

A NICE GUY WILL BE A BANDIT

Interview by JORGE FIESTAS

IN SPAIN, HE LIKES EVERYTHING BUT THE ROADS

Jeffrey Hunter, whose real name is Henry Hunter McKinnies, was born in New Orleans, 25 November 1926. His first marriage was with Barbara Rush, and his second was with Dusty Barlet. Christopher, eleven years old, is from his first marriage. In his second, Jeffrey has two sons, four-year-old Henry (called "Toddie"), and one-year-old Scott Hamilton. Also, there is Steele, the eleven-year-old son from Dusty's first marriage. Hunter has shot 32 films and many TV appearances since 1951. His most important role was as Jesus Christ in "King of Kings". His 33rd film will be "Joaquin Murrieta"; like "King of Kings", that film is being shot in Spain. In appearance and deeds, Jeffrey Hunter has a reputation for being a good, kind, and distinguished person.

THINGS have changed, and Mr. Hunter is no longer the elusive actor who came to Spain two or three years ago to portray Jesus Christ in "King of Kings." Then, it was required that he avoid personal publicity, without talking to anyone, important or not, who wished to interview him. For example, Jack Paar, a man rivaling Ed Sullivan as the most prominent TV host in the United States, had to content himself with watching work on the set. No interviews, no pictures. According to the film's producers, such activities could adversely affect the state of mind of the actor who was to be Jesus in the film.

— I do not deny that it has been my best role. When it was offered to me, I felt at once humble and honored to have been chosen. It was an experience I will never forget. Even today, after two years without making films, I get almost two thousand letters a month that exclusively address my performance in "King of Kings."

— *What have you done since then?*

— A TV series, "Temple Houston". Two years of uninterrupted work. 26 hours of episodes. Exhausting work, but it was rewarding because the show immediately became very popular.

— *What kind of character is Temple Houston?*

— A good man who sees that justice is done. He has a simple, straightforward philosophy that everyone understands. Perhaps that is why the program was so successful.

— *Between "King of Kings" and "Temple Houston", did you make other films?*

— Yes. "Mantrap" — a police melodrama; a small role in "The Longest Day"; "Gold for the Caesars", a Roman period film made at MGM in Italy; and "The Man from Galveston", a western.

— *How do you remember your time in Spain?*

— Magnificent. Both my wife and me. She speaks Spanish perfectly, you know? She studied at the University of Mexico.

— *Will she be coming to Spain with you?*

— Of course. From the time we got married six years ago, it has always been possible for her to accompany me when I have had to travel for films. Madrid was our home May 1st till November 1st.

—We took an apartment for the whole family, and before we started shooting we took a little tour around Mallorca.

—*What method did you use to study your role?*

—The same as I have now: daily inspiration. I know no other way. The technicians, my colleagues, behaved phenomenally. When I meditated or simply rested between scenes, they treated me with courtesy. When filming the Sermon on the Mount, near Chinchón, villagers themselves were employed as extras. Being devout people, they responded with real fervor.

—*Are you familiar with the previous version of "Joaquin Murrieta", filmed in Hollywood in 1935?*

—No, I have not seen it. Warner Baxter originated this role.

—*Will you have a mustache?*

—I don't think so. I only have to darken my hair.

The actor has plenty of gray in his abundant hair. He is thirty-eight years old, yet except for that gray hair, no one would think that Jeffrey Hunter is older than thirty. He is tall, thin and in perfect physical condition. His eyes are deep blue, and more than one female colleague is amazed upon observing his eyes closely this afternoon. He is wearing greenish summer khaki pants, with shoes and black socks, a white shirt and a tie with blue and green stripes.

—*Please tell me about your family.*

—Chris is my oldest son. He's eleven, and his mother is Barbara Rush, my first wife. Steele is the son of the first marriage of my current wife, Dusty. He is also eleven, and they get along extraordinarily well. Chris lives with Barbara, but he visits often. Then there are Todd, who is four, and Scott, one. I met my wife during a shoot outside Phoenix in 1955. After that, she moved with her family to Los Angeles, and we dated for a year, just to be sure of the strength of our feelings, before deciding to get married. And fortunately, we are very happy.

