

**RACHAEL  
ELIZABETH  
HUDSON**  
**1916-1972**



**ACTRESS  
AND  
WARTIME  
SPY**

Rochelle Hudson became a Hollywood actress at thirteen, due to her ambitious stage mother. She was a major actress in the 1930s, whose varied career seemed to move backwards and forwards at an unpredictable pace. When she left Hollywood in 1942, her career turned to espionage activities in World War II alongside her husband. When she resurfaced in Hollywood in the 1950s, the talented actress with over sixty films showed her audiences what they had been missing.

Rachael Elizabeth Hudson was born in March 1916 in Oklahoma City. She began dancing lessons at age three and recited verses at school pageants by age six. In 1927, her father Ollie Hudson, an Oklahoma Labor Commission statistician and descendant of British explorer Henry Hudson, suffered a nervous breakdown. The prescription was to move to sunny California. The career of newly-renamed Rochelle began.

When the family arrived in Van Nuys in 1928, Rochelle began studying with Ernest Belcher, father of dancer Marge Champion. Soon her parents separated, and her father moved to Kansas to run a cattle ranch. Rochelle remained with her mother Mae Hudson, who moved them to Hollywood to be closer to the studios.

Thirteen-year-old Rochelle was signed by Fox in 1928, provided with singing lessons to become the next Janet Gaynor but little else. When she was dropped by Fox, she signed with RKO. She became close to longtime family friend Edgar Rice Burroughs, creator of Tarzan, after she was snubbed by her classmates because of her rising fame as a movie star. She completed her high school education on the Fox Studios lot.

Cinema exhibitors named Hudson a WAMPAS Baby Star of 1931. Sensing they had something hot on their hands, Fox moved the 15-year-old's date of birth back two years to make her more believable in romantic roles. The WAMPAS Baby Stars was a promotional campaign sponsored by the Western Association of Motion Picture Advertisers, which honored 13 young actresses each year whom they believed to be on the threshold of stardom. Honorees included Clara Bow, Fay Wray, Mary Astor, Joan Crawford, and Jean Arthur.

While at Fox, she starred with Mae West and Cary Grant in *She Done Him Wrong* (1933) Claudette Colbert in *Imitation of Life* (1934), and Shirley Temple in *Curly Top* (1935). When Darryl Zanuck took control of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Hudson was retained and starred with W. C. Fields in *Poppy* (1936). But Hudson was growing up and becoming too candid in interviews. Zanuck began to favor a younger Loretta Young with Hudson consigned to mostly B-movies during the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1939, Hudson married Disney Studios story editor and naval reserve officer Harold Thompson. From 1942 to 1945, the couple worked for Naval Intelligence, making “fishing” trips to Mexico and other Central American countries to engage in espionage, posing as a vacationing couple to detect if there was any German or Japanese undercover activity there. One big success the couple achieved was the discovery of a large cache of high-test aviation gas hidden by German agents in Baja, California. Following the war, the couple moved to Vancouver, until their divorce in 1947. Hudson’s career never really got back on track after the war.

Her second marriage to Los Angeles Times sportswriter Dick Irving Hyland lasted from 1948 to 1950. In 1955, after a thirteen-year absence from Hollywood, Hudson appeared as Natalie Wood’s mother in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Even though she was only 39, fans were shocked by how old she seemed. That next year, she moved to Arizona where she ran a 10,000-acre ranch. She then moved to Tulsa and worked for a petroleum company, instructing executives in communication. In 1960, she received her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

She married twice more – to Kansas businessman Charles K. Brust from 1956 to 1962 and hotel executive Robert Mindell from 1963 to 1971, with the divorce decree coming just ten days before her death in January 1972 at age 55 in Palm Desert, California, where she had settled in 1967 to run a successful real estate firm with her mother. Ed Sullivan lamented in 1944, “Rochelle Hudson should have been a much bigger success. She had everything.”