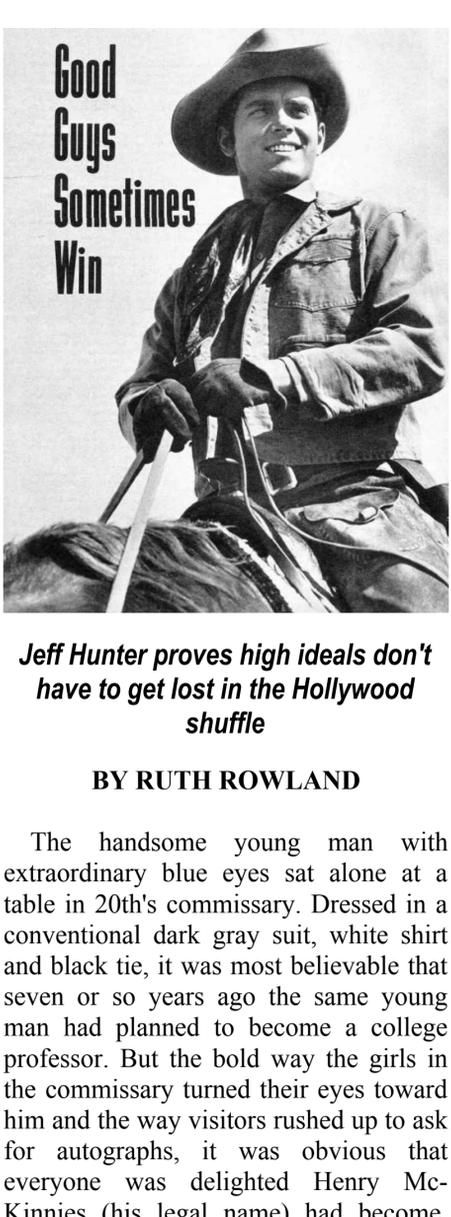


Good Guys Sometimes Win



Jeff Hunter proves high ideals don't have to get lost in the Hollywood shuffle

BY RUTH ROWLAND

The handsome young man with extraordinary blue eyes sat alone at a table in 20th's commissary. Dressed in a conventional dark gray suit, white shirt and black tie, it was most believable that seven or so years ago the same young man had planned to become a college professor. But the bold way the girls in the commissary turned their eyes toward him and the way visitors rushed up to ask for autographs, it was obvious that everyone was delighted Henry McKinnies (his legal name) had become, instead, Hollywood's Jeff Hunter!

To-day, there is still a lot of Henry McKinnies in Jeff Hunter. In fact, it is the combination of the two personalities that makes Jeff an enigma in show business. He is a young man of culture and old-world gallantry. He's dignified, extremely intelligent and has the envied looks of a hero in a romantic novel. Most heroes in novels have few vices and many virtues and in novels these good guys always win in the end. Realists, however, will be quick to tell you that things don't happen that way in the cruel, hard world. Good guys win only in novels—it's the sharp characters who win in real life. Well, Jeff Hunter proves otherwise!

The day we saw Jeff, he had come to 20th for a few last-minute details before leaving for Mexico on a vacation he certainly deserved, having just completed one of the busiest seasons in his career. Yet, it wasn't too long ago that Jeff's career, a career which started with such terrific speed, had hit a slump that lasted almost two years.

"Of course, the slump had to come," said a friend of Jeff's. "He was too honest, too good a sport. He was a good guy and you know good guys always end up last."

What the friend meant, of course, was that in his opinion one must be ruthless, temperamental and very self-centered to win. These traits might describe some stars but not Jeff. And what happened in the career of Jeff Hunter will serve as encouragement to other young actors and, in addition, kick that old bromide—good guys never win—right out the window.

Talking about that difficult and discouraging two-year slump, Jeff says, "I just didn't know what to do. It seemed my career was over. They were making a lot of pictures on the lot but I wasn't cast in any of them and I couldn't understand why, particularly since I started out with such a terrific lot of luck."

