

Tab Hunter Confidential, LLC.
"TAB HUNTER CONFIDENTIAL"
FEBRUARY 25, 2015
TRANSCRIBED BY: WORD OF MOUTH (RL)

[00:00:26]

TAB HUNTER : I would go out occasionally to a cocktail party and I was fascinated by all of what I saw there. There were a few guys dancing with a few guys, a couple of gals dancing with a couple of gals. It was just a party and people were dancing and having a good time. Parties like this were illegal.

[00:00:53]

And then the next thing I know the cops came in. Doors burst open, there they were. They were arresting a bunch of, uh, queers. They took us down to the police station. You know, I thought oh my God, this is terrible. I thought what would my mother think of my being arrested? Will it affect this career that I'm trying to get started in motion pictures?

[00:01:27]

An attorney, Harry Weiss appeared. He was well known for taking care of situations like that with many, many Hollywood people. He said you gotta be a lot sharper than you are. You're in Hollywood now, you want to be an actor, and really laid down the

law to me. And then I was released. I had no idea it was gonna jump up and be thrown out at me years later.

[00:01:57]

[FILM CLIP]

DICK CLARK : Here's the young fellow you've been waiting for. Ladies and gentleman, Tab Hunter.

VOICEOVER : Six feet of rugged manhood to stir the heart of every woman.

FEMALE : Oh my goodness, I'm flabbergasted.

TONY RANDALL : Tab Hunter.

VOICEOVER : How do you shave, Tab?

TAB HUNTER : With a Gillette Super-Speed of course.

PAT BOONE : Tab Hunter.

MALE : Would you tell me where I could find Tab Hunter?

MALE : Well you look pretty good.

TAB HUNTER : Gee thanks.

MALE : What do you like about Tab Hunter?

FEMALE : Well quite a few things.

JIMMY DURANTE : [SINGS] That clean-cut unaffected Tab Hunter. That all-American boy.

MALE : A shocking but true story of a young man who found himself overwhelmed by a strange compulsion.

TAB HUNTER : Hello, I'm Tab Hunter and I've got a secret.

[00:02:40]

TAB HUNTER : Well I would never have talked about my personal life in the 1950's.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Something the matter, kid?

TAB HUNTER : What? Oh no, no, not a thing.

[00:02:48]

TAB HUNTER : I obviously was very closeted and I'm sure it's a very difficult thing to think what's the problem? But there was a problem. It's been very difficult for me my whole life, talking about that side of me. For me to come out of myself like this and to share all of this is extremely difficult. I've never been as open as I am with you because, uh, it's been written about and what the heck, you know, I'm an old man, I don't, you know, this is my life, big deal. [LAUGH]

[00:03:20]

SHOW OPENING TITLES

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : When I count three, will all of the ladies in the audience please go, aah?

JOHN WATERS : Tab when I was young, when I first saw him, looked, beside acting, he just was amazing looking. Whoa, this was like a flying saucer landed looking that cute. Beautiful, California surfer, handsome, that every single girl or boy would wanna make out with.

[00:03:56]

[FILM CLIP]

FEMALE : Are you Tab Hunter?

TAB HUNTER : Uh, yeah.

FEMALE : I think I've died and gone to heaven.

[00:04:02]

ROBERT WAGNER : The kids and the fans just gravitated to him just like a magnet. He was so popular and so many people just thought he was it, and he was.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : [LAUGH] I'll bet.

RONA BARRETT : He was as big as they could come. He had the star quality and he had the X factor.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Mr. Tab Hunter. [APPLAUSE]

[00:04:27]

GEORGE TAKEI : And in every picture they managed to take his shirt off. [LAUGH]

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Hey kid.

REX REED : Nobody could take their eyes off Tab Hunter. He was the all-American boy and nobody sold that image better. He was the good-looking sailor or he was the good-looking Marine or he was the good-looking Air Force pilot.

[00:04:47]

TAB HUNTER : I did so many military films that I was waiting for the government to send me a pension. I mean, my gosh, I was in uniform all the time.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Cigarette?

JO-ANN COX BUNTON : I saw him in Battle Cry. He played a young Marine with Dorothy Malone. They did have a love scene.

TAB HUNTER : It caused a lot of comment at the studio.

[FILM CLIP]

DOROTHY MALONE : Let's take a dip in the pool.

