

EXCLUSIVE FAMILY CIRCLE INTERVIEW BY GLENN PLASKIN

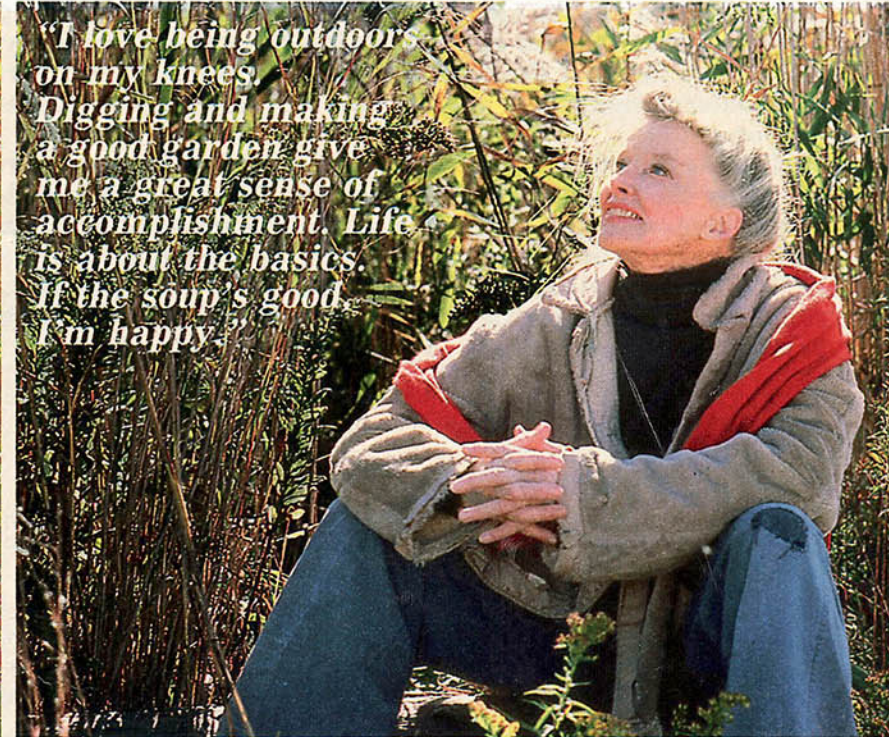
# "I'M BORED WITH THE GREAT KATHARINE HEPBURN!"



*"I never get lonely. You're always going to be lonely and depressed if you think only about how you're feeling, how you look, how to color your hair. That's because the self is a dead end, ultimately boring. If you concentrate on that, God help you."*



*"I love being outdoors on my knees. Digging and making a good garden give me a great sense of accomplishment. Life is about the basics. If the soup's good, I'm happy."*



**T**he fire in the sitting room is crackling, because "Madame," as she is nicknamed by one lifelong friend, has just gotten down on her hands and knees to stoke it herself. With granny glasses perched on the tip of her nose and her hair wound into a frazzled bun, Katharine Hepburn now sits in her favorite chair, a black leather recliner. On her lap she balances a tray that contains a hearty lunch: a melted ham-and-cheese sandwich, zucchini soup (homemade from her own recipe; see page 116) and a giant wedge of chocolate cake.

The telephone beside her rings. "Can't talk," she barks into the receiver and hangs up mischievously, never having asked who the caller was. Clearly, age hasn't tamed Hepburn's notorious sassiness. At 77, she is as audacious and opinionated as ever. "Silence," she muses, pausing for dramatic effect, "is the great joy."

Content to live a quiet life, Hepburn has been settled in the same grayish-white town house on

*Freelance writer Glenn Plaskin frequently interviews celebrities. His last article for FAMILY CIRCLE was on Lena Horne.*

Manhattan's East Side for the past 55 years. For company "Madame" has her driver, her housekeeper and Phyllis Wilbourn, her secretary of 32 years.

The actress rules her roost with absolute authority. "There's no greater luxury," she declares, "than doing what you want, when you want to do it."

So you could recommend living alone—"as the most perfect state imaginable," she finishes my sentence with delight. "I'm one of six children, and it was my ambition as a young girl to find a moment to be alone—which usually wound up at 5 o'clock in the morning. So all my life I've made the terrible sacrifice of going to bed at 8 and getting up at 5."

But surely the independent Hepburn must feel lonely at times?

"Nope," she insists, shaking her head. "The human animal naturally likes company. And I think I would be lonely if I were forced to be alone all the time. But I have quite a number of friends over for tea, and my phone doesn't stop ringing. And I live alone in the greatest luxury. I've got a driver, delicious food, you name it. So

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lips, but I didn't have enough sense to open them.

We returned to the party, and after Rosie had thrown her bouquet into my upraised arms, Jerry took her away to live in Cedar Rapids. Mama and I returned to the apartment on Sheffield Avenue.