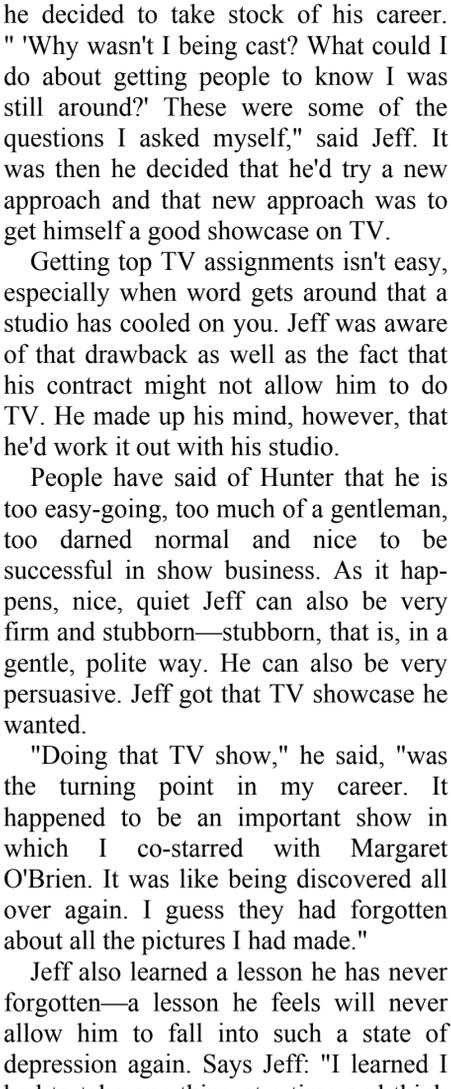
As often happens, when luck is riding with a person, he can be lulled into a false sense of security. Then suddenly, when luck deserts you, you are left alone and stranded. How people pick up the pieces of their life at that point is indicative of their character. Jeff's first impulse at that stage in his career was to run. He thought very seriously of leaving Hollywood and becoming the college professor he had once wanted to be. Hollywood, which had once seemed so glamorous, now seemed to have brought him only unhappiness and failure. He had been rejected by others, his talent had been rejected; he was filled with despair. Jeff had never in his whole life been conditioned to accept failure because he had always excelled in everything. Now he had not only a career failure to face, but his marriage to Barbara Rush had also come to an unhappy end.

"The slump began," Jeff says, "when I lost the role in 'Prince Valiant.' " This was a role he had been led to believe was his. "It was a terrible disappointment to me," he says quietly.

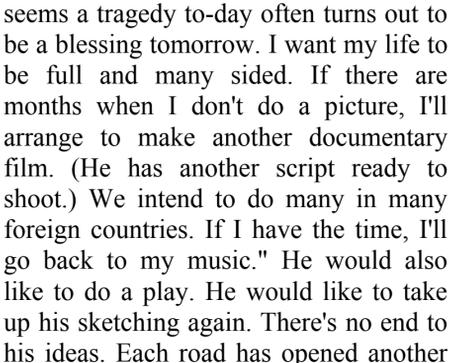
As it happened, the plum role went to Robert Wagner. Since Wagner and Hunter were close friends, Jeff tried to be understanding. The situation was just as difficult for Bob. However, what seemed a tragedy to Jeff at the time, later proved to be his strength. During the slump, Jeff, a guy who had never been conditioned to failure because he had always excelled in everything, did a lot of thinking about what kind of a person he really was. Should he desert Hollywood for a less glamorous, more secure life or should he stick it out? Jeff thought and Jeff decided to remain in Hollywood.

Once he had made the decision to stay, Jeff, who had always known exactly what to do, suddenly didn't know what to do. "I just felt restless and so alone. This always happens when an actor has too much leisure time. Nothing was happening to me and everyone else was forging right ahead. I felt miserable, lost—as if the bottom had fallen out of everything."

At the time, a friend advised Jeff to play it "smart," to forget that Bob Wagner was a friend and to make a campaign to sell himself for the "Prince Valiant" role. Jeff refused to do this. He knew, as did everyone, that the role was a great break for Wagner. He knew, too, since the studio wanted a younger man than Jeff for the role, no one could play it better than Bob.



When Jeff's career hit slump, he wisely decided to use free time to conquer new fields including flying (those are his pretty flight instructors above). As result, to-day he has richer, fuller, happier life plus his once-again booming film career.



"Every man must walk with the sound of his own drum," Jeff believes. He couldn't play the "smart" game because he didn't know how. He is straightforward and honest. But when he wasn't cast in other films, he became alarmed about his future as an actor in Hollywood.

"I worried about it for days and days but I did nothing constructive to open up another avenue for my talents. I kept feeling sorry for myself. Then, suddenly, I came to my senses. Why keep worrying about the past, I thought."

Jeff's first constructive act toward finding a fuller future was to widen his horizons by deciding to produce documentary films. One of the films Jeff subsequently produced was a movie filmed in Georgia and called "Living Swamp."

In addition, Jeff studied photography, took up his music again (he is a fine pianist) and became interested in medical research. In short, he opened new avenues for himself should his acting career come to an end.

