

Jeffrey Hunter in King of Kings

There could be no more difficult character to play in the history of motion pictures than that of Christ in "King of Kings." Jeffrey Hunter, who was chosen for this role of roles, feels it was a challenge and an inspiration in his life. He spent six months in Spain with the "King of Kings" company, and says he had the greatest assist possible from the Spaniards, most of whom are devout Catholics.

"We had hundreds of extras," Jeffrey told me, "when we went to Pino Sierra, a little town a half hour from Madrid to film the Sermon on the Mount. The natives were all assembled before I appeared saying the Beatitudes, and the people fell on their knees, crossed themselves, and some of them were hysterical in their emotions. We had to explain it was just a motion picture, and Christ's appearance was made before he was crucified, and actually before Christianity was born."

I asked Jeffrey why he thought he was chosen for the role. He said, "Christ was a carpenter and 33 years old, and I am 33, and I suppose my physical measurements fitted the description in the New Testament. At the time of His death, He was robust, and not a delicate man."

Jeffrey, his wife and two of their children (Steele, his wife's son, adopted by Jeffrey, and their own little boy, Toddy) learned to speak Spanish. "We sent Steele to school the first day, and when 7:00 o'clock came and he hadn't returned, we were frantic. He finally came home and said he made five new friends that day. He had a two-hour siesta, and loved the school. Our youngest speaks no English — only Spanish."

How handsome Jeffrey is! I've known him ever since he came to Hollywood, but I had no idea that he is such a fanatic on health. "How did you get on this health kick," I asked him. He went on to tell me that he learned to know what was good for him and what wasn't. He said that every morning he takes tiger's milk, a concoction of honey, protein and three or four other ingredients. "You have to exercise, too," he added.

Jeffrey told me he became conscious of the importance of good health when he was off the screen for 14 months and almost lost his life with hepatitis. "I started a picture," he said. "I worked all day and couldn't remember my lines. Finally, a doctor was called, and I had a temperature of 105. I thought I would never be able to work again—if I lived."

"You were married, weren't you," I asked him, "when this illness laid you low?" He said, "Yes, Dusty (Mrs. Hunter) and I were coming back from Greece and we drank some tap water. She was sick for three days, but she was able to throw off the poison. I wasn't able to get rid of it for over a year."

The Hunters were just back from Lake Arrowhead, where they had two wonderful weeks. "I had my son Christopher with us." (He lives with his mother, Barbara Rush.) "The two boys, Steele and Christopher, get along so well. I taught all of them to skin-dive, to play tennis, and to swim. It was a wonderful holiday."

The Louella Parsons column appears daily in The Examiner



Actor Hunter spent six months in Spain on what he calls his most demanding film role, a portrayal of the Christ