



## **Lucille Ball** - a brief biography -

Lucille Ball was born on August 6, 1911 in Jamestown, New York, and grew up in the neighboring village of Celoron.(1) As a child she fell in love with vaudeville(2) and movies, and decided that she wanted to be "in show business." Lucy left home as a teenager for the opportunities of New York City. However, it took years of struggle to finally become a successful actress. The young girl worked at many odd jobs, became a Hattie Carnegie model,(3) then "the Chesterfield Girl",(4) and finally had the opportunity to travel to Hollywood as one of "the Goldwyn Girls".(5)



*Roman Scandals* (1933) was the first film in which Lucy appeared; she was in 82 feature length films during her career.(6) Although she is universally respected as one of the greatest comedians of all time, she did not consider herself to be funny! She is quoted as saying, "'I'm not funny. What I am is brave.'" She was influenced by such early comic geniuses as Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and the Marx Brothers.(7)



Before television, radio<sup>(8)</sup> was the most popular form of entertainment in the country. Lucy starred in a show called *My Favorite Husband*, which really set the stage for "*I Love Lucy*".

In the early 1950's, television sets were beginning to appear in more and more homes. Lucy's success in radio resulted in CBS Television's invitation to have her bring her popular radio program, *My Favorite Husband*, to the new medium of television. Lucy had married Cuban-born Desi Arnaz<sup>(9)</sup> in 1940, and she wanted him to play her television husband. CBS refused because of Desi's Cuban accent and "Latin look"; they didn't think the public would accept the inter-ethnic couple.<sup>(10)</sup> They created a vaudeville show and took it "on the road" for six months. The great reception they received by the public convinced CBS executives and sponsors,<sup>(11)</sup> and "*I Love Lucy*"<sup>(12)</sup> was on its way into history.



Although "*I Love Lucy*" was amazingly successful and its stars were extremely popular, there were challenges. One of the most difficult occurred in 1953 when Lucy was accused of being a Communist during this country's "Red Scare".<sup>(13)</sup>

"*I Love Lucy*" was on the air from 1951-1957; it continues to be enjoyed through reruns to this day. Lucy then starred in several other television series,<sup>(14)</sup> the Broadway show *Wildcat*<sup>(14)</sup>, feature-length films, and many other television shows and specials.

Following her divorce from Desi in 1960, Lucy became the head of Desilu Studios, and the first woman to head a major Hollywood studio.<sup>(15)</sup>

Lucille Ball appeared on the cover of *TV Guide* more often than any other celebrity. Throughout her career, and even after her death, Lucille Ball was honored for her work<sup>(16)</sup>. She received Emmy Awards, a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame,<sup>(17)</sup> a Presidential Medal of Freedom, induction into the National Women's Hall of Fame, and many other awards and recognitions.



Many of today's popular entertainers attest to being influenced by Lucille Ball, including Carol Burnett, Lily Tomlin, Ellen DeGeneres and Robin Williams.

**For further study:**

1. Lucy's childhood and local roots
2. Entertainment in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century
3. Modeling, costumes and fashion
4. Advertising before TV
5. The Goldwyn Girls and the MGM Studios
6. Film career of Lucille Ball
7. Comedians who influenced Lucy
8. Radio
9. Desi Arnaz
10. Racism and prejudice
11. Television sponsors
12. "*I Love Lucy*"
13. Joseph McCarthy and the "Red Scare"
14. Lucille Ball TV shows
15. Lucille Ball as business woman
16. Honors received by Lucy
17. Hollywood Walk of Fame