

**BARBARA  
and JEFF:**

# Split in Haste! Repenting at Leisure?

**They rushed into a divorce court,  
flung accusations at each other –  
but now that's only half the story**

**by MARK WELLS**



Jeff was Barbara's first love, but her divorce plea stated that he was emotionally immature for marriage.

"I GET ALONG WITHOUT you very well...."

So goes the tune that is a favorite with torch singers all over the country. Speaking of their former loves, they go on to say they are doing very nicely, thank you, except—ah, there's the rub. Except when they recall "the thrill of being sheltered in your arms."

It's a common feeling among those who have known and lost love. Sometimes they can forget the hurt and go on to other loves. But sometimes the old flame won't die, and all it needs to blaze again is a small amount of fuel.

All this is a case in point in the lives of two handsome and talented young people, Barbara Rush and Jeffrey Hunter. They are divorced. She sued him on March 29, 1954. Under California law, the divorce became final one year later.

Ordinarily their marriage would seem dead and buried. Finished.

But is it?

That question is not as irrational as it first seems. Listen to a close friend of Jeff's: "They are more cordial with each other than you usually find among divorced couples. Other people I know who have split up will scarcely talk to each other. But Jeff and Barbara get along beautifully.

"He is over at her house several times a week to visit their son Chris. He readily admits that he would much rather be married than lead a bachelor's life. I

wouldn't be at all surprised if he and Barbara tried it again."

Are you still skeptical about this?

So was I, until I confronted Jeff with some questions. I was checking a rumor that he was dissatisfied with the divorce set-up and sought more rights as a father.

He denied this categorically.

"I have absolutely no complaint," he replied. "Far from it. My relations with my former wife couldn't be better. Both she and her family have been extremely nice about everything. In fact, things are so nice that you'd think we were still married."

When it was suggested he might take care of that matter, he replied, "Perhaps—some day."

If you look back on the story of their marriage, you can begin to see that the idea of a reconciliation is not without logic. Jeff and Barbara married when both were in their early twenties. It's tough enough for any two people to adjust to living together. It's tougher still when both are caught up in the hurly-burly of movie careers.

But the Hunter union had even more difficult stresses and strains than most Hollywood marriages.

Barbara admits that she had never been in love before. She had been engrossed with acting since her college days with the University Players at the University of California. Then came the Pasadena Playhouse and finally a chance for the big time at Paramount Studios. She was

chosen as one of the favored few in the studio's Golden Circle of future stars. She met Jeff during those golden days.



The family circle is no more, and Jeff feels the anguish of being a part-time parent to son Chris.

They were both enamored with acting and with each other. They resolved to marry early in 1951, but their careers threw a roadblock in their plans. Jeff was assigned to a long location with "The Frogmen" in the Virgin Islands, and Barbara was on location in Arizona with "Devil's Canyon." It looked like a long separation ahead. Impulsively, they eloped to Boulder City, Nevada, and were wed Dec. 1, 1950.

Two weeks later, Jeff shipped out to the Virgin Islands.

He returned for a few months of wedded bliss, then was sent to the Orient

on a goodwill journey. But Barbara wasn't outwardly disturbed. She remarked, "Hank (his real name) and I married each other with the full knowledge that he was an actor and I was an actress."

The biggest blow came shortly before the birth of their child. Jeff was told he would have to go to Malta and England to make "Sailor of the King." He was frantic for fear that he might not be in the country when his child was born. The departure date came closer, then was postponed a week. Four days before he finally had to leave, Christopher arrived.

He didn't return until the baby was five months old.

When he came back, the Hunters faced a family issue. The Golden Circle had turned out to be brass. Barbara's career was at a standstill, and she pondered over giving it up to be merely a wife and mother.

Jeff argued against it. "Just try a little longer," he urged. "You have something to offer. I'm behind you—and Christopher will be proud of you."

His persuasion worked. Barbara tried some more, and was successful. She made a big impression in "Magnificent Obsession" and was elevated to star billing. Now she was the one who was leaving on location. She was assigned to "Captain Lightfoot," to be made in Ireland.

When she returned, her studio announced that the marriage was over.

