



Katharine Hepburn

Barbara Leaming

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Hollywood has produced many stars, but no one compares to Katharine Hepburn. She is the last of the great ones: a celebrated actress, a brilliant personality, an original.

Barbara Leaming has discovered thousands of never-before-seen documents that finally illuminate the mystery of this enigmatic, fascinating woman. Based on letters by Hepburn, her friends, and her family, as well as interviews with Hepburn herself, Leaming's book is a family story that brings alive three generations of fearless women, personal and political crusaders who shaped the history of women in our century.

Katharine Hepburn Details

Date :

ISBN :

Author : Barbara Leaming

Format :

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Culture, Film, Biography Memoir

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From Reader Review Katharine Hepburn for online ebook

James Lew says

The first book I ever picked up about Katharine Hepburn, one of my favourite actress, and I love how interesting her family tree and history is, and what she has endured as a modern woman and one of the best actresses ever.

Alida says

A lot of information (as of page 77) of life in the late 1800's. Interesting!

Michelle Adcock says

I think I loved this one so much because I love Kate. I thought the author did a pretty good job.

Claudia says

I thought this was a wonderful, thorough book about the life and career of one of my favorite actresses, Katharine Hepburn. The author takes the reader on a journey through Kate's life, describing her home life, parents, siblings, and relationship with Spencer Tracy in a way I had not experienced before.

Scott E says

A more appropriate title would have been "The Hepburns" as this biography is roughly 50% about Katharine Hepburn, the rest being about her family. That wouldn't have been so off-putting if Leaming would have included more/any info about each of Hepburn's films (origin of material, negotiations of contracts, process of filming, public reception, etc...much of this info is included, but maybe a couple paragraphs at most for most of her films). I feel Leaming's account will appeal more to readers who are looking for a "sensationalized" telling of Hepburn and those in her life. Rich and deep detail is not a strong point of this book.

Kricket says

decent choice for anyone interested in hepburn's background. it was a little dry and a lot unbalanced. we spend eons on katharine's ancestors and parents, and some of the information was really important for understanding kh's life- but some wasn't. i was fascinated by all the work kh's mom & aunt did for woman's rights, and really enjoyed reading that part, which is why the book gets 3 stars-- but then leaming goes on to

write katharine's own life in terms of the men she was with, as if she was defined by john ford & spencer tracy.

holy crap did i get tired of hearing about spencer tracy. what an ass.

so we spend eons more on her life in terms of ford & tracy, and then they both die, so leaming rockets through kh's years after that in approximately two pages, saying that katharine kept busy in her old age with many wonderful projects, none of which are described. the book should have been called "Katharine Hepburn's Family & The Men In Her Life"-- it really doesn't have a whole lot to do with her.

Linda says

Interesting facts about Katherine Hepburn's family history, her acting career, and her romantic relationships. I always admired her independent personality & enjoyed the book very much.

Donna says

A really interesting, informative and well-researched biography of Katharine Hepburn. A good read.

Karen says

I loved this book. Hepburn is the ultimate blue blood East coast icon of all time.

Helaine says

I had always admired Hepburn as a woman who took control of her career in Hollywood where so many woman seemed to be steam-rolled into studio dictated lives. However, the thesis of this biography is a dark side of the Hepburn family and supposedly the effect of that on Kate. I would have to read other biographers to see if there is agreement on this. Leaming's picture of Kate certainly contrasts with Lauren Bacall's picture of her in Bacall's biography of 1978.

Kathy says

What an odd family -- so many suicides and nervous conditions. Hepburn was beautiful but her life wasn't. Spencer Tracy wasn't such a nice guy either. Interesting story
Excellent narration.

