



Lucille: The Life of Lucille Ball

By Kathleen Brady



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Lucille: The Life of Lucille Ball is an entertaining, informative, scholarly, and fascinating biography of one of the most revered actresses in television history. Moving beyond the typical celebrity bio, author Kathleen Brady separates the actress from Lucy Ricardo, the antic, enduring character she created on *I Love Lucy*.

Brady is the only biographer to have spent extensive time in Jamestown, New York, Lucille Ball's hometown, where she interviewed Ball's childhood friends. Other interviews for the book included family, employees, Bob Hope, Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Milton Berle, Maureen O'Hara, Maxine Andrews of the Andrews Sisters, and the late chairman of CBS Bill Paley. Kathleen Brady's definitive biography presents a human Lucille Ball the fans have never known: the would-be showgirl in New York, fired almost as soon as she was hired because she was too flat-chested and mousy; her great love for Desi Arnaz, their tempestuous marriage, the day she thought she had killed him with a hammer, and the incident that ended their marriage; Lucille as head of Desilu Studios, overriding the advice of her most trusted executives and agreeing to green light the pilots of *Star Trek* and *Mission Impossible*; and her run-in with the House on Un-American Activities Committee and fears of being black-listed.

Brady reveals that Lucille Ball's life was a roller coaster, going from disaster to victory and triumph to tragedy. As a young woman, Ball believed that she had to work hard to make people like and appreciate her. As a star, she felt she had to work hard to maintain her popularity, and was also conscious that what her fans wanted from her was not herself, but Lucy Ricardo.

Of the first edition of this book, published by Hyperion in 1994, critic Molly Haskell wrote: "It's a beautiful portrait of someone with enormous talent as an entertainer and heartbreaking fragility as a woman. In giving Lucille Ball the serious appraisal she deserves, Kathleen Brady has really gotten behind the scenes and the cameras to provide an invaluable chronicle of several areas and eras of show business."

New to this edition of *Lucille* is an introductory essay focusing on the place of the character of Lucy Ricardo in the history of comedy, going back to the traditions of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* and forward to the end of the 20th century. In this essay, Lucille Ball is compared to other key female figures in comedy like Mabel Normand, Mae West, Frannie Brice, Gilda Radner, and Fran Drescher. As the author writes, "Lucille Ball was a revolutionary figure because Lucy Ricardo was the first female character to combine the knock-about physical comedy of vaudeville and music halls (and 15th century carnivals) while being

beautiful, feminine, and sweetly appealing." This edition also includes many new photographs from various sources.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Featured mainly in B-movies in the 1930s at RKO, leading lady in several MGM films in the '40s, Lucille Ball was never a "star," but she became the Queen of TV with *I Love Lucy*, first aired in 1951. In this evenhanded, serious look at America's beloved comedienne, Brady describes how, under Buster Keaton's tutelage, Ball developed her talents, and how her husband's womanizing led her to conceive the TV series "because it would keep Desi at home." Brady's biography is a narrative roller coaster veering from heartache to terror to triumph as she depicts Ball as actress, wife, mother and producer. The terror occurred during the McCarthy era, when she was investigated-then cleared-by HUAC. Desi Arnaz is shown as an astute businessman who, in tandem with his wife, became successful enough to buy the studio where their series was produced, Desilu Studios. Ball's outrageous behavior after her last series, *Here's Lucy*, ended in 1974 and her struggle against aging are recounted in doleful detail. Ball died in 1989 at the age of 78 but, as Brady remarks, "Lucy Ricardo" achieved eternal life. Fans will appreciate the profusion of *I Love Lucy* lore and trivia. Brady is co-chair of New York University's Biography Seminar. Photos.

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From Library Journal

More than 40 years after the show's premiere, *I Love Lucy* reruns on television still attract a devoted following. Because of this interest, more than half a dozen books have been published during the past 15 years about the show itself or about Ball and husband Desi Arnaz. As a result of Brady's focus on Ball, more time is spent with her lesser-known (but hardly undocumented) film career, and the *I Love Lucy* show doesn't appear until halfway through her narrative. Still, there's not a lot of difference between this book and Warren G. Harris's *Lucy & Desi* (LJ 9/1/91) or Coyne Steven Sanders and Tom Gilbert's *Desilu* (LJ 1/93). All three books present the same basic facts, and all are well researched and well written. Buy only according to demand.

John Smothers, Monmouth Cty. Lib., Manalapan, N.J.

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From [Booklist](#)

Lucille Ball was the quintessential hardworking, wisecracking gal who knocked herself out to get a break, caught fame's shooting star, and rode it for all it was worth. Meanwhile, she worked herself harder than a Horatio Alger hero, becoming an extremely successful businessperson who suffered the now-familiar distancing from her children, who later said they couldn't remember her ever just playing with them. The first TV megastar, Ball became so familiar that her nickname, Lucy, instantly brought her to mind. Her offscreen persona was the antithesis of the TV Lucy, though, and after a while, she wasn't even Lucy on TV anymore. Yet the show, the drive, and the grind kept going, for the money kept rolling in. Eventually, her enjoyment of it all evaporated as the toll of her stormy marriage to Desi Arnaz and the problems of her children, whose entertainment careers she tried to start and manage, mounted. Ball's life is a captivating, ultimately cautionary tale; its similarity to the plot of a showbiz potboiler makes it all the more appealing.

Mike Tribby

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kathi Adamo:

Do you have favorite book? When you have, what is your favorite's book? E-book is very important thing for us to know everything in the world. Each book has different aim or goal; it means that book has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They can be reading whatever they take because their hobby is definitely reading a book. Think about the person who don't like reading through a book? Sometime, man or woman feel need book once they found difficult problem or perhaps exercise. Well, probably you should have this Lucille: The Life of Lucille Ball.

Colleen Nguyen:

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Louis Cline:

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