

*Sometimes son Chris
wonders if life with all
fathers is like this.
He hopes so!*

BY RICHARD LEON

HUNTERS' PARADISE

*Chris is the big star of the Hunter home for Barbara
and Jeff*



Having two boys around the house is no problem to Barbara Rush. "It's as easy to raise two boys as one," she says. And a good thing she feels that way, too, since she has two—Christopher, aged almost two, and his father, Jeffrey Hunter.

"They're just enough different so that I'm never in a rut, but they also have quite a lot in common. Hank is a little too old to pull everything he can reach off the tables like Chris does, for instance—but then, Chris is a little too young to sneak off and take flying lessons without telling me. As for what they have in common, that's easy. They're both terrible hams!"

Now it can be told that Barbara and Jeffrey Hunter don't consider young Christopher the only baby born. Nor the only perfect one. He's been known to dampen a diaper, to refuse his food, to cry at night. What's more, he keeps his parents hopping by his one aim in life at present: to clear all table tops of everything that isn't nailed down. Chris is, his parents admit, a normal baby boy.

His father, known to family and friends alike as Hank, is something else again. Jeffrey Hunter is six feet, one inch and a hundred, eighty pounds of manhood. All male and a yard wide—at least, across the shoulders. He wears the pants in the family, for which Barbara is quietly happy. After all, what woman would want to be married to a child? And still he's young enough, boyish enough, to

keep secrets from her. Like the flying lessons.

Last year the Hunters sensibly decided that they ought to save some money. While neither earned the astronomical salaries fans usually associate with movie stars, they both worked steadily without, somehow, saving a dime. So they turned their affairs over to a business manager. He is a rosy-cheeked, soft-spoken young man, no older than they are, and he has a real genius for saving other people's money. In order to do so, however, he has to know how they spend every penny that goes out of their bank account.

Now, at this time, Hank was harboring a small secret which he had managed to keep from Barbara, his friends and even the studio. Hank thought of everything to cover his tracks. Nobody was going to know a thing until the day he had that pilot's license to flash around casually or drop into a conversation with friends. The one detail Hank overlooked was young Mr. Bamberger, the business manager, across whose desk came some checks written to a flight school in the inimitable scrawl of Jeffrey Hunter.

He immediately picked up the phone and called Barbara. "*What,*" he asked, "*is this?*"

"You should've seen Hank's face!" Barbara recalls. "He was like a little boy whose mischief has been found out. Like Chris will be in another few years. But that put a stop to secret flying lessons in a hurry!"

Someone has to put an end to things now and then, at least temporarily, because Jeffrey is a tireless hobbyist. Along with flying, which is his current enthusiasm, he's an avid skier in season, deeply interested in photography, and has recently discovered spear fishing, which fascinates him.

"When Hank goes out for something new," his wife admits ruefully, "he goes all out. He has to buy everything he has been told he'll need, and nothing but the best. If he never did another day's work, he'd have enough hobbies to keep him busy the rest of his life. And, from the way Chris can't be distracted from throwing everything on the tables onto the floor, I imagine he's going to take after his father."

As for that flavor of ham, she says, "When Hank tells a story, he lives it, going back in time to the moment it occurred." If he comes home from the studio and tells Barbara about something that happened to—say, Dick Widmark—he becomes Dick Widmark. His voice, his facial expressions, his gestures change entirely, and for the length of the story Jeffrey Hunter becomes the fellow actor for whom he has such great admiration. "He doesn't even know it, but he's always acting."

"Everyone is always acting," Jeffrey reasons. "Whether they get paid for it or not, whether or not they have an audience. Even when they're alone,

people are always acting like the people they wish they were."

"And that Chris!" says his mother. "That one is hopeless. You know, he has an instinct about people who don't care for children. No use pretending otherwise—there are perfectly nice, decent adults who don't like children. Chris can spot them in a minute, and you can almost see him thinking 'Watch me take care of that!' as he makes a beeline for them. He pats them with his little hands, which stay clean only on those occasions; he laughs and coos and makes the biggest fuss over them you ever saw. Before they leave, they're downright silly about kids in general and especially Chris. He just can't resist the challenge of a cold audience!"

It has been widely printed that Jeff Hunter reserved judgment on his son and heir for quite some time. Alarmingly, it's true—and what's more, his wife thinks it's perfectly natural. "All new fathers feel that way, even if they don't all admit it. No matter how much you try to prepare a man in advance, a new baby is still a terrible shock to him. Babies just don't look like people to men."

