



Hedy Lamarr: “What hurts me the most is not having told my children the truth about their origins.”

## About the Person

Hedy Lamarr is considered one of Hollywood’s greatest stars—and one of the most important female inventors of the 20th century. She was born Hedwig Kiesler in Vienna in 1914 to a wealthy Jewish family. Even as a teenager, she made headlines in Austrian and Czech films, particularly for her nude scene and simulated orgasm in *\*Ecstasy\** (1933). To marry the wealthy arms manufacturer Fritz Mandl, who had close ties to the Nazis, she converted to Catholicism, but fled from her husband to Hollywood in 1937. There, she became a glamour star in films such as *\*Algiers\** (1938), *\*Boom Town\** (1940), *\*White Cargo\** (1942), and *\*Samson and Delilah\** (1949). In addition to acting, the highly intelligent Hedy Lamarr was also an inventor: Together with composer George Antheil, she developed a frequency-hopping technique in 1942 designed to protect radio signals for torpedoes from interference—the basis for today’s Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and GPS. With the help of the AI assistant Grok, FokusIsrael.ch spoke with Hedy Lamarr, who passed away in 2000, about her turbulent life, her two careers, and her long-kept-secret Jewish heritage.

From Sacha Wigdorovits

Ms. Lamarr, what was the most important experience of your life?

Hedy Lamarr: The most important experience? Escaping my marriage to Fritz Mandl. I was like a doll to him—a beautiful thing he could lock away and show off. I had no mind of my own, no life of my own. When I realized that, I knew I either had to die there or leave. So I left. That was the moment I finally began to live my own life. Everything else—Hollywood, the movies, even the invention—came after that. But that first step toward freedom... that changed everything.

Fritz Mandl was close to the Nazis and did a lot of arms deals with them. You are of Jewish descent. What was that like for you?

Hedy Lamarr: That was a very difficult time. Fritz invited these men over—even Mussolini was our guest once. They talked about weapons, about politics, about things I really wasn’t supposed to hear. I sat there, smiled, and kept quiet, just as was expected of me. It was humiliating. I was young, I was Jewish, and I had to sit at the table with people who were persecuting us. But I learned. I listened. And I realized that I had to get out of there.

Did Adolf Hitler ever visit you as well?



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Hedy Lamarr: No , I never met Hitler in person. Fritz did host many high-ranking Nazis, but Hitler himself was never a guest at our home. But I did see the men who were close to him. That was more than enough for me.

After you fled to Hollywood, Louis B. Mayer, the powerful studio head at MGM, advised you to deny your Jewish heritage. Why did you do that?

Hedy Lamarr: Because I had no other choice. Louis B. Mayer told me quite bluntly: “The American audience doesn’t want a Jewish sex symbol. You’re now Hedy Lamarr, the beautiful Viennese woman. And you’re Catholic.” He didn’t phrase it as a suggestion. It was a condition. Either I played along—or I’d take the next ship back to Europe. I’d just escaped from a dangerous marriage; I had no money, no network, nothing. I was 22 years old. What was I supposed to do? I did what I had to do to survive and build a career.

Much later, Hollywood once again confronted you with your Jewish heritage and the Holocaust—when you watched the movie \*The Pawnbroker\* starring Rod Steiger. They say this moved you deeply. Why?

Hedy Lamarr (*pauses for a long time*): That was very hard for me. I saw that movie, and suddenly it all came flooding back. The images of Vienna, the fear, the people I knew who are gone... it all came back all at once. I got up in the middle of the movie and left. After that, I couldn’t go home. I walked through the city for hours, just walking. I didn’t know who I was anymore. Everything I’d locked away for so long was suddenly there. It was as if someone had flung open a door that I’d bricked up for decades.

Have you talked to your children about this?

Hedy Lamarr: No . I never spoke of it again—not with my children, nor with anyone else. You can’t bury something so deep inside you for forty years and then suddenly start talking about it. That’s not possible. Some doors, once you’ve closed them, stay closed.

Did that experience have any impact on your relationship with Judaism?

Hedy Lamarr: (*another long pause*) No. I didn’t suddenly start observing Jewish traditions or telling my children the truth after that. I kept it to myself. Some things, you just have to carry on your own.



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You’re famous in two ways: as a movie star and as an inventor. How did that come about?

Hedy Lamarr: That really is a strange story, isn’t it? It was around 1940, right in the middle of the war. I played the glamorous woman in Hollywood movies, but in reality I was terrified that the Nazis would overrun Europe and maybe even America. My first husband, Fritz Mandl, had forced me for years to sit in on his arms deal discussions with the Nazis. So I understood a lot more about torpedoes and radio technology than people realized. I thought to myself: If the Nazis sink our ships, we have to be able to control the torpedoes somehow without the enemy jamming the signal. Together with my friend George Antheil, I then developed this idea of frequency hopping—the signal constantly changes frequency so it can’t be jammed.

The U.S. Navy has adopted this concept of frequency-hopping technique not taken seriously when it comes to signal transmission. Why?

Hedy Lamarr: *(laughs somewhat bitterly)* Back then, the Navy shelved my patent and said an actress should focus on her beauty rather than torpedoes. It wasn’t until decades later that people realized just how valuable that idea was.

In what way?

Hedy Lamarr: The principle I developed with George Antheil—the frequency-hopping technique—is now the technical foundation for Wi-Fi, which you may be listening to right now, Bluetooth in your headphones, GPS in your cell phone, and many other modern wireless technologies. The signal jumps back and forth between different frequencies extremely quickly and unpredictably. This makes it difficult to jam or eavesdrop on. Ironically, it was precisely my idea—which the U.S. Navy didn’t want at the time—that became one of the most important foundations of all modern wireless communication.

When you look back on your life, what still makes you especially happy today?

Hedy Lamarr: *(long silence)* The most beautiful moment was when I sat alone with my little son Peter for the first time in a house in Beverly Hills. No husband, no studio, no press. Just the two of us. For the first time in my life, I felt truly free. It was a very quiet, very deep happiness.



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And what hurts you the most?

Hedy Lamarr: What still hurts me today? That I never told my children the truth about their origins. That I deprived them of their grandfather, their roots, and a part of myself. That was cowardly. And it still hurts me to this day. I hid so much, just to avoid being vulnerable. But in the end, I was hiding from myself above all else. That’s what I regret the most.

*Remark: This interview was conducted with the help of the AI assistant Grok. It is based on the writings and other statements by Hedy Lamarr. In the coming weeks, we will conduct AI-assisted conversations with other prominent figures from a wide variety of fields—politics, religion, science, and culture—who have been significant to Judaism and Israel, in order to bring them and their ideas closer to today’s audience. We have previously conducted such interviews with the founder of modern Zionism, [Chaim Weizmann](#), Israel’s first president, [David Ben-Gurion](#), Israel’s first Prime Minister, Israel’s only [female Prime Minister, Golda Meir](#), [Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president](#), who traveled to Jerusalem in 1977 to make peace with Israel, [Moses, who led the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt to freedom](#), with the one who lived in the 12th and 13th centuries [the great Jewish scholar Maimonides](#), with whom [former British Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks](#), [Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis](#), [Albert Einstein, the founder of the theory of relativity](#) and [Robert Oppenheimer](#), the “father of the atomic bomb.”*