

Lucy: The Early Years - A Chronology of Lucille Ball's Early Life - James Sheridan

September 25, 1887 - Henry Durrell Ball is born to Jasper and Nellie Durrell Ball.

September 21, 1892 - Desirée Eveline Hunt ("DeDe") is born to Frederick Charles and Flora Belle Emeline Hunt.

June 1, 1907 - *Jamestown Evening Journal (JEJ)*- "J.C. Ball and Henry Ball left today for Chicago. After spending a short time there they will go to Butte, Montana, where they will engage in telephone work."

Henry settled in at 120 W. Park Ave. Anaconda, Montana and worked as a lineman for the Montana Independent Telephone Company.

September 1, 1910 - Henry Ball marries Desirée Hunt. They were married at the bride's parents' home, 38 Hall Avenue, Jamestown. He had returned to Jamestown the previous fall. Their engagement was announced on August 25. The plan is for them to return to Anaconda, Montana.

It's unclear if they actually did go to Montana. Lucy claimed she was conceived there. However, a newspaper article from November 28, 1910 lists DeDe among the singers in a quartet at their local Jamestown church. She would have been a few weeks pregnant. It's always been said that DeDe traveled back to Jamestown so her mother could deliver her baby. Lucy implied that her mother made this trip by herself with her father still in Montana when she was born. This would be untrue. They were still in Jamestown in May 1911.

May 22, 1911 - *JEJ* "While working on a telephone pole at Clark's Corners, near Poland Center, Monday afternoon [May 22], Henry Ball of Stewart avenue, in this city, slipped and fell to the ground. One of his climbing spurs gashed his leg badly, making a cut fully seven inches long and about an inch deep. He was brought to his home here and given necessary surgical attention and is feeling much improved today."

August 6, 1911 - Lucille Desirée Ball is born on Sunday, August 6, 1911 to Henry Durrell and Desirée Eveline Hunt Ball. She is born at 5:00 in the afternoon at the home of her maternal grandparents at 123 Stewart Avenue in Jamestown.

It has always been claimed that Lucy was whisked back to Montana shortly after she was born. However, it looks like she spent her first year (at least 14 months) in Jamestown.

From 1911-1912 Jamestown Directory: Ball, Henry D. (Desiree E.), chauffeur, 123 Stewart Ave.

Hunt, Fred C. (Flora B.), woodturner, 123 Stewart Ave.

August 17, 1912 - *JEJ* “Charles Henry Orcutt of Villenova and Miss Mable Bell Moseler of South Dayton were quietly married at the home of the bridegroom's uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Hunt. 123 Stewart avenue, Saturday evening at 8 o'clock. The attendants were Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. Ball of Jamestown and the officiating clergyman was Rev. Charles D. Reed, pastor of Calvary Baptist church.”

October 27, 1912 - *Anaconda Standard* - “Henry Ball of Jamestown, N.Y. has taken a position with the Independent Telephone Company and will permanently locate here. Mrs. Ball and daughter will follow soon.”

August 28, 1913 - *JEJ* Jamestown - “Mrs. Edwin Johnson has been entertaining her sister Mrs. Henry D. Ball and daughter Lucille of Montana.” (Mrs. Johnson was actually Henry Ball’s sister)

The timeline has always had the Balls moving straight from Anaconda, Montana to Wyandotte, Michigan. However, from March to June 1914, they briefly settled in Charlotte Center, New York, about 15 miles from Jamestown (with possibly a stop in Jamestown before). Note that Lucy’s name is spelled “Lucile” in all these early Jamestown mentions.

March 12, 1914 - *JEJ* - In town: “Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. Ball and daughter Lucile of Anaconda, Montana.”

April 11, 1914 - *JEJ* Charlotte Center - “Henry Ball has moved his family here from Jamestown to F.H. Hooker’s house and will work for Mr. Hooker.” “Mrs. Dr. Hunt of Jamestown is spending some time at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Henry Ball. Dr. Hunt spent Saturday night and Sunday at the same place.”

Agriculturist Fred H. Hooker and his wife Carrie were prominent citizens in Chautauqua County.

May 11, 1914 - *JEJ* “Dr. and Mrs. Hunt and daughter of Jamestown were Sunday guests of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ball.”

