

Lucille Ball

1911-1989

Lucille Ball was born August 6, 1911 in Jamestown, New York. Setting her mind on becoming an actress early, she left high school at age 15, and with her mother's blessing, enrolled in John Murray Anderson drama School in New York City. Though she auditioned repeatedly, Ball was told she had no talent, and was never accepted to the school. With no experience behind her and very few acting roles for women available, Ball took a job as a model, using the fashion designer, Hattie Carnegie. Carnegie chose Ball to be the Chesterfield Cigarette Girl in 1933. The position won her national exposure for the first time, and caught the attention of Hollywood. Lucille Ball's first role was an appearance in Eddie Cantor's musical, "Roman Scandals" in 1933.

Ball continued to audition for movies, and caught bit parts in low budget feature films like, "Blood Money" in 1933 and "Kid Millions" the following year. Ball would appear in over 60 films by the late 1940s, including feature films starring Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Roger, and Bob Hope.

After performing in the musical "Too Many Girls," in 1940 with popular Cuban band leader, Desi Arnaz, Ball fell in love with her co-star, and married him later that year.

Ball and Arnaz pitched an idea to CBS that would involve the unlikely marriage of a wild red head to a Cuban bandleader. At first, CBS officials balked at the idea. So, the husband and wife team formed their own production company called "Desilu," and hit the road, taking their show idea and turning it into a popular and highly praised vaudeville act. When CBS still refused to consider the show, ball and Arnaz used their own money to film the pilot episode of the show. "I Love Lucy" premiered in October of 1951, and instantly became the most popular television show in America. CBS picked it up before the show's thirty-minute episode was over.

"I Love Lucy" ran successfully for 6 years. The first four years on the air, "I Love Lucy" was number one in the Nielsen Ratings. During its entire history, the show never fell below number three. "I Love Lucy" won more than 200 awards, 5 Emmys, and the respect and admiration of the country.

After 179 episodes of the "I Love Lucy Show," Ball and Arnaz decided to call it quits. While they said goodbye to the old show, they began taping another, name "The Lucy-Desi Comedy Hour." By the end of the 1950s, Desilu become a powerful, respected corporation, producing such hit TV show and "Star Trek" and "Mission Impossible".

After 20 years if marriage, Ball and Arnaz divorced in 1960. Ball took out a loan for \$3 million and bought her ex-husbands half of Desilu. At the time, Desilu was the world's largest production facility and Lucy's take-over made her the first woman in history to hold such a position.

In 1962, encouraged by fans, Ball reintroduced Lucy to TV, and she starred in "The Lucy Show". After 6 years, "The Lucy Show" went of the air and Ball wasted no time in starring in yet another series based on the same character. "Here's Lucy" was instantly picked up by the networks and ran on prime time through 1974. It was during this same time when Ball spread her wings and began performing outside the lines of comedy. She won rave reviews for her appearance on Broadway in 1961s "Wildcat". On the heels of that success, Ball teamed with Bob Hope for two feature films and co-starred with Henry Ronda in the critically acclaimed "Yours, Mine and Ours".

In the late 70s and early 80s, Ball made only sporadic appearances on TV, usually as the guest star. In 1985, she portrayed a New York homeless woman in the TV film, "Stone Pillow". The following year at the age of 75, she debuted "Life with Lucy", a half hour comedy series. It aired for only two months before being cancelled.

Lucille Ball spent much of the rest of her life out of the spotlight. Her last public appearance was the 1989 Academy Awards.

One week after undergoing open-heart surgery on April 26, 1989, Lucille suffered a ruptured aorta and died. She was 77 years old. She is survived by her two children, Lucie and Desi Jr.