

Audrey Hepburn

FAMINE GIVES STAR NEW ROLE

AUDREY Hepburn reigned as one of the top actresses of the 1950's and 60's. At the age of 24, she won the Oscar for her first film, *Roman Holiday*. The camera continued to capture her elegant appearance and screen vulnerability in such classics as *Sabrina*, *Funny Face*, *Breakfast At Tiffany's* and *My Fair Lady*. Belgium-born Hepburn began her career as a ballerina, studying dance in Holland and England. During that time she supported herself and her mother with a series of bit parts in revues, television and movies. While working on a French film, she was discovered by the French writer Colette in Monte Carlo, who asked her to play the role of *Gigi* on Broadway. The rest is cinema history. Hepburn has been married and divorced twice, first to actor Mel Ferrer, then to Dr. Andrea Dotti, an Italian psychiatrist. She has a son from each marriage, Sean and Luca.

In 1967, Hepburn left acting to devote herself to her home and children. She has returned to the screen periodically, only when a project would accommodate her personal priorities.

Fluent in four languages, Hepburn lives in Switzerland with her companion of nine years, businessman Robert Wolders.

Recently, she was appointed special UNICEF Ambassador, visiting UNICEF projects in famine-stricken Ethiopia.

M.M. Does this UNICEF position hold a special meaning for you because you have experienced hunger in your lifetime?

A.H. I must say you don't need to know hunger to want to help a hungry child. It so happens that during World War II, I lived through five years of occupation in Holland and the last was very dramatic because we were cut off from food supplies. There were no shops open. We had the Germans behind us and the British across from us on the other side of the river. We were in no man's land and we survived, but with great difficulty. The children were very undernourished, including me. And that's when I first learned about the Red Cross and UNICEF, which it was then call UNRRA.

M.M. How did that wartime experience affect you?

A.H. It certainly conditioned me for the rest of my life to appreciate life and liberty, food and the luxury we have. I mean luxury in the sense that it is a luxury to have water and to have food and a roof over your head. My brothers were in the resistance – one was sent to Germany, forced labor – and I had two uncles and many friends who were shot as a reprisal.

M.M. Is It true that you carried messages for the underground?

A.H. Yes, but I didn't do very much of it. At some point I think they couldn't find somebody who would. There were these little bulletins that had to be passed on I just stuffed them in my socks.

M.M. There is an incredible sense of detail about everything you do, whether it's your appearance or your work. You also have the reputation of a true

professional, rarely showing temperament. Where does this strong sense of discipline come from?

A.H. That came from my mother, who was born in 1900, so you can imagine, in the Victorian days' practice, she was brought up very strictly. I had a combination of an old-fashioned upbringing and of being Anglo-Saxon at the same time, so it's a combination of duty comes first and of manners. My mother used to say manners mean kindness. It's thinking of others first and yourself last.

I suppose I was ingrained with that and with Russian ballet training, which as you know, is very tough and disciplinarian. You're not supposed to huff or puff or complain. You're just supposed to do it. I think a combination of all of that has been very helpful because it got me through some very rough times, at least with bothering other people as little as possible. It also turns you into a rather reserved person, because for so long I had great difficulty expressing or talking about myself if I needed to, because I had been brought up to think that wasn't done.

M.M. I think most women were raised with the sense that everybody else's emotional needs were more important. That's what the women's movement was all about – strengthening your self-esteem, putting yourself on the priority list. Did you identify with that in any way?

A.H. I don't have much to say about self esteem. I've had so many complexes all my life that it's always been hard for me to have assurance. To be assured is what I've needed more than anything. The women's movement, I've always sympathized with, but I've never had any problem because at the age of 13 I went to work and I was always able to work, and nobody stopped me from working, so I've had a certain independence that way.

M.M. You said you had a lot of complexes. That's hard to believe when you have generations of women who look at you and want your cheekbones, your smile, your voice and your figure. Did you not feel comfortable with the way you looked?

A.H. Especially when I was younger, I thought I was moonfaced and flat-chested and had rather large feet and all the things I didn't want to have. I wanted to be pretty and round, like beautiful girls admired. Somehow, in spite of all of that, so many good things have happened to me. Today, I'm happier with myself than I ever was when I was younger, because I realize these things didn't stop my happiness. Two sons and many movies later, plus lots of friend, I feel better about myself now than I did then.

M.M. What did it feel like at the age of 24, with no acting training and little experience, to have a Broadway success and win an Oscar?

A.H. I was in a total daze. I think I thrill to it more today. I didn't really know what had hit me or what movies quite meant or how you made movies until I did the first one. I went from director William Wyler and Gregory Peck to an Oscar. It was incredible and over the years is when I really learned to realize the very good fortune I had and how many blessings it brought me.

