

ALONE —

but not for long

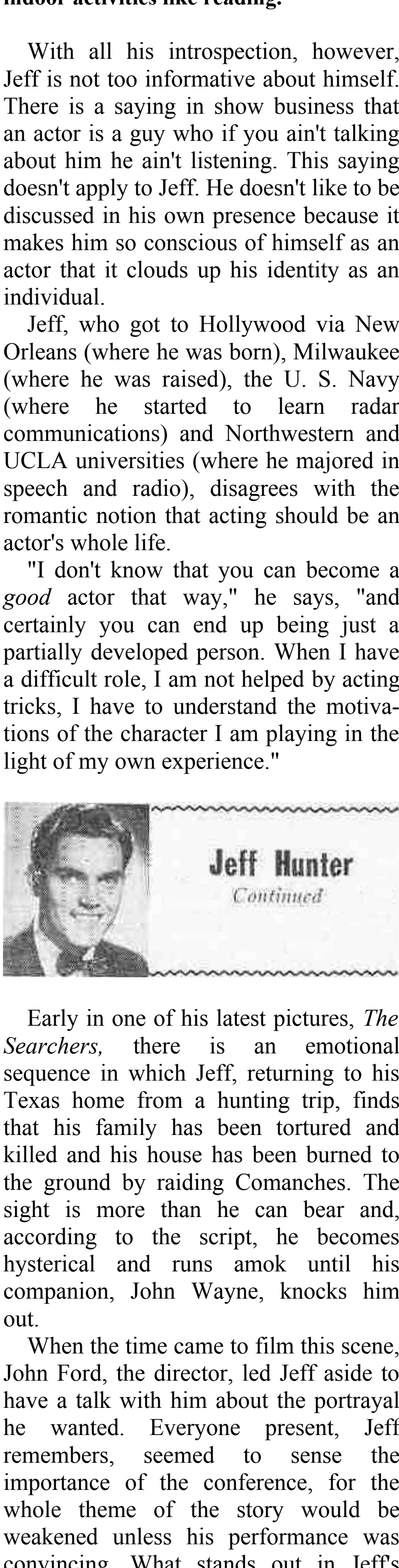
Jeff Hunter is sexy, successful and single.

No wonder that even his ex-wife is eyeing him

by **LOUIS POLLOCK**

Jeffrey Hunter is such a good-looking guy—extra tall, darkly intent, with startlingly blue eyes—that his serious air comes as a surprise.

"Jeff isn't a fellow who just lives," a close friend says. "He's always thinking about it."

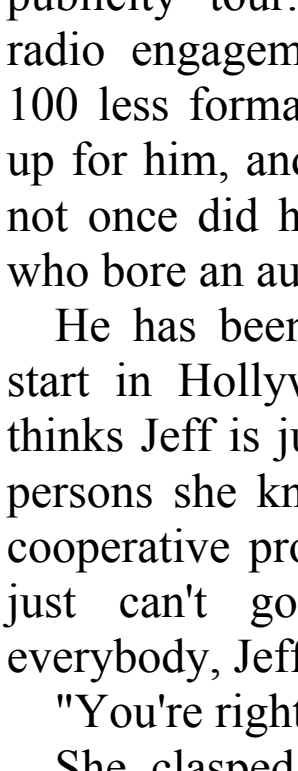


Jeff Hunter has time both for sports—like horseback riding—and quieter indoor activities like reading.

With all his introspection, however, Jeff is not too informative about himself. There is a saying in show business that an actor is a guy who if you ain't talking about him he ain't listening. This saying doesn't apply to Jeff. He doesn't like to be discussed in his own presence because it makes him so conscious of himself as an actor that it clouds up his identity as an individual.

Jeff, who got to Hollywood via New Orleans (where he was born), Milwaukee (where he was raised), the U. S. Navy (where he started to learn radar communications) and Northwestern and UCLA universities (where he majored in speech and radio), disagrees with the romantic notion that acting should be an actor's whole life.

"I don't know that you can become a *good* actor that way," he says, "and certainly you can end up being just a partially developed person. When I have a difficult role, I am not helped by acting tricks, I have to understand the motivations of the character I am playing in the light of my own experience."