—*Where in California do you live?*

—In Santa Monica. In a Spanish-style house, very



George Sherman, the famous director, who will direct Hunter's next film, exhibits a remarkable disparity in height with the actor, and Jeffrey is subtly trying to shrink himself a bit, to look less tall next to Mr. Sherman.

—*How many films have you made?*

—Thirty-something.

—*And you have never been tempted by the stage?*

—Oh yes, and besides, I owe my livelihood on the screen to it. When I was young I dabbled in theater with a company of young actors. And in California, during the summer, there is "summer stock", as we call it. Without being presumptuous, I think that I'm the only player discovered twice on the same day, by two scouts. I acted a role named "Chris", in a play. One of the scouts got me a test with Paramount, the other a contract with Fox. From that point on, film work left me no free time for anything else. But I have a project to introduce next year on Broadway — a great comedy, naturally."

—*How have you invested the money you have earned?*

—In the activities of a record company, and in a trade organization working with shelters used for mountain sports. I have also participated in a company involved in selling farms. And in life, of course."

—*Now that we know that, what do you most like about Spain?*

—The Spanish people. They are honest and have great ideals.

—*And what do you like least?*

—The roads. Please forgive my frankness.

If the face is the mirror of the soul, Jeffrey Hunter should be what in these parts we call a man "as good as bread", being polite, courteous, educated, and very cooperative. He smiles often and meditates on each of his answers carefully. In Hollywood, he was quoted once as saying, "Talent without temperament." It is quite possible that this "slogan" fits him to a tee.

Jeffrey, with his wife Dusty and their children Chris (left), born during Jeff's marriage to Barbara Rush, and Steele (right), son of Dusty's first marriage.



Ten years ago, Jeffrey Hunter, when he was married to Barbara Rush, seen with her during a Hollywood premiere. The marriage was not a successful one.

near the ocean. We have furniture in it that we purchased here on our last visit.

—*What was the first thing you did upon arriving this time?*

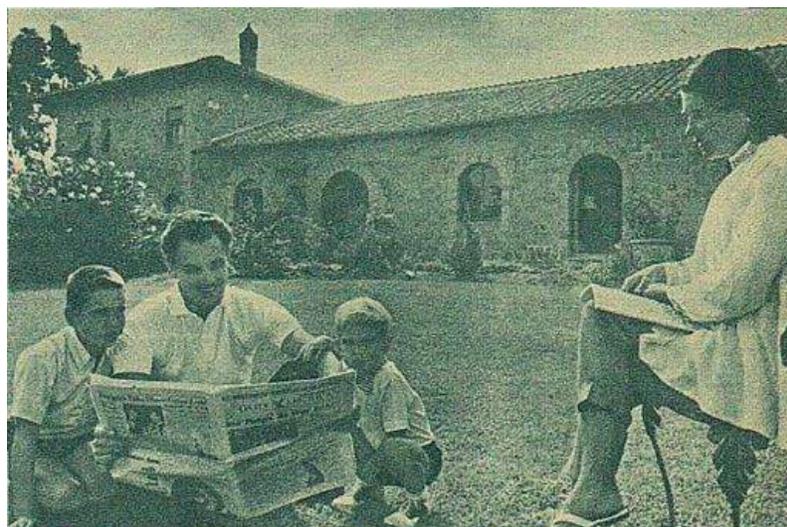
—We got tickets to see "El Cordobés".

—*How did you like him?*

—A non-classic bullfighter, and a prodigy of rashness and audacity.

—*Has Hollywood returned to holding the scepter of the Mecca of Film?*

—Hollywood is still somewhat stronger than its detractors out there believe, though certainly there are fewer movies made there. Instead, now there is a powerful Television industry. The entire industry works there now, one way or another, more than ever before.



Translator's Notes:

Errata:

Jeffrey's middle name at birth was not Hunter, but Herman.

Jeffrey's wife's name was Dusty Bartlett, not Barlet.

The blond child in the photo with Dusty and Steele appears to be son Todd rather than Chris.

Clarification: When Jeffrey speaks about living in Madrid from May until November, all the way through his answer to the question about through his comment about how he studied for his role, he refers to the period in 1960 when "King of Kings" was filmed in Spain.

Observation: It is likely that this interview was conducted entirely in Spanish; Jeffrey was fairly fluent in the language.