

Zoom Talk: Audrey Hepburn

Delivered on: 13th January 2021

Haywards Heath & District Probus Club

Given By: Howard Slater



Audrey Hepburn and her war years 1929 - 1963

On 13th January 2021, Howard Slater presented a Zoom talk to us about Audrey Hepburn, her life and work.

Most ladies particularly enjoy the story of Audrey growing up during the Nazi invasion of Holland, followed by her career after the war. The talk included a short video of Audrey's films, rare photographs as well as some not so well-known information.



Picture Credit: "Audrey Hepburn (1929 - 1993)" by twm1340 is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/)

Unfortunately, I was unable to join this Zoom talk but I put together the following short commentary afterwards about this beautiful woman, her Hollywood career, her war years and her many other accomplishments. She may have only been 63 when she died of cancer in 1993, but she had had packed more things into her short life than most other people.

Films

Audrey Hepburn (born Audrey Kathleen Ruston on 4th May 1929) was a British actress (although born in Belgium) and humanitarian. Recognised as both a film and fashion icon, she was ranked by the American Film Institute as the third-greatest female screen legend from the Golden Age of Hollywood and was inducted into the International Best Dressed List Hall of Fame.

She studied ballet with Sonia Gaskell in Amsterdam beginning in 1945 and later with Marie Rambert in London. She began performing as a chorus girl in West End musical theatre productions and then had minor appearances in several films. Hepburn starred in the 1951 Broadway play *Gigi* (remember the music?).

She was partnered by numerous handsome leading men as she rose to stardom in romantic films – starting with a comedy, *Roman Holiday* (1953) alongside Gregory Peck. She went on to star in a number of successful films such as *Sabrina* (1954) in which Humphrey Bogart and William Holden compete for her affection; *Funny Face* (1957) a musical; the drama *The Nun's Story* (1959) with Peter Finch; the romantic comedy *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) with George Peppard; the thriller-romance *Charade* (1963) opposite Cary Grant; and the musical *My Fair Lady* (1964) as Eliza Doolittle with Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins, and Stanley Holloway, Gladys Cooper and Wilfrid Hyde-White in supporting roles.

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Her Family, School in England, and the Dutch Resistance

As a result of her multinational background and travelling with her family due to her father's job, Audrey learned six languages: Dutch and English from her parents, and later varying degrees of French, German, Spanish, and Italian. In the mid-1930s, Hepburn's parents recruited and collected donations for the British Union of Fascists.

Joseph, Audrey's father, was a British subject born in Auschitz, Bohemia, Austria-Hungary, left the family abruptly in 1935 after a "scene" in Brussels when Adriaantje (as she was known in the family) was six; later she often spoke of the effect on a child of being "dumped" as "children need two parents". Joseph moved to London, where he became more deeply involved in Fascist activity and never visited his daughter abroad. She professed that her father's departure was "the most traumatic event of my life". That same year, 1935, her mother moved with Audrey to her family's estate in Arnhem; her half-brothers Alex and Ian (then 15 and 11) were sent to The Hague to live with relatives. Joseph wanted Audrey to be educated in England - so in 1937, Hepburn was sent to live in Kent, where she, known as Audrey Ruston or "Little Audrey", was educated at a small independent school in Elham.



With the outbreak of the war, Audrey's mother brought her back to the Netherlands. There, she became a reluctant observer of the brutal Nazi occupation of Western Europe from 1940 to 1945. Audrey took part in various underground concerts to raise money for the Dutch Resistance movement. She danced at recitals and designed the dances herself.

You can see a video about the above at:

<https://youtu.be/tVJX4td0M60>

The picture (left) showing Audrey with her mother, is a screen clip from that video.

UNICEF

Later in life, Audrey devoted much of her time to UNICEF, to which she had contributed since 1954. Then, she worked in some of the poorest communities of Africa, South America, and Asia between 1988 and 1992. In December 1992, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of her work as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. Sadly, only a month later, she died of appendiceal cancer at her home in Switzerland at the age of 63.

About the Speaker



Howard is a retired qualified lecturer and has been lecturing and giving talks for over 30 years. The talks he gives have been fully self-researched and some include photographs acquired from around the world. His details are at:

<https://speakernet.co.uk/talk/1695/audrey-hepburn-and-her-war-years-1929-1963>