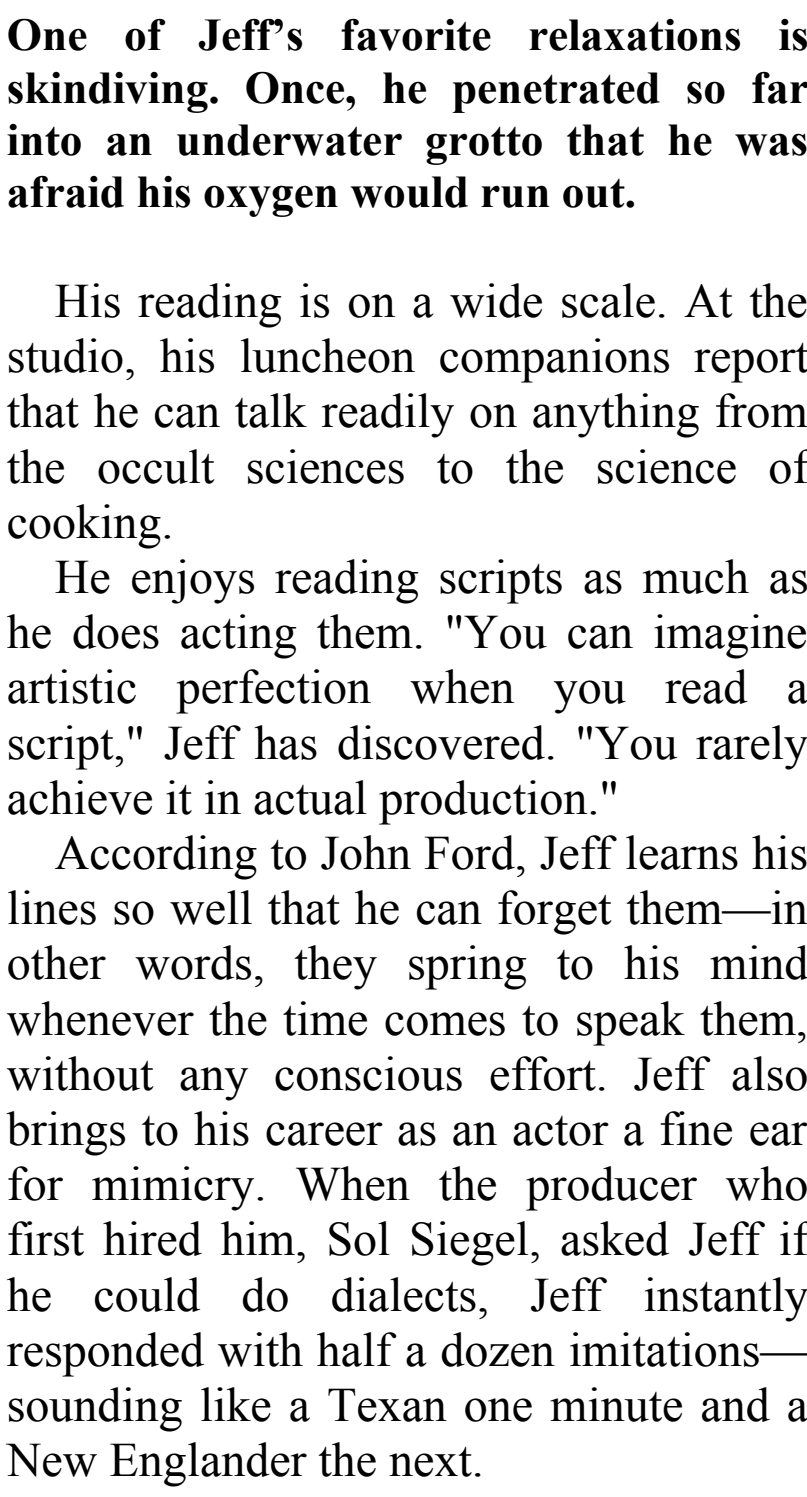


Jeff Hunter
Continued

Early in one of his latest pictures, *The Searchers*, there is an emotional sequence in which Jeff, returning to his Texas home from a hunting trip, finds that his family has been tortured and killed and his house has been burned to the ground by raiding Comanches. The sight is more than he can bear and, according to the script, he becomes hysterical and runs amok until his companion, John Wayne, knocks him out.

When the time came to film this scene, John Ford, the director, led Jeff aside to have a talk with him about the portrayal he wanted. Everyone present, Jeff remembers, seemed to sense the importance of the conference, for the whole theme of the story would be weakened unless his performance was convincing. What stands out in Jeff's mind was Ford's quiet way of setting and conveying the mood he wanted. "He used no technical terms at all," recalls Jeff. "He just discussed in a very simple and touching way this tragedy of early Texas which we were about to depict. I began to get the feel of a man who discovers that those he loves have been taken from him forever. Ford wasn't talking to Jeffrey Hunter, the actor, but to Henry H. McKinnies, Jr., the man. He wanted emotion, not elocution."

