

# Audrey Hepburn

Born 1929. Actress and UNICEF ambassador.

Available online at [www.livesretold.co.uk](http://www.livesretold.co.uk)



## Contents

1. Introduction
2. Early Years
3. Life under Nazi Occupation
4. Working for the Dutch Resistance
5. Rise to Fame
6. Ups and Downs
7. Hepburn in Hollywood
8. Iconic Look
9. Two More Lovers
10. Later Years
11. Death
12. Legacy

# 1. Introduction



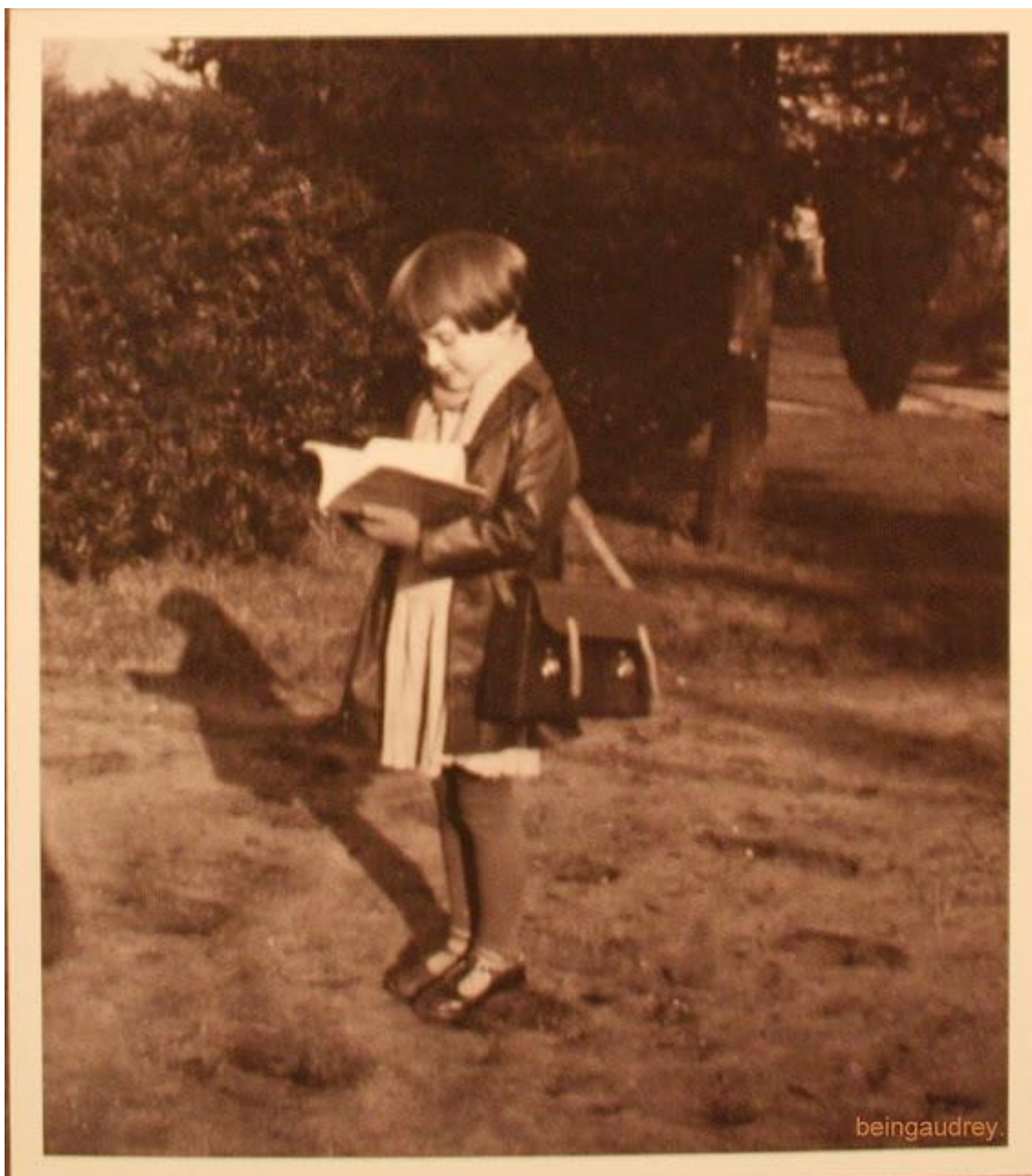
*The following chapters were archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the [www.liveabout.com](http://www.liveabout.com) website. The article was written by Shelly Schwartz, and was published in January 2020.*

Audrey Hepburn (May 4, 1929–Jan. 20, 1993) was an Academy-Award winning actress and a fashion icon in the 20th century. Having almost starved to death in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands during World War II, Hepburn became a goodwill ambassador for starving children.

