

## Katharine Hepburn, 1907-2003: An Independent and Intelligent Actress

She has been called the greatest American actress of all time. *Transcript of radio broadcast: 18 September 2009*

VOICE ONE:

I'm Steve Ember.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Barbara Klein with PEOPLE IN AMERICA in VOA Special English. Today we tell about Katharine Hepburn, one of America's great film and stage actresses. Hepburn's career lasted almost seventy years. During that time she made more than fifty films. She became known all over the world for her independence, sharp intelligence, and acting ability.

Katharine Hepburn holds the record for the most Academy Awards for Best Actress. She won the honor four times. This star holds a special place in American film and popular culture.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:



Katharine Hepburn

Katharine Houghton Hepburn was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in nineteen-oh-seven. She came from a wealthy and highly educated family. Her father, Thomas Hepburn, was a successful doctor. Her mother, Katharine Martha Houghton, was a great supporter of women's rights issues including the right to birth control. The Hepburns made sure to educate their children about important political and social subjects. The family members were not afraid to express their liberal opinions.

VOICE TWO:

Doctor Hepburn also believed in the importance of intense exercise. For most of her life Kate was an excellent athlete. She rode horses, swam and played golf and tennis. Here is a recording of Katharine Hepburn from a film about her life. She is talking about the values her family taught her. She says she is not strange, but is fearless.

KATHARINE HEPBURN: "I don't think I'm an eccentric, no! I'm just something from New England that was very American and brought up by two extremely

intelligent people...who gave us a kind of, I think the greatest gift that man can give anyone, and that is...sort of freedom from fear."

VOICE ONE:

Katharine graduated from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania in nineteen twenty-eight. She soon started appearing in small roles in plays on Broadway in New York City. That year she also married a businessman named Ludlow Ogden Smith. Their marriage lasted only a few years. But Katherine later said Ludlow's support was very important to her during the early part of her career.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Katharine Hepburn was not the usual kind of actress during this period. She had a thin and athletic body. She spoke with a clear East Coast accent. And she was very independent in her thoughts and actions.

For example, she wore men's pants as clothing at a time when women wore only skirts or dresses. Sometimes her independence and liberal opinions got her in trouble. After a few successful plays in New York, Hollywood filmmakers became interested in her. She later signed with the film production company called RKO pictures. Her first movie came out in nineteen thirty-two.

VOICE ONE:

The next year she made the film "Morning Glory." In her role as Eva Lovelace, Hepburn plays a stage actress fighting for a successful career. Few directors are interested in her. But by the end of the movie, she has a chance to let her acting skills shine and she becomes a star. This movie earned Hepburn her first Academy Award for Best Actress. Here is a recording from the movie. Hepburn's character, Eva, tells about how she has changed her name in preparation for becoming a great actress. She talks very quickly, but you can sense the energy behind her performance.



KATHARINE HEPBURN IN "MORNING GLORY": I hope you're going to tell me your name. I want you for my first friend in New York. Mine's Eva Lovelace. It's partly made up and partly real. It was Eva Love. Love's my family name. I added the Lace. Do you like it or would you prefer something shorter? A shorter name would be more convenient on a sign.

Still, Eva Lovelace in 'Camille' for instance, or Eva Lovelace in 'Romeo and Juliet,' sounds very distinguished, doesn't it?

I don't want to use my family name because I shall probably have several scandals while I live and I don't want to cause them any trouble until I am famous, when nobody will mind. That's why I must decide on something at once while there is still time, before I am famous.

VOICE TWO:

During the nineteen thirties, critics either loved or hated Katharine Hepburn. Some thought she was a fresh and exciting addition to the Hollywood industry. Others decided she was too bold and self-important. They thought her way of speaking sounded false. But Hepburn wanted to face the movie industry in her own way. She liked to play the roles of strong women.

She did not want to be like other actresses. She did not wear make-up on her face. She would not let photographers take sexy pictures of her. And she did not like talking to her fans or the media.

