

Cary Grant

One of the greatest comic actors and handsome leading men in Hollywood was born Archibald Alexander Leach in Bristol, England. An only child, he had a confused and unhappy childhood. He came from a very impoverished childhood, emotionally and physically, as well as monetarily. One day when Archie was ten, he came home from school and was told that his mother had gone to a seaside resort. In actuality, his mother Elsie was placed by his father in a mental institution. She had apparently never overcome her depression after the death of a previous child in infancy. His father, who had a son with another woman, told him that she had gone away on a "long holiday." It was only when he was in his late twenties that he discovered she was still alive, and institutionalized.

Who said, "Everybody wants to be Cary Grant. Even I want to be Cary Grant."?

After being expelled from Grammar School in 1918, the 14 year old Archie lied about his age and forged his father's signature on a letter to join Bob Pender's troupe of knockabout comedians. He learned pantomime as well as acrobatics as he toured the English provinces, picked up a Cockney accent in the music halls, and then in July 1920, was one of the eight Pender boys selected to go to the US. Their show on Broadway, "Good Times," ran for over 450 performances, giving Grant time to become accustomed to life on stage in America, where he chose to stay when the group returned to the United Kingdom. His background in acrobatics would serve him well in doing prat falls and comical moves in his cinematic career.

An uncredited role in Paramount Pictures 1931 release "*Singapore Sue*" led to a studio contract, and the birth of "Cary Grant" He changed his name at the insistence of Paramount Pictures executives. Paramount executives ordered him to drop the name "Archibald Leach" and devised a new name from the initials of their top star: Gary Cooper. Though he spent most of his life as "Cary Grant", he seemed to deliberately insert the ghost of his old life at odd opportunities: in his comedy "*Arsenic and Old Lace*" with Peter Lorre, a tombstone bears the name Archie Leach, and Grant inserted the name into the dialogue of several films, including "*His Girl Friday*". In 1933, Hollywood sex symbol, Mae West wanted him for "*She Done Him Wrong*" because she saw his combination of virility, sexuality and the aura and bearing of a gentleman. This was his big Hollywood break.

Grant's combination of good looks, comic timing and physical grace made him a rare commodity. By 1935, when Grant's Paramount contract expired, he was able to write his own ticket and became one of the few actors who worked independently. A sharp businessman, he negotiated a dual contract with RKO and Columbia Pictures that gave him options to accept outside roles- a landmark case of flexibility not typical in the Hollywood studio system. Able to pick his projects, Grant's first big hit was his 1935 work with Katherine Hepburn in the

romantic comedy "Sylvia Scarlett", the first of a string of co-starring roles that included "*Bringing Up Baby*" (in which Grant vied for Hepburn's affections with a pet leopard) and "*The Philadelphia Story*". While his costars, Jimmy Stewart and Hepburn earned Oscars for "*The Philadelphia Story*", Grant gave his share of the film's earnings to the British War Effort during World War II. King George VI awarded Grant the King's Medal for Service in the Cause of Freedom, citing his "outstanding service to the British War Relief Society." His share of the earnings from "*Arsenic and Old Lace*", were donated in full to the U.S. War Relief Fund.

Cary's talent for comedy earned box office hits in three decades, from his 1940s farces to "*Operation Petticoat*" and "*Monkey Business*" in the 1950s. Debonair, Grant proved a perfect foil for the films of fellow Briton Alfred Hitchcock, who cast him in four of his best films: "*Suspicion*", "*Notorious*" (with Oscar winner Ingrid Bergman) "To Catch A Thief" (with the director's favorite actress, Grace Kelly) and "North by Northwest", which broke rules and box office records with racy dialogue and breathless action scenes. Hitchcock so trusted Grant he actually allowed him to improvise dialogue with Grace Kelly during "*To Catch A Thief*", and had been so pleased with the pairing he had originally planned to reunite them for "*North by Northwest*", not anticipating Kelly would retire to become the Princess of Monaco.

Tony Curtis was said to model his character in Billy Wilders' "*Some Like it Hot*" after Cary Grant. Christopher Reeve admitted that he used Grant as a model for his Clark Kent role in "*Superman*." Ian Fleming modeled the James Bond character partially with Grant in mind. Cary was actually offered the role of James Bond in the initial film, "*Dr. No*", but he turned it down feeling he was too old for the part. He turned several roles down in the fifties and sixties feeling that, for the most part, he was too old to play opposite the leading women. He turned down the role of Henry Higgins in "*My Fair Lady*" because he was emphatic that the role should go to Rex Harrison, an actor whom he admired and had made the role on stage. He did, however accept the leading role in "*Father Goose*", opposite Leslie Caron, which he said later most represented what he felt he was like.

His life was marked by experimental treatment of LSD (legal until 1966) for medicinal purposes and several failed marriages, including one to Dyan Cannon, producing his only child, Jennifer. Rumors flew that he was homosexual because between marriages he lived with his close friend Randolph Scott, Jr. The two not only denied it but poked fun at the rumors.

Retiring in 1966, the former film star assumed a leadership role within the Faberge Cosmetics empire, making rare public appearances in 1970 to accept a special Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement, and Kennedy Center Honors in 1981. During the 1980s Grant undertook a tour of lectures, his one-man show affording audiences at small colleges and in remote towns an opportunity to discuss with him his life, career and craft, though he refused offers to do the same with talk show hosts or the media. On November 29th, 1986, Cary Grant suffered

a severe stroke as he prepared for his program called "*A Conversation with Cary Grant*", in which he would show clips from his films and answer audience questions, dying later from cerebral hemorrhage at a local hospital.

Cary Grant was and is still one of the most recognizable people in the world. In November 2004 Grant was named "The Greatest Movie Star of All Time" by *Premiere Magazine*. He was a person who seemed to have it all, but behind this "famous man" was a man, one who had a life just like everyone else. His life, a true "rags to riches" journey, is an inspiration. Despite all that happened to him, he made a success of his life.

Permission is granted to reprint this article provided the following paragraph is included in full:

Jim Mathis, CSP is an international Certified Speaking Professional, executive coach and trainer. To subscribe to his free personal and professional development newsletter, please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group, please call 888-688-0220, or visit his web site: www.jimmathis.com.