Dawn says

I have read a good many books about Katharine Hepburn, including her 2 autobiographies. But I was always left with a yearning to understand her more, and the books left so many unexplained personality changes, her character I saw as split in 2, the ultra independent force vs the codependent, lap rug to the men in her life. Barbara Leaming has finally put all the pieces together that make up the pie of this fantastic actress. Starting with both sets of grandparents and families, thru the death of her brother Tom when she was 14, adding the strength and idiosyncrasies of her mother and aunt, the overpowering will and cold father, thru her many male companions, boyfriends, husbands to other women, to even her own brothers, a clear and defined picture of this woman emerges, human, faulty, needy, strong and vibrant, healthy, obstinate, feminine, and yet wanting to be a boy so desperately as well. One imagines what Katharine Hepburn would be like in this day and age of same sex marriages and sex operations, and more therapists recognizing the mixed gender patterns of this woman. Her own demons were to fight for rights for women, normally reserved for men, to dress like a man, and surround herself with them. That doesn't make her a lesbian, but during the years involved only the men had the freedom to express themselves and carry themselves fully as free humans. So she emulated them. On the other hand, her strong and smart mother was the President of the Ladies Suffrage group of the state of CT, no small chore. BUT, Mrs. Hepburn had to be home by 4pm to serve the daily tea with husband and children. Her role as a woman in those days could be stretched only so far, as far as her husband was concerned. All through her life Kate saw her father, cold and emotionless, dictate the ways of the home, and her mother, drop her strength and independence and become a dutiful wife and woman. Kate never got her father's approval for her life, her abilities, nor did he ever express love and admiration for her work. Instead, she always kowtowed to him in most matters, hiding within herself the blame she felt for her brother's death, and wanting desperately to make it up for him by being both her brother and herself simultaneously. One main reason this book is so important, is that Kate's family, starting with her grandparents thru her own parents, concealed, and covered up the truths of the deaths that made such an impact on this family, leaving the living to live with no answers, no questions answered, and absolute silence, rarely mentioning the dead's name again. Whoosh! Under the rug, and forget. Yet each death created a heavy impact upon the living, and would have given Freud a lifetime to figure out! Barbara Leaming researched the family members relentlessly, unearthing secrets and hidden feelings, and generational dynamics unknown prior, and this information was requested by the remaining Hepburn children, in their 80s+ at that time. The newest generations will not be burdened with these secrets, nor dwell heavily upon them, as most of the secrets were of the times, society disfavoring suicide as a family defect. Well, the Hepburns had 5, all male, for the past 3 generations.

Upon reading this litany of sorrow and pain, I can understand Kate better, and quite honestly, feel sorry for her, as her character(s) were formed in her childhood, along with her needs, suppression of feelings, and her need for male domination and expression of love. If only she had sought out a psychiatrist to understand what drove her so intently into life, her loves, and her work. She might have found herself before it was too late.

I recommend this book highly, not just because of the juicy gossip, but the enjoyment and energy that Kate and her family of eccentrics display thru this book.

One last point, after reading the many reviews, I do have to say that the title of this book is misleading. I read the jacket ahead of time so that I knew it was about explaining KH by diving into the family history, and was anxious to read this. But maybe the title should have been more designed to indicate that this was a Hepburn/Houghton family history, leading into the psychology of KH, woman and actress.

Rena Sherwood says

Enjoyable, engrossing and incredibly thorough biography of not just Katherine Hepburn, but the entire Hepburn clan. Get ready to read a hundred pages or so before Katherine is even born. Real eye-opening stuff about her relationship with Spencer Tracy. Despite some harsh criticism of this book by some movie fans, this is an affectionate portrait of an American original.

Janet Ott says

I was 200 pages in and Kate was only 8. I'm now in her years at Bryn Mawr. She just swam naked in the fountain. Gotta love Kate! Hard to believe that in her first two years she was basically a wallflower. But then, she had discovered her brother's body after he hung himself only a year before going. That would throw anyone. And her family went completely silent about it afterward, forcing Kate to suppress her feelings about it. No wonder she can find her depth of feeling so well on film.

Cindi says

Good book - long read. Lots of sad history.