Early in November, Mama finally received news of Papa from a Polish man who had been with Papa when he died in one of the German work camps on the Eastern front. The man brought Mama an old snapshot of our family, which my father had somehow managed to keep hold of all those years, but it was so badly creased and smudged that no one was identifiable. Mama and I grieved together.

That night I slept outside on the mattress that still lay on the porch, but in the morning when I awoke, an unexpected stillness hung over the city. Below, only a prowling cat nudged the garbage cans underneath the stoop. Silence had settled on Sheffield Avenue and on the whole world, it seemed.

**A**s I lay there, I thought about all the recent changes in my life: how the war was finally over and the baseball season too; how Rosie was married and so quickly gone from our lives; how I would never again be my father's little girl.

I listened for the clanging of the El or the rumble of the tracks on Clark Street, but at that hour, even those sounds had stilled, and I knew the Aragon Ballroom also would be silent. The musicians had put away their instruments and started home.

I can dance with you now, I thought. I can dance the fox-trot with you now. But the sailors too had gone. The dance had ended.

In the hush of early dawn, I rose and crawled back through the window, pulling in my mattress and blanket behind me. Quietly lowering the window, I turned the latch to lock it in place and I made my way into the bedroom I had shared with Rosie during the winter months. The room was empty, but the scent of her face powder and perfume hung in the air and gave me comfort.

I slid under the covers of Rosie's bed. Burying my face in her pillow, I inhaled deeply the odors of a summer garden and waited for my grown-up life to begin. ■

you can't judge by me. I'm not exactly the average person who comes home and has to start cooking."

Putting aside her lunch tray and getting to her feet, the actress strides around the room, showing off like an ingenuous kid. She is proud that she has regained full use of her foot after nearly losing it three years ago, when she accidentally drove her car into a telephone pole on the way to Fenwick, her family's summer home in Connecticut.

"I don't have any limp because of my strength of character," she teases.

Despite bouts with other ailments from time to time, Hepburn maintains, "I don't become down, even when I'm sick. I do feel disgusted when I have to crawl up three flights of stairs—it's not as much fun as running up. But I'm not depressed. Look, I've still got my foot, for God's sake, and I've had 50-odd years of a successful career. If I complain, I should be hit over the head, or have it examined."

*How are you feeling these days?*

"Just fine, thank you," she snaps. Case closed.

*How is your work going?*

"My work always goes well—and if it didn't, I wouldn't tell you."

*That's a beautiful Navaho rug.*

"How much will you give me?"

*How about tea next week?*

"I'll probably be dead by tomorrow, but call me anyway. Now pass the peanuts," she orders briskly, then points to a huge orchid next to the fireplace.

"Sent to me by Calvin Klein because he thinks I'm such a snappy dresser."

She jokes at the "absurdity" of the recent Lifetime Achievement Award she received from the Council of Fashion Designers of America. Today she is wearing her "uniform"—beige sneakers, well-worn black pants, a white turtleneck beneath a man's shirt ("My brother gave it to me—seven bucks!") and a red sweater draped around her shoulders. Pointing proudly to one of her favorite "raggies," a sheepskin jacket riddled with holes, she remarks, "I get paid for dressing up. Otherwise, forget it."

Her entrenched attitudes and steely independence come from the grounding she received as a child. "I hope I'm not full of self-esteem [her word for

conceit], but I never had any problems with self-confidence. I was trained to speak up and never be afraid. That's because I was brought up by parents who made sure we were a very strong family. They spent time with us and cared about the plight of the underdog."

Indeed, the Hepburns were mavericks in their day. When "Kathy" was a girl, her father, urologist Thomas Hepburn, campaigned to educate the public about birth control, venereal disease and the need for legalized abortion—all causes his daughter would later support. Her mother, Katharine Houghton, demonstrated for women's suffrage and the rights of blacks. No topic of discussion was forbidden. And, most important, Hepburn says, "Mother and Dad were always home at teatime" to hear what she, her three brothers and two sisters had on their minds.

"I've always considered myself the product of parents who were fortunate enough to live in an era when household help was affordable. Nowadays, women are in a desperate situation. Today's idiotic rents and prices force women to work, even when they don't want to. That makes life hard on the kids, doesn't it? When children have to open the door themselves, naturally they put on those machines [Walkmans] because they haven't developed any inner resources. The absolute attention my parents gave me made me believe I could do anything."

Today, she spends most weekends with her family in Connecticut. "We're all still close," she reports. She shies away from discussing "intimate matters," though it's well known that she wasn't always so independent, or alone. In 1928, she married Philadelphia insurance broker and socialite Ludlow Ogden Smith, but they separated just two months after their honeymoon and divorced in 1934. Seven years later, Hepburn met the man who would change her life: actor Spencer Tracy, who was separated from, but remained married to, Louise Treadwell.

Beginning with their first film together, 1942's *Woman of the Year*, Tracy and Hepburn entered into a 25-year professional collaboration

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and romance. On the screen they were the ideal match, but their real-life relationship was not so simple. The two stayed close until Tracy's death in 1967, with Hepburn at his side during his bouts with alcohol.

