

*Celebrating Women's History Month*  
*Ann Bradford Davis*  
(1926 – 2014)

For years, the actress Ann B. Davis thought that people would always identify her with a character she played on an old TV show ... and then she made "The Brady Bunch."

Ann Bradford Davis and her twin sister Harriet were born in Schenectady, N.Y. on May 5, 1926. She first became an entertainer when the twins put on a puppet show at age 6. As a young woman, Ann planned to become a doctor, but an interest in acting acquired while watching plays in Erie, Pa, and her brother's success as a professional dancer, inspired her to choose a show business career.

Ann graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in drama and speech in 1948. She went to Hollywood to find work in the movies, but lacked the conventional good looks of a movie star. Her first movie roles were so small that her name wasn't listed in the credits. She performed frequently in local theaters, acted occasionally on TV, and worked in a department store to support herself.

Davis' fortunes changed when TV producer Paul Henning saw her in a play. He was creating a show for actor Robert Cummings, who would play a bachelor photographer. Henning hadn't decided what sort of person the photographer's secretary should be. He considered a man and a "dumb blonde" woman, but seeing Davis gave him a fresh idea. He cast her as Schultz, the plain but devoted secretary who often stole the show from the star.

"The Robert Cummings Show," also known as "Love That Bob," ran for four seasons, from 1955 through 1959. For the last two seasons, Davis won the Emmy award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series. She had become a TV star, but that didn't guarantee more work after the Cummings show ended.

Davis hoped to play the popular comic-strip maid Hazel, but another studio bought the rights to the character and cast a different actress. She played a gym teacher on "The John Forsythe Show" in 1965, but it lasted only one season. She made a handful of movies and guest appearances on TV, toured Vietnam to entertain soldiers with a USO troupe, and mostly worked in "summer stock" or dinner theaters. Fans around the world still knew her as Schultz.

In 1968, Davis got another chance at a TV series. Inspired by the growing number of blended families in the U.S., Sherwood Schwartz created a show about a couple with six kids from previous marriages. He cast Davis as "The Brady Bunch's" maid, Alice Nelson. The show was slow to catch on and reporters expected it to be canceled. Davis remained in suspense until ABC renewed the show for a second season.

"The Brady Bunch" was never a Top 30 show in the ratings, but was very popular with children during its five-season run. By 1973, Davis had noticed that people over four feet tall called her Schultz, while kids under four feet called her Alice. "The Brady Bunch" flourished in reruns and Davis reunited with the cast frequently, while the Cummings show was mostly forgotten. By the time Davis died on June 1, 2014, she was Alice to just about everyone.



**Publicity photo of Ann B. Davis  
as Alice in "The Brady Bunch"**

To read a copy of Davis' obituary go to <https://episcopalnewsservice.org/2014/06/02/ann-b-davis-brady-bunchs-alice-will-be-sorely-missed/>.

This is one of a series of four Celebrating Women's History Month profiles, written by Kevin Gilbert for the New York Newspapers Foundation's News Media Literacy/Newspaper In Education Program.

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