Hank was sure there was something wrong with Christopher. "Are you sure he's all right?" he kept worrying. "Look, that ear is higher up than the other one—and should they both stand out like that?" Any optometrist could have told him that most people have one ear set higher than the other, just as most people's feet aren't

exactly the same size, but he'd have had quite a time convincing this particular father. Hank still keeps a wary lookout on how his son's ears are getting along.

The biggest adjustment Hank has had to make to fatherhood is an equally normal one, having to do with the most important item of a baby's wardrobe. And the sight of her husband changing Chris's diaper for the first time is a memory that Barbara will cherish forever. "It's hard for anyone the first few times. The baby squirms; you're afraid he'll break or you'll stick him with a pin. Then the diaper doesn't fold right, or you're just about through when you remember the powder. It would have been a struggle anyhow, but Hank was attempting to become the first one-handed diaper changer in history—the other hand was firmly fastened to his nose, and he wouldn't let go!"

Barbara, of the dark eyes and sweetly curving smile, had her own adjustment to make. "Because I thought of Chris as a part of me. Feeling every little movement he made, I guess I thought I would always feel everything he felt and think everything he thought. Then he was born, and the first time I saw him, I realized that he was already somebody else, already a person, separate and complete. It was quite a shock."

Their acceptance of Chris as an individual has made the Hunters throw away the rule book. He's a person, not a strange little creature who has to be

interpreted like a man from outer space. Came Christopher, and, after his parents applied a few of the fine theories they had memorized so carefully, they filed the psychology books in a handy waste basket. "There just aren't any rule books for individuals," said Barbara. "Chris is a member of the family. He's different from either one of us in certain ways, as he should be, but he's one of us and he's happy. What's more important than that?"

And why shouldn't he be, in such a happy household? Not that either parent is perfect enough to wear a sticky little halo, not that they don't have their differences now and then.

"Barbara's too intense," Hank observes. He looks a little worried when he says it. "Things matter too much to her, and she gets hurt by them."

"Hank's too easy-going," counters Barbara, basking in his concern for her. "Maybe if he showed some temperament once in a while, people would sit up and take notice, and realize what a wonderful actor he is."

Then there's the matter of Doing Things. Hank, who is brimming with energy, can't find enough time for all he wants to do even when he isn't making a picture. Doing nothing is one of Barbara's pastimes, and she considers herself an expert at it. Obviously they could achieve a smart, modern marriage in which each goes his own way. And why don't they? Too much in love, too intelligent.

"Anything that interests him interests me enough to go along," Mrs. Hunter said recently. "Besides, there's plenty of time for staying home, especially since the baby. Plenty of evenings when I sit and read a book, which I love to do while Hank plays the piano, which he does beautifully, or loses himself in his photography. Neither of us is deprived."

"When we aren't working, we love to go out and hit the high spots," Jeffrey says with relish. "Wish we could do it more often."

"Frankly, it's a financial thing with us right now," adds his bride. "We can't afford to attend every opening at Ciro's or Mocambo, or run over to Palm Springs for a few weeks, and still have the things that are most important. Like a home of our own, which we're shopping for right now. We wouldn't be able to buy it if we had gone out every time either one of us felt like it."

One or both of the Hunters must be up at dawn because of a picture in production almost always, and at such times Barbara's mother comes quietly through the early morning light from her home a few blocks away to take over in the infant department. Jeffrey left for England and "Sailor of the King" only a week after Chris was born; he has since been on a personal-appearance tour to help promote the picture. In the past year Barbara has been on location twice, in Apple Valley, Calif., for "It Came From Outer Space" and in Moab, Utah, for

"Son of Cochise." Both are working so steadily that they have little time together, but the time they have is good. And what of young Chris?

"We're very fortunate to have mother close by," says Barbara. "She dotes on her only grandson, of course, and the baby is very much attached to her. This is the only arrangement possible if I'm to go on with my career, and—"

"She should," interrupts her husband. "She's a very fine actress."

"He's my biggest fan," explains Barbara with a shamelessly warm smile at Hank. "But what I was going to say is that I wouldn't consider leaving Christopher otherwise, to give all the love in his little heart to one maid after another. He wouldn't feel secure if, as soon as he learned to love someone, she left and a stranger took her place. He and my mother have a mutual admiration society—they are mad for each other, can't bear to be separated for long, and Hank and I are just so much icing on the cake.

"You know how Hank became a doting father? It was when he first got the camera bug, and at that time Chris was so young that you just plunked him down somewhere and there wasn't much he could do about it. That was when Hank really got with the baby, when he realized what a perfect photographic model Chris was. He just shot movies to his heart's content. Then we showed them for our friends, and every one said he

was a great photographer and Hank was sold on babies from then on. I think he might even be willing to have another one some day."

"Ten," says Hank.

THE END