

THE NAME'S FAMILIAR BUT . . .

Biographies of Famous People That Few of Us Truly Know

Generally speaking, fame's "constituent ingredients" include superior accomplishment or achievement, renown, celebrity and, occasionally, notoriety. When viewed against the vast backdrop of history, few people have ever achieved long-lasting fame. And frequently, in those cases where a name might still be recognizable after 25, 50, 100 years or more, all that truly remains is a "skeletal" recognition of who the person was. In other words, the name lingers even though the achievement fades.

These eight, standalone lectures attempt to "flesh out" the skeletal remains of eight fascinating individuals whose names are still identifiable even though their accomplishments have faded into the gaseous empyrean of time.

Lectures (eight):

1. **Erich Von Stroheim (1885-1957):** Hollywood's first mad genius. During the Great War, he played the perfect Hun. Trouble was, he was the son of a Jewish hat maker.
2. **Damon Runyon (1880-1946):** The quintessential New York, the man who put the "guy" into Guys and Dolls, was actually born in Kansas and was a good friend of Bat Masterson.
3. **Al Smith (1873-1944):** It's a long, long way from the Fulton Street Fish Market to the Governor's mansion in Albany.
4. **Ayn Rand (1905-1983):** The exotic creation of "objectivism," which rejects altruism and exalts wealth, was, in reality, a Russian-born émigré named Alissa Rosenbaum.
5. **Meyer Lansky (1902-1983):** Many believe that if he had not been a gangster, he probably would have wound up running General Motors. Oh really?
6. **"Diamond Jim" Brady (1856-1917):** Robber Baron, bon vivant, world-class trencherman and companion of Lillian Russell, Brady was truly larger than life.
7. **Samuel F.B. Morse (1791-1872):** Yes, he invented the telegraph and Morse Code. But he was also a celebrated artist, right-wing politician and first-rate curmudgeon.
8. **Lillian Gish (1893-1993):** The "Queen of Silents," Miss Gish's career on the Silver Screen lasted an incredible 75 years.