June 19, 1914 - *JEJ* “Henry Ball and family have moved to Detroit.”

The Ball family actually moved to neighboring Wyandotte, Michigan, where Henry worked at the Michigan Bell Company. They settled at 126 Biddle Avenue South. Lucille’s earliest memories came from this house, including having hot tea accidentally spilled on her. Lucy and DeDe visited the house more than 30 years later, when Lucy was touring in *Dream Girl*, and Lucy was able to recall everything about the house.

Late January/February 1915 - Henry Ball contracts typhoid fever, thought to be the result of eating ice cream at a local shop. With her husband ill, a pregnant DeDe would tie Lucille to a clothesline, so she couldn't run away. Whenever someone passed by, Lucille, anxious to escape her awkward confinement, would pretend that she had gotten caught in the clothesline accidentally and ask them to help her get loose. This only added to DeDe's stress, as she was then forced to search the neighborhood for her daughter. During this same period, three-year-old Lucille Ball got her first opportunity to perform for a crowd when DeDe asked Mr. Flower, the neighborhood grocer, to keep an eye on her daughter. Lucy acted out little routines she had learned from her parents and would frequently be rewarded with pennies or candy from those shopping in the grocery store.

February 28, 1915 - Henry Ball dies in their Wyandotte home.

JEJ - "A letter from Wyandotte, Mich., to The Journal states that Henry D. Ball; of Wyandotte, Mich., formerly of this city, died at his home Sunday morning, at the age of 28 years from typhoid fever, being a sufferer for four weeks. He was a young man of good habits and a most lovable father. He leaves besides the widow, Mrs. Desiree Hunt Ball, a daughter, Miss Lucile D. Ball; parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Ball; sisters, Mrs. Mable Johnson of Busti, Mrs. Maude Shipman of Hartfield, N.Y., and Mrs. Blanche Finley, and a brother, F. C. Ball of Orlando, Fla. The remains will be brought to this city for burial, arriving Wednesday and the funeral will be held at the grave in Lake View cemetery Thursday morning at 10:30 o'clock."

March 3, 1915 - At 5:00pm, Lucille, DeDe, and Harry Ball (Henry's first cousin) arrive in Jamestown by train with Henry's body.

March 4, 1915 - Henry Ball's funeral. *JEJ* - "The funeral of Henry D. Ball, who died at Wyandotte, Mich, a few days ago, was held from the undertaking parlors of E. O. Partridge. 21 West Second street, this morning at 10:30 o'clock, Rev. Frank P. Stoddard of Busti officiating. The bearers were Fred C. Hunt, Edward Johnson. Robert Shipman and Harry Ball. There was a large attendance and the many floral tributes were pieces from the Calvary Baptist church of this city and the Michigan State Telephone company of Wyandotte, Mich. Those present from away were Harry Ball of Detroit, Mich.; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shipman of Hartfield and F.C. Ball of Orlando, Fla. The interment was in Lake View cemetery. Mr. Ball was a son of Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Ball and resided in this city until about three years ago, when he went to Anaconda. Mont., with his brother, F. C. Ball to construct telephone lines in that city. Last June he went to Wyandotte and took charge of construction for the Michigan State Telephone company. He is survived by his wife, who was Miss Desiree Hunt, daughter of Mr, and Mrs. Fred Hunt of this city; one daughter, Lucile; his parents, Mr. and Mrs. J C. Ball: three sisters and one brother, Mrs. Maude Shipman of Dewittville, Mrs. Mabel Johnson of Jamestown and Mrs. Blanche Finley and F. C. Ball of Orlando, Fla. Harry L. Ball of Detroit, came with Mrs. Ball and her mother, Mrs. F. C.

Hunt, who was with him during his sickness, arriving here Wednesday night with Mr. Ball's remains.”

Love, Lucy - “DeDe says I showed very little emotion until the funeral service. As they lowered his coffin into the ground and began filling in his grave, she says, "I let out a bloodcurdling scream she'll never forget and wouldn't stop until she carried me away.”

