



Lew Ayres: Hollywood's Conscientious Objector (Hollywood Legends Series)

Lesley L. Coffin, Marya E. Gates

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Lew Ayres (1908-1996) became known to the public when he portrayed the leading character in the epic war film *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The role made him a household name, introduced him to his closest friends, brought him to the attention of his first two wives, and would overshadow the rest of his career. To be a movie star was his first and only ambition as a child, but once he found success, he was never fully satisfied in his choice of profession. Although lacking a formal education, Ayres spent the rest of his life pursuing dozens of intellectual studies, interests, and hobbies. He even considered ending his acting career after just a few years to pursue a more "respectable and fulfilling" path as a director.

Ayres was given not one but two comeback opportunities in his acting career, in 1938 and 1945. He was cast in the film series *Dr. Kildare* where he showed his abilities in comedy and his unique strength at bringing a level of sincerity to even the most outlandish or idealist character. But he was willing to give up his star status in order to follow his moral compass, first as a conscientious objector and ultimately as a noncombat medic during World War II. To everyone's surprise, he was welcomed back to Hollywood with open arms and new opportunities despite his objector status.

Biographer Lesley L. Coffin presents the story of a man of quiet dignity, constantly searching for the right way to live his life and torn between the public world of Hollywood and secluded life of spiritual introspection.

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