Considered one of the most beautiful and elegant women in the world then and now, Hepburn's beauty shone through her doe eyes and contagious smile. A trained ballet dancer who never performed in a ballet, Hepburn was Hollywood's most sought-after actress in the mid-20th century.

---

## 2. Early Years



*Audrey Hepburn aged 5.*

Hepburn was born the daughter of a British father and a Dutch mother in Brussels, Belgium, on May 4, 1929. When Hepburn was 6 years old, her father Joseph Victor Anthony Hepburn-Ruston, a heavy drinker, deserted the family. Hepburn's mother Baroness Ella van Heemstra (right) moved her two sons (Alexander and Ian from a previous marriage) and Hepburn from Brussels to her father's mansion in Arnhem, Netherlands. The following year in 1936, Hepburn left the country



and moved to England to attend a private boarding school in Kent, where she enjoyed dance classes taught by a London ballet master.

In 1939, when Hepburn was 10, Germany invaded Poland, beginning World War II. When England declared war on Germany, the Baroness moved Hepburn back to Arnhem for safety. However, Germany soon invaded the Netherlands.



*Young Audrey Hepburn with her mother.*

---



### 3. Life Under Nazi Occupation

Hepburn lived under Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1945, using the name Edda van Heemstra so as not to sound English. Still living a privileged life, Hepburn received ballet training from Winja Marova at the Arnhem School of Music, where she received praise for her posture, personality, and performance.

Life was normal at first; kids went to football games, swim meets, and the movie theater. However, with half a million occupying German soldiers using up Dutch resources, fuel and food shortages were soon rampant. These scarcities caused the Netherlands' child death rate to increase by 40 percent.



*The van Heemstra mansion, near Arnhem.*

In the winter of 1944, Hepburn, who had already been enduring very little to eat, and her family were evicted when Nazi officers seized the Van Heemstra mansion. With most of their wealth confiscated, the Baron (Hepburn's grandfather), Hepburn, and her mother moved to the Baron's villa in the town of Velp, three miles outside of Arnhem.

The war affected Hepburn's extended family as well. Her Uncle Otto was shot to death for attempting to blow up a railroad. Hepburn's half-brother Ian was forced to work in a German munitions factory in Berlin. Hepburn's half-brother Alexander joined the underground Dutch resistance.

## 4. Working for the Dutch Resistance

Hepburn also resisted Nazi occupation. When the Germans confiscated all the radios, Hepburn delivered secret underground newspapers, which she hid in her oversized boots. She continued ballet and gave recitals to make money for the resistance until she was too weak from malnutrition.

Four days after Adolf Hitler ended his life by committing suicide on April 30, 1945, the liberation of the Netherlands took place—coincidentally on Hepburn's 16th birthday. Hepburn's half-brothers returned home. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration brought boxes of food, blankets, medicine, and clothes.

Hepburn was suffering from colitis, jaundice, severe edema, anemia, endometriosis, asthma, and depression. With the war over, her family tried to resume a normal life. Hepburn no longer had to call herself Edda van Heemstra and went back to her name of Audrey Hepburn-Ruston.

Hepburn and her mother worked at the Royal Military Invalids Home. Alexander (age 25) worked for the government in reconstruction projects while Ian (age 21) worked for Unilever, an Anglo-Dutch food and detergent company.



*Liberation of the Netherlands, April 1945.*

---

## 5. Rise to Fame



*Marie Rambert.*

In 1945, Winja Marova referred Hepburn to Sonia Gaskell's Ballet Studio '45 in Amsterdam, where Hepburn studied ballet for three more years. Gaskell believed that Hepburn had something special; especially the way she used her doe eyes to captivate audiences.

