cook. By sheer will and discipline he built his career and a great restaurant business while he and his wife Mary raised their family.

When Roy started out, hamburgers were only a nickel and a small restaurant operator had to scrimp for every penny. Years later, when Roy sold his business, he became a millionaire. But the dollar signs never changed Roy. He's never been driven by money. As you'll hear Roy often put it today, "I never wanted to be the richest man in the graveyard," to which I'll generally chime in, "You got it, Roy. You've never seen a hearse with luggage racks." Roy's is the kind of discipline that keeps success from going to your

head once you have had the good fortune to achieve your goals.

## **Outward: Treating People Right**

Success may start inside, but it doesn't mean anything until you draw other people into the picture. The key is whether you are going to be fair to other folks—will you treat people right? If you are to treat people right, you

**"Live your faith. Don't wear it on your sleeve; roll up both sleeves and do something about it."**

have to master three fundamentals: caring, teamwork, and support. Most of us are lucky enough to learn these basic ideas from our parents and should be pros at them by the time we are in nursery school. (But I have met some Ph.D.s and millionaires who have never learned the words or have forgotten what they mean, and I bet that you know people like that, too.) Not taking people for granted is a great way to steer a straight outward course and to do right by your fellow human beings.

### ***Caring***

Caring is the rock that love is built upon. Caring is feeling what another person feels. Some people call it “empathy.” Genuinely caring about people usually leads to success. And really successful people widen the circle of people they care about more and more as they grow older. Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, once told me something I’ll never forget. She said the one suggestion she got in life that helped her most was to “pretend that every single person you meet has a sign around his or her neck that says, ‘Make me feel important.’”

Why aren’t we just nice to people? One year, shortly before Christmas, I went to a Wendy’s restaurant in Albuquerque to film a television program about adoption with two youngsters. The little girl, who was about seven, had a fresh scar where her father had walloped her with a beer bottle. That scar wasn’t going to go away. As we ate lunch along with a friend of mine, the girl and her older brother, who was about nine, finally started to look us in the eyes, and that was none too easy for them. We talked about how important it is to stick together when you don’t have other family. And then the boy said: “I don’t want to be adopted with her. Just look at her ugly scar!”

It may seem cruel, but he was right. The boy knew his sister’s appearance would turn off many possible adoptive parents. And before you condemn him, think back for a minute: Were you any less selfish when you were nine? I doubt that I was. My friend—who is smart in a low-key way and who made it big-time by building a big business over the years—reached into his wallet and pulled out two crisp one hundred dollar bills. “You kids,” he said in a real quiet voice, “don’t have any money to buy Christmas presents. It’s plain to see that. So I want you to buy some Christmas presents, but there’s a catch. You can’t buy anything for your-

self. Think hard about what your brother or sister might like or need and buy that instead. Finally, you have to write me a letter about what you got each other.”

That five-minute course in caring outdid the best universities anywhere. The brother and sister made up. In January, my friend received a letter reporting what they bought each other, and he sent a copy to me. Then we learned that they had been adopted by a family. As I hear it, they’re quite a team, and their new parents are proud to have them—because of the way that they care for each other and for lots of other reasons, too.

### ***Teamwork***

Teamwork is the starting point for treating people right. Most people think that teamwork is only important when competing against other teams. But competition is only part of the picture. In most things we do in life, people have to work with rather than against each other to get something done. Win-win situations and partnerships are the most important results of teamwork. The best teams in the world are the ones that help people become better and achieve more than they ever thought they could on their own.

One place people learn teamwork from is their families. Children get their first lesson watching how their parents behave toward each other. So, if you’re a parent, you are also a teacher of teamwork—for good or ill—every day. Your sons and daughters learn from what you do. For me, the people I’ve worked with have become my family, too. Throughout my career, my “second family” has taught me a whole lot about teamwork.

There are little teams and there are big teams. Your community is a team, for example. My daughter Pam organizes volunteer work for the city of Columbus, so she knows a lot about how to get

different kinds of teams to work together, on projects ranging from recreation centers to hospital boards. Teams can work together, and teams can compete, too, even when they are not rivals. Why aren’t Pam’s kids jealous when she spends so much of her time on community work? There is a simple answer: The kids are all involved in community work themselves, and they have been from an early age. Pam and her husband, Steve, endorse it and encourage it. The community team isn’t a rival or an opponent of the family team—it’s an extension of it. Neat idea, don’t you think?

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## Support

Many people believe that support is something you give to someone you feel sorry for or that it means propping someone up who would fail unless you were there to give him a boost. But that's not the way I see it. Support is the boost you give someone who can help himself but who needs a partner to open a window or to push aside a roadblock. Support isn't a bunch of reckless advice, either. It's real help—commitment and effort. Support is "teamwork plus." Support is also sharing feelings and insights with other people. It's helping others with their level of awareness and making your own awareness stronger at the same time.