May 17, 1915 - “Mrs. Henry D. Ball and daughter Lucille of Jamestown recently spent a few days visiting at Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shipman's.” (This is Wooglin, NY - about 20 miles from Jamestown.) Also - “Clinton Ball and family have gone to Montana after spending a couple of months at Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shipman's. Mr. Ball's mother accompanied them as far as Westfield.”

Lucy would have little contact with most of the Ball relatives. They did remain close to the family of Henry's brother Frank.

June 1, 1915 (New York State census) - DeDe and Lucille are living with Fred, Flora Belle, and Lola in Jamestown on Buffalo Street Extension.

July 17, 1915 - Brother Fred Henry Ball is born at the Buffalo Street house.

October 5, 1915 - “The house with four lots where the late Matthew Wright lived was recently sold by Frederick P. Hall to Fred Hunt of Buffalo street, Jamestown. Mr. Hunt will soon move his family to his new home on 8th street.”

It is likely the family lived in the house on 8th Street as renters until Fred Hunt officially purchased the house on February 1, 1920.

Christmas 1916 - From 1972 article - Lucy: "There are a lot of gifts I've received in my lifetime that I value - like precious stones, bracelets, watches, awards, and success, if you can call it that. But there's one gift that stands out: It is a beautifully hand-carved doll bed, table and chair set my grandfather gave me for Christmas when I was only five. My grandmother had hand-sewn a bedspread to go with it, and all new clothes for my doll. Grandpa was a woodcarver - an art that is almost extinct today. You just don't see beautiful work like that anymore. I treasure that gift more than I do anything else."

October 22, 1917 - Lucy's aunt, Lola Hunt, marries George Mandicos. Lucy lives with them for a time at 400 West 8th Street in Jamestown.

Greek born George inspired Lucy's love of the dark, handsome type like Desi and Johnny DeVita. Lola operated a beauty shop and Lucy had a lifelong love of hairstyling as a result.

October 27, 1917 - DeDe, suffering from depression, goes out to California for a period of time. The local newspaper says she's going out for "the winter." Lucy stays with newlyweds Lola and George.

September 17, 1918 - DeDe marries Edward Peterson, who she met working at Weber-Knapp, a Jamestown factory. At Weber-Knapp, DeDe was a plater and Ed was a metal polisher. Lucy and Fred were not at the wedding.

From handwritten notes by Lucy: "My mother's Wedding Day- My stepfather Ed Peterson- so tall and ugly handsome- he looked like the King of Sweden- I decided that many years later. I was not at the wedding. I don't even know where they were married- I never thought to ask- but after the wedding they came to my Aunt Lola's where I was living and my brother Fred and I were waiting eagerly to kiss them and see their happy faces. I remember asking Ed if we should call him Daddy-He said no. His answer was abrupt and startling- that's why I remember- I guess DeDe so much wanted a Daddy."

Lucy on *The John Davidson Show, 1982* - "My stepfather happened to be a very nice man. A very learned man. A well read man. He helped me in many, many ways because I didn't get enough education."

May 12, 1919 - Cleo Mandicos, daughter of Lola and George, is born.

DeDe and Ed Peterson move to Detroit, where Fred finds work in a factory. Thinking that DeDe's parents could not handle two children by themselves, the Petersons decided that younger brother Fred should stay with the Hunts while Lucille would be entrusted in the care of Ed's parents, Charles and Sophia Peterson. Lucy lived with them at 20 Twelfth Street in Jamestown. Lucy estimated that she lived with the Petersons for two and a half years, but said it felt like six or eight. Grandma Peterson was a devout Christian who tried to rid the house of any sense of enjoyment. Lucy did credit her strong work ethic to Grandma Peterson. She also attributed her love of gardening and her pastime of crocheting to her. Lucy later said it wasn't until she had children of her own did she realize how the negative comments she made about her childhood with Petersons affected DeDe.

Lucy is not listed in the 1920 census as living with the Petersons nor the Hunts. Perhaps she was somehow overlooked? It's not clear exactly how long she lived with the Petersons for. She likely lived with them until early 1922. As time went on, Lucy would often stay with the Hunts in Celoron on weekends and then on a more steady basis until she was permanently back living with them.

December 27, 1920 - *JEJ* - "J. Edward Peterson of Detroit is spending a few days with his wife at Celoron and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Peterson, Twelfth Street."