An only son, Jeff, alias Henry H. McKinnies, Jr., was brought up quietly in a home where voices were almost never raised in anger, and he reflects it. He is soft-spoken and he hates dissension. He is so agreeable, as a matter of fact, that his friends think it is hurting him in Hollywood.



Friends think that Jeff and his ex-wife, Barbara Rush, may remarry and give little Chris, now four, a full home again.

The decisions an actor makes—about what activities he will undertake, what pictures he should appear in—can make or break him professionally. Since he is his own stock in trade, as a person as well as an artist, he must learn both to live and to work with wisdom, knowing when to say yes and when to say no. Jeff's trouble is that no one can ever remember him saying no.

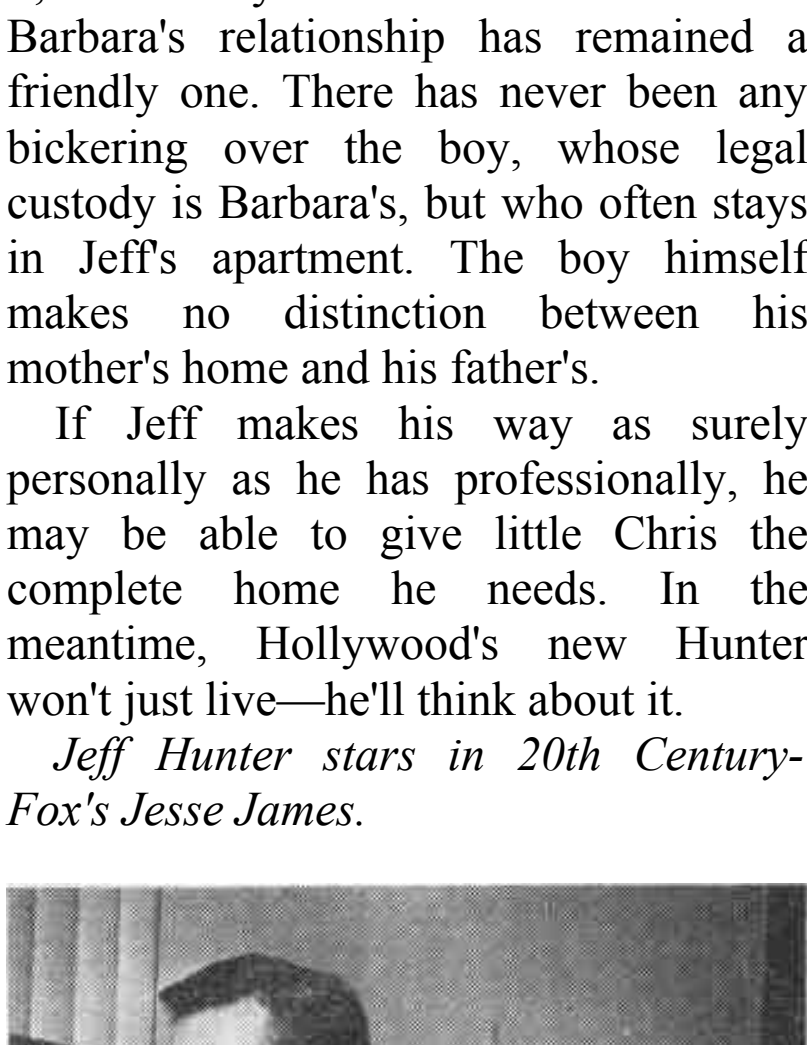
He has never been known to turn down any request for his help or services or to veto any studio picture assignment. He has never been seen to lose his temper. Recently, he was sent on a six-week-long publicity tour. Dozens of theater and radio engagements, as well as perhaps 100 less formal appearances, were lined up for him, and not once did he beg off, not once did he fail to oblige every fan who bore an autograph book.

He has been this way right from his start in Hollywood. Rita Moreno, who thinks Jeff is just about one of the finest persons she knows, takes issue with his cooperative professional character. "You just can't go around agreeing with everybody, Jeff," she told him once.

"You're right," he replied instantly.

She clasped a hand to her forehead. "Good Lord!" she cried. "There you go again!"

The chances are, however, that Jeff will become more assertive from this point on. He has accepted almost any role to gain experience and the confidence that comes with it, but he knows that now he must become more selective about his work. He has also decided, he says, that an actor must not only be able to take his work seriously, but be able seriously to leave it alone.