Since acting was really Jeff's first love, he decided to take stock of his career. "Why wasn't I being cast? What could I do about getting people to know I was still around?" These were some of the questions I asked myself," said Jeff. It was then he decided that he'd try a new approach and that new approach was to get himself a good showcase on TV.

Getting top TV assignments isn't easy, especially when word gets around that a studio has cooled on you. Jeff was aware of that drawback as well as the fact that his contract might not allow him to do TV. He made up his mind, however, that he'd work it out with his studio.

People have said of Hunter that he is too easy-going, too much of a gentleman, too darned normal and nice to be successful in show business. As it happens, nice, quiet Jeff can also be very firm and stubborn—stubborn, that is, in a gentle, polite way. He can also be very persuasive. Jeff got that TV showcase he wanted.

"Doing that TV show," he said, "was the turning point in my career. It happened to be an important show in which I co-starred with Margaret O'Brien. It was like being discovered all over again. I guess they had forgotten about all the pictures I had made."

Jeff also learned a lesson he has never forgotten—a lesson he feels will never allow him to fall into such a state of depression again. Says Jeff: "I learned I had to take one thing at a time and think it through clearly. There will be, of course, other rough times in my career but I will never panic again and just do nothing with my time but feel sorry for myself. I'll never put all my eggs in one basket."

Jeff also feels, "If you can only be patient—and what young ambitious people are?—you can look ahead, plan ahead and see beyond the present disappointment and realize that what seems a tragedy to-day often turns out to be a blessing tomorrow. I want my life to be full and many sided. If there are months when I don't do a picture, I'll arrange to make another documentary film. (He has another script ready to shoot.) We intend to do many in many foreign countries. If I have the time, I'll go back to my music." He would also like to do a play. He would like to take up his sketching again. There's no end to his ideas. Each road has opened another road. His first love is, of course, acting. "But to make a life for yourself, to be happy in a town like this, or I guess any town, you have to honestly examine yourself very critically," he reflected.

In examining himself, Jeff Hunter has learned to accept the failure of his marriage. "We were too young and there were too many separations. I was doing a picture in Mexico, Barbara was doing one someplace else. We just never had enough time together."

But his friends say they had nothing in common, really, except that they were both "beautiful young people." Jeff, or "Hank" as his close friends call him, liked all the things Barbara didn't. For instance, he's a great athlete, he loves to ski, skin dive, swim and water ski; he's a whiz at tennis and great on ice skates; he's an accomplished golfer. Barbara isn't athletic at all.

A friend said of their marriage, "They never quarrelled, really, and that was the trouble. They just disagreed very politely about everything. A successful marriage needs a good, hot emotional outburst once in a while—not an intellectual discussion."

Jeff merely smiles when the subject is brought up. He is too much of a gentleman to discuss his private life with anyone. But he does hope to marry again and he's quite popular with the girls!

"I always go for brunettes," he laughingly said, but with a twinkle in his eyes, he added—"There is one blonde in my life, though." He won't say who she is. He has the old-fashioned manner of not discussing his dates with his friends.

To-day the road ahead looks pretty smooth for Jeff Hunter. At the moment he has lots of friends and no important enemies. There was a time when he wanted to be liked by everyone but now he has developed much more security within himself. "It is necessary to get along," he feels, "but not if you have to sacrifice the things you believe in. I can't like everybody and everybody can't like me. In the long run, it's the quality of your work that counts. I don't think success depends on stepping on others; you can't carry a big knife cutting down everyone who seems to stand in your way. If I want success, I must get it my way; I must be honest with myself and be myself!"

In being himself, Jeff has been amazingly successful. Perhaps he has none of the explosive violence that makes for overnight stardom, but his success has been built differently. It has a stable, thorough foundation. He is without phobias, completely charming and has a delightful sense of humour. His cultured background reflects his way of thinking and he hopes to bring up his son, Chris, to have the same appreciation for fine things.

In reviewing the life of Henry McKinnies, Jr., who became the motion picture actor, Jeff Hunter, we find that they are quite similar after all. Jeff would be the same whether he was teaching English to students at a university or playing a romantic hero on the screen. He's a man who has respect for others and he'll never change no matter how big and important a star he becomes.

"Hank's always been a good sport in everything he's done," says a friend, "and he'll always come out on top."

It's been said that the only trouble with being a good sport is that you have to lose to be one. Well, Jeff Hunter proves otherwise. He proves good guys sometimes win.

THE END

(Jeff's new films are 20th's "The True Story of Jesse James," "The Way To The Gold" and U-I's "Gun For A Coward.")