

Here's how it happened!



All in one day, Jeff Hunter fell for Barbara Rush and signed up for movies

Jeffrey Hunter says
his movie break
was plain luck.
The Lady sure helped but—

• BY MARTHA BUCKLEY



It's a wooden pedal car for Debra Paget and Jeff Hunter in *Belles on Their Toes*

The tall young man in the faded terry-cloth bathrobe was wiping make-up industriously from his face in the stuffy confines of the college auditorium dressing room when it happened.

With the informality of youth, one of his fellow players threw open the door, casually announced, "A couple of folks here to see you, Hank," and as quickly departed, leaving Hank face to face with his future.

The "couple of folks" were talent scouts from 20th Century-Fox and Paramount who had just caught the opening night of the Arthur Miller drama, *All My Sons*, as presented by the students of the University of California at Los Angeles, and the actor who caught their fancy was one Henry H. McKinnies, Jr.—soon to become Jeffrey Hunter.

"I honestly thought it was some kind of a gag at first," Jeff laughs as he talks about it now. "After all *two* talent scouts was a little too much to take seriously. And I'd read all the stories about the kids—really talented kids—who come [*Please turn to page 74*]



Jeffrey Hunter

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to Hollywood and beat their heads against a stone wall trying to crash the movies. So I figured some of my pals in the cast were trying to pull a fast one on me. Real honest-to-goodness talent scouts couldn't be interested in me!"

They were, though—extremely interested. The man from Paramount was first through the dressing-room door, and so it was at that studio that Jeffrey faced the camera next day.

"I was really lucky," he recalls modestly, "because they let me do a scene from *All My Sons*, and opposite me was one of the greatest actors I know, Ed Bagley, who played the father in the original production."

This modesty of Jeff's is one of his most heartwarming characteristics. Actually, studio moguls were so impressed with his performance as Chris that they promptly put him under option, and the gnashing of teeth at the Fox studios could be heard clearly from across town. Snarls turned to smiles, however, when a shakeup in Paramount's top echelon caused them to let the option lapse. Jeffrey was signed immediately to a Fox contract, given his new name, and two days later was en route to New York for his first picture, *Fourteen Hours*.

"It was my first plane trip, too," he admits. "Gee, it was wonderful. But I honestly didn't need the plane—I was flying 'way up on cloud 64 as it was!"

Jeff's been flying just as high ever since, turning in one outstanding performance after another with scarcely a breathing spell between pictures. He's especially grateful to 20th Century-Fox for the diversity of the roles in which he's been cast. After the straight part in *Fourteen Hours*, he played a southern GI in *Call Me Mister*, and then the campus Casanova in *Take Care of My Little Girl*.

"I'll never forget my first scene in that picture," he reminisces. "Right off the bat, before we even said 'How-do-you-do?', I had to take Jeanne Crain in my arms and kiss her. That cloud I was riding went up a couple of miles higher, and I didn't float down to earth until the middle of that kiss, when suddenly I opened my eyes and came to with a bang. *Yipe*, I thought, *this is me kissing Jeanne Crain!* I guess my eyes popped out like I'd just received a million dollars. 'cause the director called 'cut' and we had to start over. Which, need I add, suited me fine."

Despite his surprise at the suddenness with which it happened, Jeffrey Hunter was ready for the big break when it came.

"Without sounding smug," he says, "I've always felt that you have to be well prepared when old man opportunity comes knocking. I always wanted to be an actor, and so I did everything possible to prepare myself for my career. Radio seemed to be the field with the most to offer a beginner, so I studied all phases of it, and was taking my masters' degree at UCLA with the idea of eventually teaching radio if I didn't click behind the mike."

Born in New Orleans on November 25th, twenty-four years ago. Jeffrey moved with his parents to Milwaukee when he was only 4. He has the kind of folks who encouraged

him careerwise, and even though his father is an engineer, there was never any urging for the youngster to follow in Dad's footsteps. And so, while in high school, when Jeff took time out from football, at which he was no slouch, to participate in the Children's Theater of Milwaukee, it was with his parents' blessing. When a company of New York summer stock players came to Milwaukee, Jeff was only too eager to try his hand at walk-ons, and this, his first taste of real professional theatrical atmosphere, made up his mind for once and always. Acting it had to be. Because Milwaukee had more to offer in the field of radio than of the theater, Jeff made his professional debut with pay (\$12.50 per show) on the air when he was a high school senior.

An enforced vacation from his chosen career came with his stint in the Navy in 1945, but after his discharge the next year he entered Northwestern University to major in speech and radio. Since then he has never stopped pursuing his goal—in college, on the air and in summer stock.

He'll never forget that day at Paramount, which was the culmination of his studies and work, for in addition to his screen test, Jeffrey Hunter met Barbara Rush, the girl who was to become his wife.

"It was in the talent office that I first saw her," he remembers, and his usually twinkling blue eyes grow tender at the thought. "She was supposed to appear in the test with me, and I remember how attractive I thought she was, and how disappointed I was when she had to dash off for a part in a picture she was making!"

Jeff and Barbara met again through mutual friends and began dating as often as their respective pictures would allow. When Jeff was set to go on location in the Virgin Islands for *The Frogmen*, and Barbara was already on location in Arizona for her own fourth film, *Devil's Canyon*, they decided, via long distance telephone, that if they were going to wait for their between-picture breaks to coincide they'd probably never get married, and decided then and there to elope. They were married at St. Christopher's Church in Boulder City, Nev., on Friday, December 1, 1950, and after a two-day honeymoon both departed for their respective jobs.

Their year-old marriage has seen them apart more than together, for Barbara spent the past summer in stock in the East while Jeff was on another location trip. Now that both are working in the studios, they are busy moving from their furnished honeymoon apartment to a larger, unfurnished one.

"We're taking our time over the furniture, too," Jeff explains. "We both like the Early American style, but we want to be very sure about the pieces we select, for eventually we'll use them in the home we hope some day to build—when we can afford it."

There's little time for shopping these days, however, for in his spare time Jeffrey is concentrating on perfecting a regional southern dialect for his next co-starring role in *Swamp Girl*. There's no time, either, for his favorite sports—golf, tennis and ice skating. But Jeffrey Hunter isn't complaining. He's too busy learning everything there is to know about this business of making movies, and when each new opportunity presents itself, you may be very sure that Jeff will be more than ready for it.

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