Gaskell introduced Hepburn to Marie Rambert of Ballet Rambert in London, a company performing night revues in London and international tours. Hepburn auditioned for Rambert and was accepted with scholarship in early 1948.

By October, Rambert told Hepburn that she did not have the physique to become a prima ballerina because she was too tall (Hepburn was 5-foot-7). Plus, Hepburn didn't compare to the other dancers since she had begun serious training too late in her life.

---



## 6. Ups and Downs



*Audrey Hepburn at her audition for the chorus line of High Button Shoes, 1948.*

Devastated that her dream was over, Hepburn tried out for a part in the chorus line in "High Button Shoes," a zany play at London's Hippodrome. She got the part and performed 291 shows, using the name Audrey Hepburn.

Afterward, Cecil Landeau, producer of the play "Sauce Tartare" (1949) had spotted Hepburn and cast her as the girl walking across the stage holding up the title card for each skit. With her impish smile and large eyes, she was cast at higher pay in the play's sequel, "Sauce Piquant" (1950), in a few comedy skits.

In 1950, Hepburn modeled part-time and registered herself as a freelance actress with the British film studio. She appeared in several bit parts in small movies before landing the role of a ballerina in "The Secret People" (1952), where she was able to show off her ballet talent.

In 1951, the famed French writer Colette was on the set of "Monte Carlo Baby" (1953) and spotted Hepburn playing the small part of a spoiled actress in the movie. Colette cast Hepburn as Gigi in her musical comedy play "Gigi," which opened on Nov. 24, 1951, on Broadway in New York at the Fulton Theater.



Simultaneously, director William Wyler was looking for a European actress to play the lead role of a princess in his new movie, "Roman Holiday," a romantic comedy. Executives in the Paramount London office had Hepburn do a screen test. Wyler was enchanted and Hepburn got the role.

"Gigi" ran until May 31, 1952, earning Hepburn a Theatre World Award and plenty of recognition.

*"Young Miss Hepburn becomes a star on first U.S. try."*  
—Life Magazine

*Star Light! Star Bright!*

*"Captivating"*  
—ATEINSON, N. Y. Times

*"Fresh and Frisky"*  
—KERR, N. Y. Herald Tribune


*"Simply Grand"*  
—GARLAND, N. Y. Journal American

*"Vital and Warm"*  
—COLEMAN, N. Y. Daily Mirror

*"Enchanting"*  
—WATTS, N. Y. Post

*"Beautiful"*  
—HAWKINS, N. Y. World-Tel. U Sun

*"Charming"*  
—CHAPMAN, N. Y. Daily News



*"Audrey Hepburn is nearly perfect as 'GIGI' in as engaging a comedy as we are likely to see for a long time."*  
—GIBBS, The New Yorker

GILBERT MILLER presents  
**AUDREY HEPBURN** in *Gigi*

A New Comedy by ANITA LOOS adapted from COLETTE'S Novel

**NIXON THEATRE**  
PITTSBURGH  
**1 WEEK BEGINNING MONDAY OCTOBER 13**  
MATINEES WEDNESDAY & SATURDAY

PRICES: Evenings - Orchestra \$3.90; Mezzanine \$3.25; Balcony \$2.60, \$1.95, \$1.30  
Matinees - Orchestra \$3.25; Mezzanine \$2.60; Balcony \$1.95, \$1.30 (Tax Included)

## 7. Hepburn in Hollywood



*A quirky publicity still for Roman Holiday.*

When "Gigi" ended, Hepburn flew to Rome to star in "Roman Holiday" (1953). The movie was a box-office success and Hepburn received the Academy Award for Best Actress in 1953 when she was 24 years old.

Capitalizing on its newest star, Paramount cast her as the lead in "Sabrina" (1954), another romantic comedy, directed by Billy Wilder and in which Hepburn played a Cinderella type. It was the top box-office hit of the year and Hepburn was nominated for Best Actress again but lost to Grace Kelly in "The Country Girl."

In 1954, Hepburn met and dated actor Mel Ferrer when they co-starred on Broadway in the hit play "Ondine." When the play ended, Hepburn received the Tony Award and married Ferrer on September 25, 1954, in Switzerland.