The best way to get support is to give it. Wendy's President Gordon Teter likes to remind people of a saying that Jack Mollenkopf, his college coach at Purdue, often used: "Meet me halfway, and it's amazing what can happen." It *is* amazing what can be done when you treat people with respect. Respect goes both ways, too. Just as the players need it from the coach, the coach needs it from the players.

Support is also easier if things aren't too complicated. Gordon believes in what he calls "The Law of the Lowest Common Denominator," and it has nothing to do with arithmetic. It goes like this: "The simpler you can keep it, the better you can execute it." It's that way for a department and its boss, for a congregation and its minister, and for a volunteer group and its chairperson. If you want to give and get support, it's a lot more likely to come and keep coming if the rules are simple and clear.

## Upward: Going for Excellence and Beyond

**W**hen you have your own act together and get along well with others, you're ready to reach for another goal, that of excellence. Nothing is as tricky in the world

of success as excellence. From our earliest days, we are taught that it is snazzy, glossy, bigger than life. It's that three seconds of glory when a major leaguer puts one out of the park or a figure skater completes a triple jump, not the constant training or workouts. But that's just false. Most people think excellence in business is sitting at a big desk and making power decisions, but true excellence is really the years beforehand making little and big decisions and learning from mistakes when things go wrong.

No one can excel in everything. In fact, excellence in any one little thing is hard enough. And don't forget: It's easy to become selfish when you "go for the gold." The graveyards of the world are loaded with people who lost it all at the same time they thought they were winning it all.

### Motivation

Without a doubt, motivation is a key ingredient of success. Know what motivates you, and prove to yourself that this motivation is honest and worthwhile. But don't let too many different things motivate you, or you'll be tangled up in a maze of all kinds of conflicts. Stay focused. Figure out what your motivations are going to be

in the next step of your life before you arrive at it. Keep dreaming, but don't daydream. And don't do anything just to earn praise, or you are likely to short-change yourself in the end. Look at success firsthand so that you really know how it works and what it costs to achieve.

It may be corny, but I'm big on lapel pins. Some people hand out business cards; I give away lapel pins. Wendy's gives out pins to employees, and to customers, too—they're just as much a part of the family as anyone else. As I said, I don't believe in wearing your beliefs on your sleeve; but I do believe in wearing them your lapel. Yep, I'm one of those guys who'll wear an American flag pin on my lapel from time to time; it shows I'm proud

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to be an American. In the same way, by wearing Wendy's lapel pins, our employees show they're proud to be a part of the Wendy's team. Does having a little symbol that means they're part of the Wendy's family motivate employees to work a little harder, or customers to come in more often? A little bit, I'll bet. And success in life is made up of a lot of little things that keep you motivated and that motivate others too.

### **Creativity**

Creativity means change, but if you don't use common sense when you change things around, you are likely to end up farther behind than when you started. Not everybody can be creative. Accept it as a fact of life that if you aren't creative yourself your challenge is to learn how to work with people who are. And being creative doesn't always mean doing new things. Sometimes, it's using a creative idea that worked in one instance and applying it to another. I'm a disciple of reality. Successful creative dreams have to be realistic—within man's laws as well as God's—and within the realm of common sense.

What makes people creative? Sometimes, it's having your life shaken up. George Valassis is a pal of mine. For nineteen years he worked as an advertising salesman for his father's brother. One day his uncle decided to retire and his cousin took over the business. The cousin fired him. Without warning, George lost a modest though comfortable job, and he realized then and there that job security could vanish like a puff of smoke. So, he put his nineteen years of experience to use in order to come up with an innovative idea. He knew that advertisers like Procter and Gamble and General Foods were having a really tough time delivering coupons to customers quickly, so he came up with the idea of inserting books filled with coupons in newspapers. To this day, when you open the Sunday edition of your newspaper and see a book of coupons inside, you're looking at what the ad industry calls a "Valassis Insert." George sold the company he built for big bucks. If he hadn't gotten fired, would he have come up with this great idea? George doesn't think so. To this day, he says he just played the hand he was dealt. Pretty creative though, wasn't it?

### **Leadership**

Everybody is saying that we need to stop putting leaders on pedestals. I'm not so sure. The real

problem is finding leaders who truly deserve to keep their pedestals. What knocks off more leaders than

anything else is failing to practice what they preach. Of all the things leaders are supposed to do, nothing is more important than setting a good example. Ben Franklin had it right when he wrote in *Poor Richard's Almanac*, "Well done is better than well said." I don't think we should do away with pedestals; we ought to be putting a lot more "little people"—people who have really achieved something—on them so that ordinary folks have a better, clearer idea of who's doing the job and who's setting the pace.