December 25, 1921 - Christmas exercises of the Sunday school of Holy Trinity English Lutheran Church. Recitation: Weave a Holly Wreath by Lucille Ball. This was the Petersons' church, so she was presumably still living with them.

1922 - In the city directory, DeDe and Ed are listed as living with Fred and Flora Belle Hunt on 8th Street.

April 21, 1922 - *JEJ* - "Lucile Ball and brother Fred are ill with measles." She is definitely living in Celoron with the Hunts by this time.

July 1, 1922 - At 9:30pm, Lucille's maternal grandmother, Flora Belle Hunt, dies at home at the age of 55 after a long bout with uterine cancer. Lola and Cleo Mandicos, who were living in Michigan, return to help Flora during her illness. George Mandicos joins them for Flora's funeral. The Mandicoses moved to Michigan prior to January 1920. They lived in Michigan until around 1926 when Lola separated from George. The funeral was held at the Celoron house, but the kids were not allowed to attend. Lucy, Fred, and Cleo tearfully followed the procession.

After Flora Belle's death, all the adults in the household worked during the day. DeDe sold hats at the Marcus Company in Jamestown and Lucy took care of the house. The kids would hold off on their chores until they saw DeDe get off the streetcar and start to walk down the street and then they would rush to get everything done before DeDe walked in the door.

Summer 1922 ('21?) - From *The Real Story of Lucille Ball* - "I got my first job when I was ten; I spent the summer leading a blind man around while both of us sold soap."

1922: Merv Griffin Interview 1980 - What were you doing at 11 years old? "I caught a little boy named Theodore and kissed him in the back of a bakery truck."

May 11, 1923 - Performed a number with the YWCA Junior Intermediates aesthetic dancing and gymnastics class.

September 25, 1924 - "A one act play. *Hannah Gives Notice*, will also be given at the same time [October 1] by the following girls of the seventh and eighth grades; Alice and Katherine Osborne, Lucile Ball and Pauline Lopus." Lucy plays Aunt Julia.

Lucy had been bitten by the show business bug. Lucy always said seeing monologist Julius Tannen perform inspired her to pursue a career in show business. "I'll never forget that. For the

first time I had seen an attentive audience, you know? He was magic... just this voice and this magnificent... man entralling you with his stories... his intonations... which I never, never forgot! It changed my life. I knew it was a very serious, wonderful thing to be able to make people laugh and/or cry, to be able to play on their emotions.” (*The Lucille Ball Story*)

She didn't recall how old she was - she guessed somewhere between eleven and thirteen. Lucy said she saw Tannen perform at Celoron High School. The only newspaper mention of Tannen appearing in the area was on November 8, 1921 as part of the revue *Fads and Fancies of 1921* at Shea's Opera House (now The Lucille Ball Little Theatre). It's possible Tannen did perform at Celoron High and it was not heavily publicized.

July 7, 1925 - The Lakewood Road home bureau unit held its annual picnic at Allen Park. In the afternoon, two one-act plays were presented by the Misses Alice Osborne, Pauline Lopus, Lucille Ball, and Catherine Osborne.

August 22, 1925 - Watson Manufacturing Company annual picnic at Midway park. Lucy wins second place for fifty yard dash for girls 12 to 18 years. Prize: framed motto.

September 30, 1925 - Lucy is elected patrol leader 1 for Troop 14 of the Celoron Girl Scouts. Fellow scouts included Pauline Lopus, Helen Erickson, and Alice Osborne.

November 5, 1925 - The freshman class of Celoron High puts on an evening of entertainment, including a one-act play, *Jerry*. Lucy plays Avis, the title character's sister.

February 15, 1926 - Dr. Carro C. Croff, noted speaker from the New York state department, gave a speech on social hygiene to the members of the Celoron Parent Teacher association. DeDe served as chairwoman. DeDe accompanied Mrs. Roy Vaness' singing of the New York State Mother's Song. Lucille gave an appropriate reading and then followed the ceremony of the lighting of the 29 candles on the birthday cake in recognition of Founder's day.