Nineteen years after Tracy's death, Hepburn is more openly emotional about her loss. Last winter, during a television tribute to the late actor, Hepburn read aloud a heart-wrenching letter she wrote to Tracy for the program, asking why he had turned to alcohol: "Why the escape hatch? Why? I can't hear you..." she finished, tears filling her eyes.

**I**f Hepburn has any private regrets about her personal life, she doesn't let on. "Taking certain trails in life fixes it so that you can't take others," she explains.

"A husband would not have been compatible for me. Nowadays people want everything—career, marriage, children. The question is, how happy are they? It seems to me that the world is rapidly becoming a very peculiar place. People are just glutted with desire. By the time they're done

with work, videocassettes, movies, TV, dance class, money, sex—they're ready for the psychiatrist."

Hepburn then suggests her foolproof method for keeping the blues at bay (see "How Kate Stays Great," page 116): "Just stay busy. Life is about the basics, and I think people are going back to the old ways of baking, making, cooking and growing their own.

"As for me," she adds, "I've *never* had any problem finding something to do, and I'm never bored." A voracious reader and an avid bicyclist, she also plays golf and tennis, attends matinees, hosts tea for friends each afternoon and handwrites much of her own correspondence.

"Finding life interesting—*not yourself*—is essential," she says, then announces, "I'm bored with 'The Great Katharine Hepburn.' You're always going to be lonely and depressed if you think about how you're feeling, how you look and where you're going. That's because the self is a dead end, ultimately boring. If you concentrate on that, God help you."

*Have you ever considered retiring from show business?*

"That would be retiring from life," she huffs. Indeed, she recently starred in a TV movie called *Mrs. Delafield Wants to Marry* and is now pondering the next script. Looking back on a 50-film career that has earned her four Oscars and eight nominations—more than any other performer in Hollywood history—Hepburn says she has "tall standards" to uphold. She receives many offers for gloomy roles in nursing homes, all of which she rejects. "Terrifying," she says.

To be clear, it is the idea of a nursing home, not death, that frightens her. "Death must be a great relief—just sleep," she says matter-of-factly. "I don't believe in shocking people, but if I got sick and was no longer of any use to myself or anyone else, I would find a way of ending it. Euthanasia should be legalized in this country. When my car runs out of gas and is finally worn out, it will fall apart. Until then, my business is to do the best I can, according to my capacities."

Hepburn admits that good fortune has made life easier for her than most. "I've been wildly lucky and hopelessly  
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**KATHARINE HEPBURN (FROM P. 115)**

spoiled, while the average person has problems that are often smothering." She concludes, "The trick is keeping up your spirit, no matter what your luck. I really believe there are happy people and unhappy people, don't you? I think it has to do with genetics. I like to eat, sleep, walk, swim, play tennis. I *like* things. So if the soup's good—I'm happy." □

**HOW KATE STAYS GREAT**

"I never get depressed," Hepburn claims. How come? "Because it's perfectly clear to me what we're supposed to do on this planet," she says. "Live for others."

Here, she offers some simple tips for fighting the blues:

- Play with your children, listen to them, take them to museums.
- Cook something delicious ("Try my Zucchini Soup recipe").
- Run down the block. Pick up the trash on the street.
- Get more sleep.
- Learn how to garden.
- Polish the silver. Clean.
- Learn a language, or how to paint.
- Write in a journal.
- Tell your husband he's great; make him want to tell you the same.
- Throw yourself in the ocean or a tub of cold water.
- Exercise. Do *anything* but think about yourself. ■

**HEPBURN'S ZUCCHINI SOUP**

Makes 6 servings at 50¢ each.

Nutrient Value Per Serving: 123 calories, 5 gm. protein, 9 gm. fat, 7 gm. carbohydrate, 647 mg. sodium, 21 mg. cholesterol.

- 1/4 cup (1/2 stick) butter**
- 2 pounds small zucchini, thinly sliced**
- 5 tablespoons finely chopped shallots (about 3)**
- 4 cups chicken broth**
- 1 1/2 teaspoons curry powder**
- 1/8 teaspoon salt**
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- Garnish:**
- 1/3 cup croutons, if serving hot, OR:**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives, if serving cold**

- 1.** Melt butter in large skillet. Add zucchini and shallots; cover and cook 10 to 15 minutes, stirring often, until zucchini is soft but not browned.
- 2.** Combine half of the zucchini mixture, 2 cups of the chicken broth, the curry powder, salt and cayenne in food processor or blender. Purée. Pour into saucepan if serving hot, or into large bowl, if serving cold.
- 3.** Repeat puréeing with remaining ingredients. Combine batches.
- 4.** If serving hot, heat soup in saucepan and garnish with croutons. If serving cold, chill 2 hours; garnish with chives.