J.B. Fuqua is a titan of industry who built a huge conglomerate and broadcast empire. J.B. is also a guy who still knows the meaning of being humble. Born to a poor family, his mother died when he was two months old, and his grandparents adopted him. When J.B. was out on his own and wanted to learn about radio electronics, the only library he knew about was Duke University's. The library staff decided to loan him the books he needed even though he was not a student. It wasn't a bad deal for Duke: After J.B. hit the bull's-eye in his own companies, he invested \$15 million in the Duke University business school, helping put it in the front ranks of all business schools in the U.S.

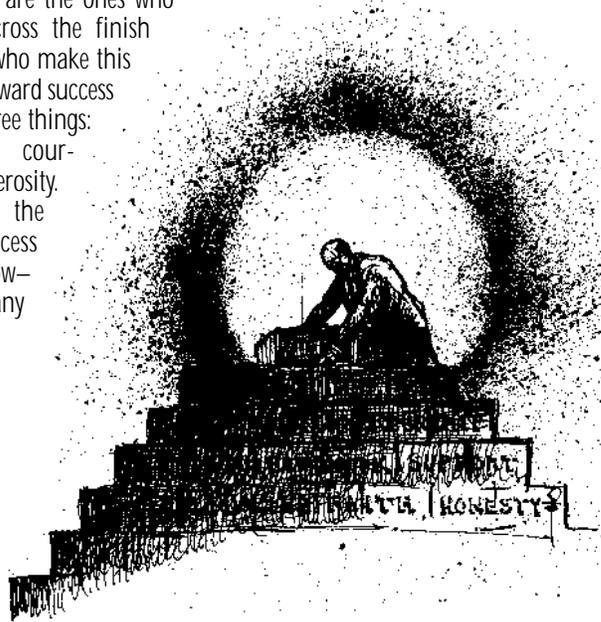
First and foremost, J.B. is a leader. In addition to the donations he's made to Duke, he's donated \$4 million to train managers in Russia and Ukraine as these nations attempt to put at least a few true free enterprise principles into practice. And then there's the \$10 million that he's giving to Prince Edward County, Virginia, to help turn around the educational system for youngsters in kindergarten through twelfth grade. It will be a model of doing the right thing for rural school systems throughout the United States.

It's not the money that makes J.B. successful as a leader. It's the fact that he won't let go. J.B. will tell you that leadership doesn't stop with giving but begins there. He's well past retirement age, yet you'll find him all over—from Farmville to Kiev—giving to others, passing on his own experience and wisdom. J.B.'s style is real leadership—letting go in the doing, but not letting go in the guiding.

**"Most people think excellence in business is sitting at a big desk and making power decisions, but true excellence is really the years beforehand making little and big decisions and learning from mistakes when things go wrong."**

## Onward: Putting Yourself Second and Others First

If going upward and reaching for excellence is where success gets tricky, going onward by putting yourself second and others first is where success really gets tough. Most books on success tell you that you have really “arrived” when you win the race. That’s wrong. Truly successful people are the ones who help others cross the finish line. People who make this last big step toward success really have three things: responsibility, courage, and generosity. Onward is the direction Success Soldiers follow—Christian or any other kind.



### *Responsibility*

We try to teach children responsibility, and that’s good, but, as I have already said, most of us don’t learn the full meaning of responsibility until we are older and have gained solid experience, made some decisions, and learned from our mistakes—not the simple mistakes we make when “following orders” but mistakes we make when trying to do something really hard or trying to excel. Making these sorts of mistakes teaches us judgment, and it helps toughen our backbone.

Mature responsibility means realizing that no single person can be responsible for everything. You can’t be successful if you are stumbling around trying to juggle the whole world on your shoulders. Responsible people refuse to take shortcuts, even though they are almost always available. They make sure that others with duties act responsibly, too. And they use whatever recognition or honor they may have earned not to further their own ends but on behalf of good causes. Instead of stealing the limelight, they allow it to shine upon a good cause.

My son Kenny says that the most important piece of advice I ever gave him came in 1979 as the two of us were driving over the Oakland Park Bridge in Ft.

Lauderdale. He was thinking about becoming a Wendy’s franchisee. I gave him my opinion; I was against it. I didn’t come out and say why, but my feeling was that he wasn’t ready for that kind of responsibility, and I didn’t want to see him fail. When he told me his mind was made up, I said, “Don’t ever forget how you got here, and don’t ever let yourself become complacent.” Kenny went on to become pretty successful in the restaurant business. He says my advice really helped him. But I could have summed up everything I said that day in just two words: Be responsible.