M.M. But when one doesn't have acting technique or training, what does one depend on?

A.H. Years ago I was doing a little tiny bit part in a picture in France and I was seen by Colette, the French writer, and she asked to speak to me, just at the time they were planning the Broadway production of *Gigi*. She said, "We're looking for an unknown girl: Do you think you'd like to do it?" I said, "I'd love to do it, but I can't. I'm not an actress; I've never acted on the stage." She said, "Well, you've been a dancer and you know how to work hard, so you will be able to do it." So I think it comes back to discipline, hard work, and you hope that you have the rest that follows. And I did work terribly hard.

M.M. You said you attributed your success to three men: Billy Wilder, William Wyler and George Cukor. What did they do for you?

A.H. I think I was the product of good directors. I've had others too, such as Fred Zimmerman, Stanley Donan and Blake Edwards. And I suppose they did bring the best out in me and taught me the things they thought I could do and therefore they gave me the assurance I needed to try. I was ;really an unknown, an inexperienced dancer and I went from one successful movie to another, and if you look at the movies that they were and you see the director who directed them and the partners that I've played opposite, it has to be that.

M.M. At the age of 38, as the drumbeat of the women's movement was getting louder and louder and thousands of women began looking for a career, you did and about face, took a prolonged break from your career and stayed at home. Why?

A.H. I had to make a choice at one point of missing movies or missing my children, and it was a very easy decision to make because I wanted my child so much. Movies were made on location. I was in Africa, Mexico, Spain, and France. When my son started going to school I couldn't take him with me anymore, and that was tough for me, so I stopped accepting pictures. I withdrew to stay home with my children; it was the only choice for me. I couldn't have survived otherwise. I would hate to look back on movies and not have known my children. I was very happy. It was not as if I was sitting at home biting my nails or being frustrated. I was desperate the other way. I'd find myself in a hotel on the other end of the world and I'd call home and find out that my son was running a fever, or something. It just became impossible.

M.M. You had your first child at the age of 30 and your second at the age of 39. You were bedridden for most of each pregnancy. What did that commitment to motherhood mean to you?

A.H. It's something that's a part of me. I think I was born wanting a child. I loved babies when I was little and it was my dream to have children. Obviously, like all mothers, I'm crazy about my two boys. My eldest son is in Mexico; he's an assistant director on a picture with Gregory Peck. I said to Greg, "I hope you bring him all the good fortune that you did me." And my youngest son is 18 now and is finishing school this year, and wants to go to art school next year.

M.M. You have survived two marriages and two divorces. You originally came from a divorced home. The whole concept of divorce, how did that hit you, how did you survive?

A.H. I suffered for the divorce of my parents terribly. I was about 6 when they separated. I think it's the single most traumatic experience of my childhood and I had several during the war. And I was determined as a child that I would grow up and would never ever divorce. When I found myself getting those two divorces, each time was equally traumatic for me because of the experience I had as a child. I wanted so much to protect my children against that agony, which I wasn't able to do. I think divorce is one of the most awful things that you can go through, especially if you have children. I think I survived because of my friends. I always had very close friends that I could call up in the middle of the night. If you can have the affection of somebody, some friend, that's terribly important, not to be alone when you're suffering.

M.M. You have taken prolonged breaks from public life, yet when you step back out, everybody is wanting at your feet. How do you explain that the more you disappear, the more people seem to want you?

A.H. Maybe it's a build of curiosity. One of the reasons I've not done too many interviews is that I felt I had nothing to really say anymore. I felt I was boring talking about myself, and everybody knew the movies I had done. I had so little to say. Now I'm very happy as the spokesperson for UNICEFF.

M.M. As an eyewitness to the terrible human tragedy in Ethiopia, what do you want people to know and to do?

A.H. Obviously, contributing is of the essence and that is what we would be so grateful for. What the country needs right now is continued emergency help because this year the drought is a great deal worse than it was in 1985. There is even less rain and the rains they were expecting have totally failed. The north is the most drought stricken. They also have a war. The Ethiopian people can be saved so easily. It is not a difficult ask. All they need is water. The water is in the ground and every so often, God willing, it falls. What they need are the means to preserve it and we won't hear anymore about these terrible tragedies in Ethiopia.

M.M. You are constantly bridging two different worlds. In one there's starvation, poverty and death and in the other is media, glamour and affluence. How does it affect you?

A.H. Since the world has been the world, I suppose that's a social injustice built into it. But you must remember it is one world and two, and more and more the world is getting smaller and accessible, and there's just no question that it's a moral obligation for those who have, to give to those who have nothing.

M.M. Is there anything that would lure you back to the motion picture business?

A.H. If there was a delicious lovely part for me to play, I might do it. I'm not looking to do a movie. I'm so involved with this. UNICEFF is what I care most about right now.