

Audrey Hepburn

When I was growing up, I was enthralled by Audrey Hepburn, so full of grace and elegance. Charming and witty. But the heroic parts of Audrey's life came before her acting career and after it. Audrey was born in Brussels in 1929, the daughter of an English banker and a Dutch baroness. Her early school years were in England. In 1935 her father divorced her mother and left the family. In 1939, her mother moved the family back to her family home in the Netherlands. She apparently believed the Germans would not attack the Netherlands. When they did invade, Audrey's mom changed Audrey's name to Edda van Heemstra and modified her documents, fearing that the English name would put Audrey in danger.

Audrey had begun to study ballet when the family returned to Holland and by 1944, she was quite good. She began to dance at secret performances to collect money for the Dutch resistance. At least one of her half-brothers worked for the resistance and Audrey acted as a message carrier for them. One of her brothers was caught and sent off to a labor camp. Audrey later wrote about seeing the Jewish children being loaded onto trains and carted off in wagons.

These early experiences influenced Audrey Hepburn's second career. When her movie career was winding down and her two sons were grown, she was appointed Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF. Although the expectation was to be a spokesperson, attracting media attention, she took the job much more seriously. She made over fifty trips to third world countries to learn about and to publicize a wide variety of problems children face around the globe.

She rolled up her sleeves and went to work in countries she visited. Her second trip was to Turkey to try to get the government's approval and support for a program to vaccinate children for common communicable diseases (measles, tetanus, whooping cough, diphtheria and polio). Evidently, her approach was successful. She said "the army gave us their trucks, the fishmongers gave us their "wagons...it took ten days to vaccinate the whole country. Not bad."

Speaking to a congressional committee in 1989, she told congressmen that "less than one-half of one percent of today's world economy would be the total required to alleviate the worst aspects of poverty. After her last trip, to Somalia, Audrey said "I'm filled with a rage at ourselves. I don't believe in collective guilt, but I do believe in collective responsibility."

After her death, her sons and other loved ones set up the Audrey Hepburn Children's Fund which continues her work.

For more information: google Audrey Hepburn and Audrey Hepburn Children's Fund

You can see video's of Audrey at work and maybe a couple of her paintings