### *Courage*

We tend to make courage too dramatic. Courage is often doing something simple, unpleasant, or boring again and again until we get it down pat. People who are physically challenged and who have the determination to get around their handicaps are great examples because their courage makes them test their limits every day in a way that the rest of us write off as small-time or insignificant. Lois Gruenbaum grew up in Cleveland

went to work in a hospital kitchen when she was fifteen. During World War II, she became a nurse’s aide and worked in an army hospital. After a shift, she would say to herself, “Hey, things are bad, but there’s always someone who is worse off. All you need to do is find out what you can and can’t do and then go ahead and do what you can do.”

Great lesson—Lois learned it not long before she needed to put it to use. In 1955, she was diagnosed with cancer. Operation after operation followed, but the cancer always came back. Finally, she lost one leg and half of the pelvic bone and was forced to drag herself around on crutches. She came home from the hospital faced with the challenge of taking care of her husband, a seven-year-old, a four-year-old, and two-year-old twins. She says she cut a deal with the Lord: “I promised that if He let me live to raise my children, I would not vegetate. I would be a contributing person.” It was a good deal. Forty years later, the family is flourishing, and Lois is one of the most active and happy people you could ever hope to meet. And there are thousands of such quiet, unsung heroes in every town. I’ll bet you

know lots of people with the courage of Lois Gruenbaum.

### Generosity

A person who has modest means and won't share may be considered stingy. But rich people can give 'til they're purple and still not be truly generous. You have to give of yourself, not just of your wallet. One of the things I'm proudest about in the Wendy's family is that so many franchisees make significant donations to the community—and they contribute leadership as well as dollars. Another old friend, the late Kenny King, was a generous guy who had a real knack for how he gave. He really took pleasure in it, was modest about it, and often gave anonymously. But even more important was the fact that he really tried to learn what giving was all about. Whether he was giving people moral or financial support, he would always say, "I'm really getting a lot more out of this than you are." I can't tell you how many times he said that same thing to me. Later, when I tried to do for others what Kenny had done for me, I learned what he meant. When you give people help and understanding, you truly learn what they are like. And those who understand others better are certainly the most likely to succeed. The giving and the getting become all mixed up—which is great.

## The Proud Beggar

In February of 1991, I had to travel to Memphis. It wasn't a trip I wanted to make. There's a church there I'll never forget; you don't forget places where you say good-bye to your best friends. It's plenty bigger than Calvary Church in Kalamazoo where I had my first memories of going to church. In fact, it's a cathedral—the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. It looks Spanish and it's mighty big and fancy. On the day I was there, every seat was filled, and a huge crowd stood outside. A lot of other people—not just me—had lost a friend.

"Oh, Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling,  
From glen to glen and down the mountainside,  
The summer's gone—all the roses falling,  
'Tis you, 'tis you must go, and I must bide."

A song you'd expect to hear in an Irish pub, not in a cathedral. You wouldn't expect it to be sung by a Metropolitan Opera soprano like Marguerite Piazza either. Maybe you'd think that it was honoring an Irish cardinal, but who would expect that it was in memory of a Lebanese entertainer of humble origins? Many eyes were tearing before the music started, but when they heard the first notes of that song—Danny Thomas's theme song for decades—everybody choked up. A little girl and an older couple near me were crying, and I don't know what sound seemed bigger to my ears—the crying or the music.

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Danny was a great friend. He was one heck of a showman. But, most of all, he was a success—not just as an entertainer but as a human being. An obsession drove him—the St. Jude's Children's Hospital in Memphis. He'd do anything for that hospital. No man or woman I know ever got over every inch of the false pride that we are all born with more than Danny Thomas did. He called himself the "Proud Beggar."

If Danny Thomas hadn't forgotten a promise, St. Jude would never have been built. Back in 1943, Danny was still playing five-dollar-a-week gigs. His wife was pregnant with their first child, Marlo, and they needed money to raise a family. Danny's uncle by marriage was a butcher who offered him a job cutting meat, but he wanted to stay in show business. Danny stopped at a church and, according to the Catholic tradition, prayed to St. Jude for direction. He promised he would show his gratitude if guided to the right path: Should he be a comedian or a butcher? Not much later, Danny's act was booked at Chez Paris in Chicago. He had made it to the big time. The booking lasted for five years, and it helped launch his television career.

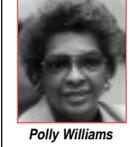
Until well into his stint at Chez Paris, Danny had forgotten all about his promise. Forgetting to make good on a promise was about the worst thing a person could do, in Danny's book. When he finally remembered, he went to see an old friend, Cardinal Stritch, and he asked what he should do. The cardinal told him that there were already enough churches and enough statues in the world. Recalling his first parish in Memphis, he proposed the idea of starting a children's hospital there.

That's what Danny did. He built the best children's hospital in the world. Why is the place named after St. Jude? St. Jude is the saint in charge





Bill Bennett



Polly Williams

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