May 20-21, 1926 - The senior class of Celoron High School presents the play *Little Miss Jack* in the school. Lucy plays Maggie, a Girl of the Bowery.

Summer 1926 - Lucy begins her relationship with Johnny DeVita. She works at a hamburger stand at Celoron Park.

Fall 1926 - Lucy stars as the lead in her class' production of *Charley's Aunt*. Lucy organized the whole show and the money they raised went to a class party. Lucy utilized the furniture from their own home for the show.

From Pauline Lopus (her best friend and next-door neighbor) in *TV Radio Mirror* - "The only thing Lucille never seemed to care about was school. She could have been a very good student. But besides gym - basketball, especially - there was just something about the routine that irked her. She was so anxious to go out and do things. So a couple of times she did! Just like that! Would run away! Once, I remember she took her little cousin Cleo with her - for company. Cleo was all of five at the time. They ended up in Newcastle, Pennsylvania, where Lucille figured they'd gone far enough and phoned her mother and asked her to please come pick them up." ... "She was the first girl in town to bob her hair. In fact, she got me to go along and have mine cut, too!"... "She was the first to own a fur coat--at age 15! She was a sophomore at Celoron High and suddenly decided to quit school. The coat--raccoon, very much the thing at the time--was a bribe from DeDe, her mother, to get her to change her mind. Which Lucille did...for a while at least. Of course, there were people who resented her--her dreams, her drive. They'd whisper about Lucille. Outwardly, she'd pretend not to hear or care. But sometimes when we were alone, she'd turn a bit sad and ask me, 'Why do people jump to conclusions like that, Sassafrassa?' That was the nickname she gave me when she found that my father and I used to go to a nearby Indian reservation to gather sassafras bark!"

October 20, 1926 - The sophomore class of Celoron High (Class of '29), "which has always prided itself on its originality," presented unique entertainment. Lucille read a story.

October 27, 1926 - The junior class entertained at the morning chapel exercises and presented a one-act Halloween play in four scenes, entitled *The Haunted Gate*. Lucille played Aunt Mathilda. On October 29, the class gave a Halloween party and repeated the play.

November 13, 1926 - The junior class performed a one act play (likely *The Haunted Gate*) as part of the entertainment for a party for 60 members of the North East Odd Fellows and Rebakahs in Lakewood.

November 22, 1926 - Lucy served as a waitress for the Celoron Hose Company's annual oyster dinner. The proceeds went to the village's children's Christmas festival.

December 10, 1926 - The Celoron girls basketball team overwhelmed the Sugar Grove team by a score of 29-4. Eleanor Smith and Lucille Ball scored over half the team's points.

May 16, 1927 - *The Scottish Rite Revue* at the Palace. *JEJ* - "It may forsooth, be propitious to assign a special paragraph to recount the antics of Russell Krebs and Miss Lucille Ball in The Sidewalks of New York. The twain were accoutered for their parts as a pair of oldtime Bowery dance hall characters. They sang the piece, but their dancing and incidental movements spelled the larger portion of their successful portrayals. Into this piece were flung the real Bowery dance hall personalities and eccentricities. The audience roared its approval." "Cleo Mendicos [sic] and

Margaret Gillespie scored in a juvenile comedy skit entitled Wes Moderns. A miniature racing car and a pair of roller skates are valuable properties in this amusing and quite realistic offering.”

Lucy later claimed she dislocated her arm doing her dance, but kept going.

Summer 1927 - Lucy worked in an ice cream stand at Celoron Park and spent the nights dancing at the Pier Ballroom with Johnny.

July 3, 1927 - Warner Erickson is shot. All of their lives change forever.

Throughout the years, there were many references to Jamestown, Celoron, and their inhabitants on Lucy’s TV series. Local friends Marion Strong, Pauline Lopus, Vinnie Myers, Helen Erickson, Gertrude Foote, and Clifford Terry were all characters, as were her favorite school teacher Lillian Appleby and DeDe’s best friend Grace Munson. There were references to Celoron High School, Jamestown High School, The Palace Theatre, Chautauqua Lake, Hunt Road, and Bigelow’s Department Store. Lucy also worked in references to Frederick C. Hunt, Florabelle Orcutt, DeDe Peterson, and Cleo Mandicos.