[00:05:10]

TAB HUNTER : We can't have one of our young Marines having an affair with a married woman. Oh really? [LAUGH]

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : I think you're the most beautiful woman I've ever met.

CONNIE STEVENS : What was the one he did with Sophia Loren?

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : That Kind of Woman.

CONNIE STEVENS : That Kind of Woman, yeah. And, uh, of course I adored her too, and I thought ooh, what a couple.

[FILM CLIP]

SOPHIA LOREN : He doesn't look enough to drink.

TAB HUNTER : I'm old enough to do anything.

[00:05:34]

GEORGE TAKEI : With his charm and good looks and his magnetic presence, he was the embodiment of youthful American masculinity.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Thank you very much and thank you.

ART LINKLETTER : There he goes the eligible bachelor from Hollywood.

[00:05:56]

TAB HUNTER : By now I'm used to Tab Hunter of course after all these years. I grew up as Art Gelien. I was born in 1931. July 11th, 1931. My mother's name was Gertrude Gelien. She was from Hamburg, Germany. I always used to say she was the poor man's Marlene Dietrich. She had two children, my older brother Walt, who was 11 months older than me, and me.

[00:06:29]

My mother and father did not get along at all. He was terribly abusive to her. Once my mother left my father it was a lot of

burden, a lot of stress for a single woman raising two children in those days. She was very strict. One moment she could be very explosive and the other moment she could be terribly tender and dear. My mother worked like a dog. She held sometimes two jobs.

[00:06:58]

She wanted to create an environment of a family and a home. And that was very important to her and to us. I was lost as a kid in many ways. Introverted. And I was extremely shy. I was never comfortable around people. It made me very nervous. My brother was quite the opposite.

[00:07:26]

My brother I looked up to a great deal because he could handle every situation very well. He was always prompting me on. Otherwise I'd have stayed in my shell much, much longer. We were raised as Catholics. My mother put us in parochial school where we had nuns. She just was really, really concerned about our own development, mental, physical and spiritual.

[00:07:55]

I loved going to church. I did sing in a choir. Benediction was always wonderful to me and the mass was in Latin and I loved

that. It was a good place to go and become a part of something that moved me.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : It's The Black Swan starring Tyrone Power in his lustiest role as the daring Captain Waring.

[00:08:16]

TAB HUNTER : Of course I went to movies all the time. I lived at the movies. There was an aura about movie stars that was quite wonderful. They were total escapism. I loved that. Movies was a world away. I did feel I was different from other boys. The word gay was not around when I was a kid. They used derogatory terms. Fairy, queer.

[00:08:47]

And I might even have said that about someone, not wanting to be different, wanting to be like everyone else. I was always taught if there's something bad, just push it from your mind, push it from your mind. So I never confronted those things, even though it was there and was very powerful. I hated myself. I went to confession and this one priest made me feel like I was the most miserable person that ever lived.

[00:09:20]

After my confession I fled from the church completely, even though it was something I really loved. I came away from that more fearful than ever.

MARILYN : I went to John Burroughs Junior High School with Arthur Gelien. It was as if magic had dropped into the school. Honestly the girls would not leave him alone. They had never seen anybody so handsome. They were just mesmerized.

[00:09:57]

TAB HUNTER : Girls were very attracted to me and it made me extremely uncomfortable when people would carry on in any way, shape or form.

MARILYN : If he tried to walk down the hall, he simply was mobbed. There were times that he'd have to run into an empty classroom and lock the door to get away from the girls. I don't know how he survived.

[00:10:23]

TAB HUNTER : The attention at school was so disruptive that I just felt I needed some sort of escape. So I decided to join the Coast Guard. I just had wanderlust. My mother and I had a big argument just prior to my joining the Coast Guard. Kelm was my father's name, Charles Kelm. My earliest memory was my father abusing my mother and my brother and I crying.

[00:10:56]

I have no recollection of my father after that. My mother never wanted to talk about him. In fact, you'd mention his name and she would, she would literally shudder. I, at times, wished that we had a father. I kept saying Charlie probably wasn't that bad after all. And my mother said oh really? Then I think you should go to New York and see him. When I was on liberty in New York I had his address and I knocked on the door and this woman said yes?

[00:11:29]

And I said is Charles Kelm here? And she said no. And beyond her I could see a figure sitting in a chair. And I said to her well would you tell him that his son came by to say hello? And she said yes, and she slammed the door in my face. I knew that that was my father sitting in the chair. And I could tell that

he didn't want to see me. I was devastated and I just walked in the snow for hours.