*Wedding of Audrey Hepburn and Mel Ferrer in 1954.*

After a miscarriage, Hepburn fell into a deep depression. Ferrer suggested she return to work. Together they starred in the film "War and Peace" (1956), a romantic drama, with Hepburn getting top billing.



While Hepburn's career offered many successes, including another Best Actress nomination for her dramatic portrayal of Sister Luke in "The Nun's Story" (1959), Ferrer's career was on the decline.

Hepburn discovered she was pregnant again in late 1958 but was on contract to star in a Western, "The Unforgiven" (1960), which began filming in January 1959. Later that same month during filming, she fell off a horse and broke her back. Although she recovered, Hepburn gave birth to a stillborn that spring. Her depression went deeper.

---



## 8. Iconic Look



*Audrey Hepburn in Breakfast at Tiffanys.*

Thankfully, Hepburn gave birth to a healthy son, Sean Hepburn-Ferrer, on January 17, 1960. Little Sean was always in tow and even accompanied his mother on the set of "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961).

With fashions designed by Hubert de Givenchy, the film catapulted Hepburn as a fashion icon; she appeared on nearly every fashion magazine that year. The press took its toll, however, and the Ferrers bought La Paisible, an 18th-century farmhouse in Tolochenaz, Switzerland, to live in privacy.

Hepburn's successful career continued when she starred in "The Children's Hour" (1961), Charade (1963), and then was cast in the universally acclaimed musical film, "My Fair Lady" (1964). After more successes, including the thriller "Wait Until Dark" (1967), the Ferrers separated.



*Audrey Hepburn in My Fair Lady, 1964.*

## 9. Two More Lovers

In June 1968, Hepburn was cruising to Greece with friends aboard the yacht of Italy's Princess Olympia Torlonia when she met Dr. Andrea Dotti, an Italian psychiatrist. That December, the Ferrers divorced after 14 years of marriage. Hepburn retained custody of Sean and married Dotti six weeks later.



*Andrea Dotti and Audrey Hepburn, 1968.*

On February 8, 1970, at age 40, Hepburn gave birth to her second son, Luca Dotti. The Dottis lived in Rome, but while Ferrer had been nine years older than Hepburn, Dotti was nine years younger and still enjoyed the nightlife.

In order to focus her attention on her family, Hepburn took a lengthy hiatus from Hollywood. Despite all her efforts, however, Dotti's ongoing adultery caused Hepburn to seek a divorce in 1979 after nine years of marriage.

In 1981 when Hepburn was 52, she met 46-year-old Robert Wolders, a Dutch-born investor and actor, who remained her companion for the rest of her life.

## 10. Later Years



*Audrey Hepburn with the actor Robert Wolders, who remained her companion from 1981 until the end of her life in 1993.*

Although Hepburn ventured back into a few more movies, in 1988 her main focus became helping with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). As a spokesperson for children in crises, she remembered the United Nations relief in Holland after WWII and threw herself into her work.



She and Wolders traveled the world six months a year, bringing national attention to the needs of starving, sick children throughout the world.

In 1992, Hepburn thought she had picked up a stomach virus in Somalia but was soon diagnosed with colon cancer. After an unsuccessful surgery for colon cancer in November 1992, her doctors gave her three months to live.



## 11. Death



Hepburn, age 63, passed away on Jan. 20, 1993, at La Paisible (above). Her death was announced by UNICEF, for which she had been a special ambassador since 1988. At a quiet funeral in Switzerland, pallbearers included Hubert de Givenchy and ex-husband Mel Ferrer.



## 12. Legacy

Though Hepburn's film career was relatively brief, spanning mainly only the 1950s and 1960s, the American Film Institute named her among the greatest movie stars of all time. The AFI placed Hepburn in the third spot on its "AFI's 100 Years...100 Stars" list of the 50 greatest screen legends, behind only Katharine Hepburn, at No. 1, and Betty Davis, at No. 2. (Katherine Hepburn and Audrey Hepburn were not related.)

Hepburn is still remembered for such films as "Roman Holiday" and "Breakfast at Tiffany's," and to this day, she is still looked upon as a fashion icon for her style and elegance. Even decades after her death, Hepburn continues to be voted as one of the most beautiful women of all time on numerous polls.