Hollywood was astounded. Theirs had seemed like an idyllic young marriage. There had been talk of the strains created by long absences, but never a report of any real trouble between them. Immediately there were rumors that a romance between Barbara and Rock Hudson had developed during their location in Ireland. This proved to be unfounded.



Good friend Rita Moreno visits Jeff on 20th's set of "The Proud Ones," the Western in which he is currently starring.

How did it happen then?

When Barbara and Jeff were married, some of their friends were Anne Francis and Bam Price, John and Patti Derek, the Keefe Brasselles, the Dale Robertsons. These and other young marriages have shattered. Jeff has seen the same thing happen to his.

Some bitterness is bound to arise in a divorce, often caused by meddling outsiders. A once close circle of friends

becomes a hotbed of dissension; friendships are broken and a whole new social scheme has to be developed by both parties. But most tragic of all the circumstances is the displacement of the family. It is rugged on a small child to learn that love no longer exists between his parents. No one can measure the harm that it does to a child. Nor can anyone but a divorced father realize the anguish of being a part-time parent.

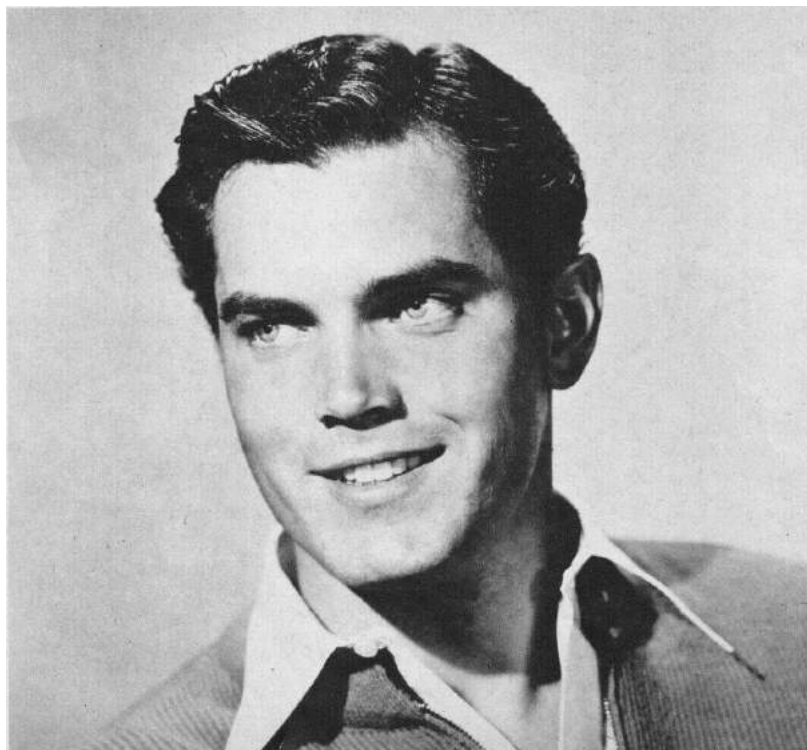
Jeff is completely devoted to his son, Chris. He visits the boy at Barbara's house three or four times a week and often takes him on excursions to places like Disneyland, the beach, the mountains.

Still, Jeff realizes it is not the same as being a full-time father, and therein lies the tragedy of his young life. He has done a lot of thinking about it, especially since he has seen the same thing happen to friends of his.

Perhaps because he is an actor, Jeff is more sentimental about his son than most fathers. He even had two special reasons for choosing the name Christopher. Jeff was playing the role of Chris in "All My Sons" at UCLA when he was discovered by a talent scout for Twentieth Century-Fox; that was the event that changed his life. The other important event in his life was when he married Barbara at St. Christopher's church in Boulder City.

Recently Jeff expressed again his feeling that marriage was the best way of life for a man. His observations showed

mature insight on what makes marriages, such as his own, fail.



Jeff still feels marriage is the best way of life for him. Will Barb be his mate?