[00:12:08]

The Coast Guard found out I was underage and discharged me. And then when they discharged me I went back down to Los Angeles. I worked as a delivery man. I worked wrapping presents at Barker Brothers in Hollywood. I worked at the Orange Julius stand on Hollywood Boulevard. I did an awful lot of jobs.

[00:12:34]

My brother was the one who introduced me to horses. I wanted to do whatever my brother did. And then my brother went on, of course, to other things but I stayed with the horses. I loved being around the horses when they were in their stalls. I loved the smell of them. I loved working around them. I loved riding. And I got a job mucking out and being at the barn.

[00:13:01]

When the horses came into my life they totally consumed my life. One weekend at the barn Dick Clayton came out, who was an actor at the time, with an actress by the name of Ann Blyth, and they were doing a photo layout for one of the movie magazines. Well

I was fascinated so I just stood there and watched. And then Ann left and I got to talking to Dick afterwards and we became friendly.

[00:13:30]

Dick never came on to me like a lot of people did. I never felt a hidden agenda from Dick Clayton because I just felt so comfortable with him. I never had a man in my life like that.

And he was the one who first planted the seed for me, how would you feel about being an actor? And I thought oh wow, that'd be terrific. I did start thinking about it but I didn't know what to do, where to begin, how to get started in the business.

Henry Willson was an agent for a lot of young actors. Henry had a stable of stars, Guy Madison, Rory Calhoun, Rock Hudson.

[00:14:17]

DARRYL HICKMAN : Henry Willson was a big deal agent, and it seemed like every actor he touched became a big star.

DON MURRAY : And he had a certain style of plan, and he was the one who would take the pretty boys and make stars out of them.

[00:14:34]

TAB HUNTER : Dick Clayton said I want you to meet Henry Willson. You know, he doesn't have the most sterling reputation. And I went there and met him and, you know, he was giving me the look and the stare and all that. You know, I'm not an idiot. I can see what was going on there. Oh yeah, Henry put the make on me every now and then. Occasionally his knee would push against your knee or something like that.

[00:14:59]

Well, I just wasn't interested. I mean, Henry was an amusing, fun person to go out with once in a while but that was it. Henry was certainly not my type. We were sitting in his office and he said the name's gotta go. So he said we've got to tab you something, so that's how Tab came about. And I showed horses, hunters and jumpers. And Henry said that's it, Tab Hunter, that's a good name.

[00:15:27]

I can just see my new name Tab Hunter on the marquee. I remember having a few drinks and I was feeling no pain, and I said I'm going to be a movie star. [LAUGH] Art Gelien became Tab Hunter. The new name was hard for me to get used to, though. And then Henry said, well once you see it on pay-to-the-order-of, it won't be so bad.

[00:15:55]

ROBERT WAGNER : He was a man who was eager, excited, enthusiastic and wanted it. But boy, it sure did come fast.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : A lush, tropical paradise beyond your wildest, most romantic dreams.

[00:16:10]

TAB HUNTER : The first interview I had was for Island of Desire. So they sent me to meet the director. He looked up and said that's the boy I want. They asked me to take off my shirt. I was really embarrassed. I then did a screen test with Linda Darnell. She was a very big name. Oh, I was a nervous wreck doing the screen test. She said don't worry, I'm good luck for newcomers.

[00:16:39]

And then he said now you take her in your arms and you kiss her. I took her in my arms and I kissed her. [LAUGH] I kissed her and she looked at me and they said cut. And she pinched me and she said that was nice. [LAUGH] Audience response was phenomenal. Critics, they hated it.

[FILM CLIP]

LINDA DARNELL : You're out of your mind.

TAB HUNTER : Darn right. This blasted island's got me loco.

[00:17:09]

TAB HUNTER : I got roasted.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Hello Hawaii, hello America, hello England, hello anybody.

REX REED : He doesn't demonstrate any shred of acting ability in that film.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : I was born too late and I've got a lot to learn.

[00:17:23]

TAB HUNTER : My mother and I did go to a screening of it. The lights came up and my mother said you were lousy. I was so

bad in the movie that I couldn't get arrested. It was a long spell between Island of Desire and my next job. The only parts I could get were in grade-Z movies.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Interpreting hieroglyphics is part of my archeological studies.