VOICE ONE:

Katharine Hepburn continued to work very hard making movies. Yet by the late nineteen thirties she had become unpopular with the public. So movie producers stopped wanting her in their films.

But Hepburn was not raised to quit easily. She decided to return to the stage on Broadway in New York City. She starred in a play called "The Philadelphia Story." Hepburn's friend Philip Barry wrote the play especially for her. It is about a wealthy and intelligent woman named Tracy Lord. She is about to marry a man she does not love. In the movie she learns to be more honest with herself and others. She decides to marry a man from her past whom she has always loved.

VOICE TWO:

The play was a great success. Hepburn immediately bought the legal rights to the play. She knew "The Philadelphia Story" would be made into a movie. And she wanted to make sure she was the star of the film version.

In nineteen forty, "The Philadelphia Story" became a great movie success. Hepburn received another Academy Award nomination for Best Actress. She had taken control of her career once again. And she would stay in control of it from now on.

Here is a recording from "The Philadelphia Story." Katharine Hepburn's character, Tracy Lord, is talking with her new friend, Macaulay Connor, a writer. She has just read his book and discovered something surprising about him.

THE PHILADELPHIA STORY:

Tracy: These stories are beautiful! Why Connor, they're almost poetry!

Macaulay: Well, don't kid yourself, they are.

Tracy: I can't make you out at all now.

Macaulay: Really? I thought I was easy.

Tracy: So did I. But you're not. You talk so big and tough, and then you write like this. Which is which?

Macaulay: Both, I guess.

Tracy: No. No, I believe you put the toughness on to save your skin.

Macaulay: Oh, you think so.

Tracy: I know a little about that.

#### VOICE ONE:



In nineteen forty-two, Katherine Hepburn starred in "Woman of the Year." This was the first of nine movies she starred in with actor Spencer Tracy.

They would soon become a famous couple both on and off the movie screen. Usually their movies dealt with finding a balance of power between their two strong characters. Hepburn and Tracy had a magical energy when they acted together. But in real life they kept their love hidden from the public.

Spencer Tracy was married to another woman. For religious reasons, he would not end his marriage and divorce his wife. So Hepburn and Tracy led a secret love affair for more than twenty years. Katharine Hepburn had had other love interests. She once had a relationship with the famous American millionaire Howard Hughes. But Spencer Tracy remained the love of her life.

(MUSIC)

#### VOICE TWO:

One of Katharine Hepburn's most famous roles was in the movie "The African Queen." She made this movie in nineteen fifty-one with the famous actor Humphrey Bogart. In the film, their two very different characters fall in love on a riverboat in the middle of Africa.

As Katharine Hepburn became older, she played more and more wise and complex characters. In nineteen sixty-seven she starred in her last movie with Spencer Tracy. He died a few weeks after filming ended. For this movie, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," she won her second Academy Award. She won her

third Academy Award the next year for "A Lion in Winter." And, in her mid-seventies she won her last Academy Award for "On Golden Pond."

VOICE ONE:

Even into her eighties, Katharine Hepburn kept working. She had roles in several movies and television programs. She also wrote several books, including one about her life. In two thousand three, Katharine Hepburn died. She was ninety-six years old.

As part of her last wishes, she helped create the Katharine Houghton Hepburn Center at Bryn Mawr College. This program helps support the things that were important to her: film and theater, women's rights, and civic responsibility.

VOICE TWO:

An actor who worked with Katharine Hepburn once said that she brought with her an extra level of reality. He said that when she was near, everything became more interesting, intense and bright.

This intensity and intelligence shine in the films that Katharine Hepburn made over her lifetime. People still enjoy her films today. Katharine Hepburn's work and personality have had a great influence on American film and culture.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

This program was written and produced by Dana Demange. You can download this program and others from our Web site, [voaspecialenglish.com](http://voaspecialenglish.com). I'm Steve Ember.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Barbara Klein. Join us again next week for PEOPLE IN AMERICA in VOA Special English.