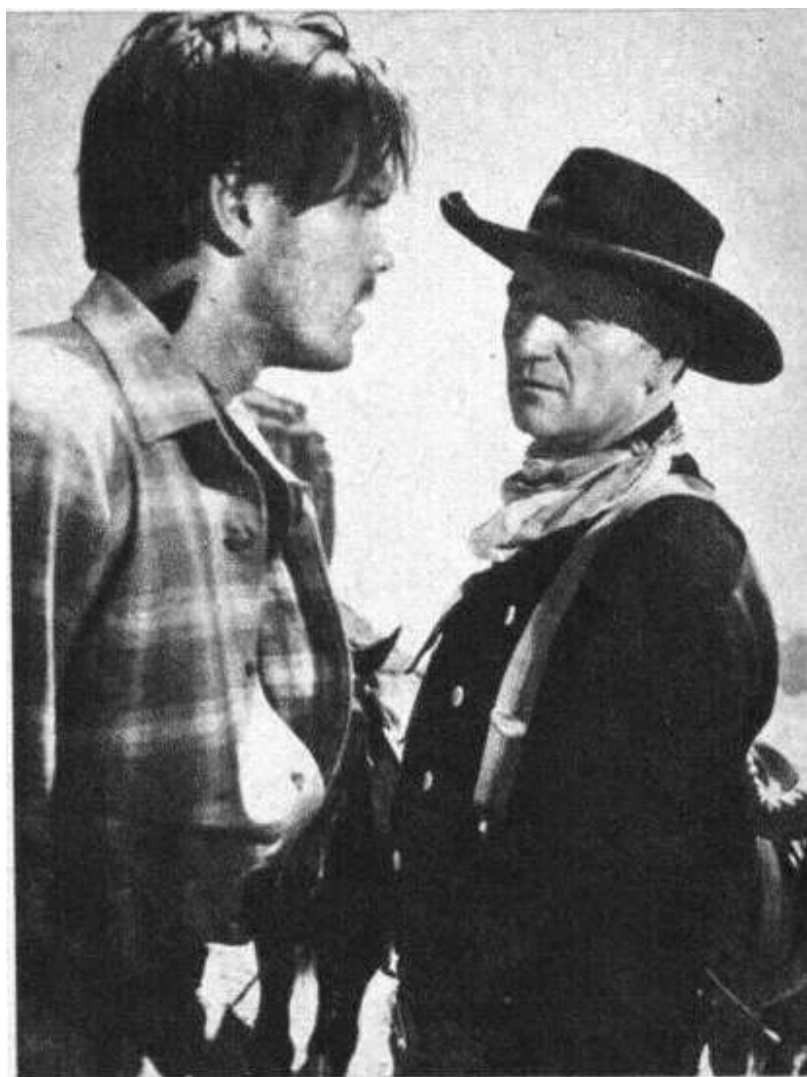
"People who marry at the age I did are filled with all kinds of romantic ideas taken from movies, radio and television. Young people tend to think of love in dramatic and romantic terms. But when a marriage is broken down into a working equation and young people have to face life's ordinary, unglamorous problems, they become disappointed and disillusioned.

"It takes a while to make a compromise with everyday living. It takes a lot of courage and love to accept this compromise and work it into a successful day-to-day marriage that will stand up whenever trouble comes along."

A close friend of Hank says, "There



has to be a mental, physical and spiritual communication to effect a happy marriage. Hank and Barbara never had that. They were infatuated with each other and with their careers. But they never really had the time or the inclination to work at their marriage."



Jeff argues heatedly with John Wayne in a scene from Warners' "The Searchers."

Since their divorce, both have dated considerably. Jeff has gone out with dolls like Peggy King (before she reconciled with her husband), Vera Miles, Beverly Garland and Dusty Bartlett. Barbara's dates have mostly been non-professionals. But neither of them has

had anything that resembles a romance.

In view of the fact that they make no effort to hide their continued fondness for each other, friends have been led to believe that a rematch might be possible. They reason that Barbara's complaint in the divorce action was that Jeff was emotionally immature for marriage. But today, Jeff is a different man from the eager young actor she married.

Friends of both Barbara and Jeff are convinced that with the Hunters it was a case of "Divorce in Haste and Repent at Leisure." They were each other's first love and there may come a day when they will be each other's last. Everybody hopes so.

THE END