

Audrey Hepburn on Life under Nazi Occupation

On May 4th, 1945, future British actress and Hollywood icon Audrey Hepburn celebrated her 16th birthday.

Although a girl's 16th birthday is often a special occasion, turning 16 was even more special for Hepburn, for the day also marked the liberation of the Nazi-occupied Netherlands—the Nazi-occupied Netherlands under which Hepburn had lived since 1939.

The child of divorce, Audrey had been removed from England to the Netherlands by her mother in hopes that the latter country would remain neutral. When those hopes were dashed by the Nazi invasion, Audrey and her mother joined in the hardships of the country, nearly starving, but doing their best to aid the Dutch Resistance where they could.

As recorded in a [biography by Barry Paris](#), Hepburn later recounted her remembrances of living under Nazi rule:

“I'd go to the station with my mother to take a train and I'd see cattle trucks filled with Jews ... families with little children, with babies, herded into meat wagons – trains of big wooden vans with just a little slat open at the top and all those faces peering out. On the platform, soldiers herding more Jewish families with their poor little bundles and small children. They would separate them, saying 'The men go there and the women go there.' Then they would take the babies and put them in another van. We did not yet know that they were going to their death. We'd been told they were going to be taken to special camps. It was very hard to understand because I was eleven or so. I tell you, all the nightmares I've ever had are mingled with that.”

Hepburn went on to say:

“We saw young men put against the wall and shot, and they’d close the street and then open it and you could pass by again... Don’t discount anything awful you hear or read about the Nazis. It’s worse than you could ever imagine.”