Jeff's rugged good looks and friendly smile appeal to men and women alike. He has had top roles in seven important films and is on his way to stardom.

"Success in Hollywood by no means assures anyone of a good life," he declares. "Your problems aren't lessened; they are increased. And if you are so busy with your career that you don't work for your private happiness, you get back just that much in return—and no more."

To make sure that he doesn't live a one-track life in Hollywood, Jeff busies himself with diversified activities. Some of these he has kept up from his boyhood and college days, like sports, music and reading. One is new—business. He is a partner in a business management firm handling the economic affairs of actors, and he produces film documentaries and short subjects on natural history and primitive peoples. He also is preparing to manufacture portable stoves, refrigerators and the like as camp equipment.

His reading is on a wide scale. At the studio, his luncheon companions report that he can talk readily on anything from the occult sciences to the science of cooking.

He enjoys reading scripts as much as he does acting them. "You can imagine artistic perfection when you read a script," Jeff has discovered. "You rarely achieve it in actual production."

According to John Ford, Jeff learns his lines so well that he can forget them—in other words, they spring to his mind whenever the time comes to speak them, without any conscious effort. Jeff also brings to his career as an actor a fine ear for mimicry. When the producer who first hired him, Sol Siegel, asked Jeff if he could do dialects, Jeff instantly responded with half a dozen imitations—sounding like a Texan one minute and a New Englander the next.

Jeff studied the piano through his early formative years and has kept up his playing. His favorite instrument, however, is the church organ. When traveling, he likes to drop in at a church during a quiet afternoon. If there is no one about, he is apt to wander over to the organ and sit down to play it. He touched the keys of an organ for the first time when he was 14. It was at St. Mary's of the Angels Church in Milwaukee. He played the Meditation from *Thais*. No one was present when he started, but when he finished, there was an audience of a dozen, including the pastor of St. Mary's, who called for an encore.

Some people, on meeting Jeff for the first time, feel a spiritual aura about him. Marisa Pavan was one of these. They were chatting, after being introduced, when she suddenly asked, "Are you a Catholic?"

When he said no, she wasn't satisfied. "There is something very Catholic about you!" she insisted.

She wasn't too far off. Jeff is an Episcopalian, the Protestant church perhaps closest to the Catholic church in ritual and belief. As a boy, Jeff was an acolyte and once contemplated entering the Episcopalian priesthood. Curiously, his two favorite sports find him often in a setting with a cathedral-like quality: he likes to ski alone amidst mountain grandeur; and he likes to explore underwater grottoes with an aqualung.

The happiest Jeffrey Hunter is the one who is skimming down an otherwise deserted ski-run at a place like Winter Park, Colorado, on a crisp, shining morning.

"Suddenly," he says, "I realize for the first time in a long time that I am *wholly* enjoying the world in which I live. I am very, very conscious of what I am experiencing; I'm not thinking about myself—which is the occupational distraction of an actor. It's a pleasure to tear down the wall of self-consciousness that usually stands between myself and life."

He has found the same sense of self-communion in undersea swimming, sometimes exploring a cave so deeply that he is guided back only by the shaft of sunlight from the entrance. Once, in the Mediterranean off the Isle of Gozo near Malta (where he went four years ago to make *Sailor of the King*), he penetrated so far into an eerie underwater cavern that for a while he was lost and barely got out before his oxygen ran out. This episode is referred to by his friends as "the time Jeff didn't know which way was up."

The way things have been turning out for Jeff lately, however, he hasn't had much time to run off by himself. Since a year ago last May, he has had top roles in seven important pictures. All this activity has added to his stature. But with success has come public interest in his private life which, of course, hasn't fared as happily as his professional one.

The talk goes that another marriage is in the cards for Jeff, and there has even been rumor that it will be a remarriage to Barbara Rush—although he is seeing other girls. There is a strong bond between Barbara and him and their 4-year-old son, Chris. Neither will discuss it, but everyone knows that Jeff and Barbara's relationship has remained a friendly one. There has never been any bickering over the boy, whose legal custody is Barbara's, but who often stays in Jeff's apartment. The boy himself makes no distinction between his mother's home and his father's.

If Jeff makes his way as surely personally as he has professionally, he may be able to give little Chris the complete home he needs. In the meantime, Hollywood's new Hunter won't just live—he'll think about it.

Jeff Hunter stars in 20th Century-Fox's Jesse James.

Jeff Hunter dates Jeanne Baird and other beauties as well as ex-wife Barbara Rush.