[00:17:51]

TAB HUNTER : I felt that I was a B-actor trapped in that genre of film and, uh, there was no way out.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Hello pop.

TAB HUNTER : Acting was something that Dick Clayton was always on my case about. This isn't something that just happens. You've got to work. There's so much to learn and so much to tap inside of myself. And I wanted to go on to the next step. And he arranged for me to do Our Town. It was important for me to do it because it was great material and a chance to grow. Marilyn Erskine, a Broadway actress who was very good, did not want to do Our Town with me.

[00:18:38]

MARILYN ERSKINE : George was a marvelous part for a young actor, but Tab Hunter playing George? I didn't see that. And, uh, so I was a little bit concerned because that's such an important part of the play.

TAB HUNTER : We did a read-through and after we finished the reading she agreed to do it with me. She said okay young man, we've got a lot of work ahead of us. Let's get to it.

[00:19:09]

MARILYN ERSKINE : I wanted him to be comfortable within himself that he can do this. Tab had that desire to really be good. I saw an actor who grew and grew, getting better and better and better.

TAB HUNTER : The only thing I really could rely on were my instincts and my feelings. And they won't lead you too far astray.

[00:19:37]

MARILYN ERSKINE : And Tab was just fabulous. He was George.

TAB HUNTER : The play was extremely well-received, got good notices, first good notices I ever received in my life. From that it sort of whet the appetite. I came away from that experience realizing that I wanted to be an actor.

DARRYL HICKMAN : The studios ran Hollywood. Hollywood was MGM, Paramount, 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers.

CONNIE STEVENS : It was just a society in unto itself, Warner Brothers. It was the best studio, so we were very proud. But you did not cross Jack Warner.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Colonel Warner. Colonel Jack Warner, ladies and gentlemen.

[00:20:03]

TAB HUNTER : Oh, Warner was quite a character, he really was. He looked like Lucifer with that little mustache of his.

[FILM CLIP]

JACK WARNER : You son of a bitch. [LAUGH]

DARRYL HICKMAN : When you had a guy like Jack Warner on your side, you had the whole Warner Brothers operation on your side. You were in business.

[00:20:47]

TAB HUNTER : The studio contract was really good because of the security of it. At Warner Brothers they had acting classes, singing and dancing. I said Henry, I really need to go to work. Henry sent out wires to different producers saying Tab Hunter is available, and he arranged me to meet Solly Baiano, casting director at Warner Brothers. I got a call from the studio. They took out an option that they might put me under contract. And your first picture will be with John Wayne and Lana Turner in The Sea Chase.

[00:21:22]

[FILM CLIP]

JOHN WAYNE : Wesser, more coffee.

TAB HUNTER : Yes sir.

TAB HUNTER : All I had to say in the film was yes sir.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Yes sir. Thank you. Everybody sir.

[00:21:31]

TAB HUNTER : The Sea Chase was an all right film but I had nothing to do in it and was very disappointed. Jack Warner was looking at rushes of the film and a director by the name of William Wellman, Wild Bill Wellman happened to see a couple of my scenes and said I want that kid for my next picture. And the next picture was Track of the Cat with Robert Mitchum.

[FILM CLIP]

ROBERT MITCHUM : The place is just crawling with dreams. You have any, kid?

[00:22:00]

TAB HUNTER : I got along with Mitch very well. He had a great sense of humor and was full of hell. I really liked him a lot. Well the first big film I did at Warner Brothers was a film called Battle Cry. Battle Cry was the biggest picture Warners had that year. They tested me nine times for the role of Danny Forrester.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Sorry I, I felt kind of itchy.

TAB HUNTER : I wasn't the only one who tested for that role.

[FILM CLIP]

JAMES DEAN : Kiss me.

PAUL NEWMAN : Can't here.

[00:22:30]

TAB HUNTER : Warners tested Jimmy Dean and Paul Newman for the role. They still couldn't make up their mind, so they said well we'll give this kid one more test. The morning I left to go to the test, my mother stopped me at the door and she said think positive. See yourself in this role. And she said if it's meant to be it will be. I thought I was so bad in that test I went home and was ready to kill myself. That was the test that got me the role.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Gimme a cheeseburger and a cup of coffee, and, uh, how about a piece of that apple pie, too?

[00:23:06]

TAB HUNTER : I just liked the role. He reminded me of my brother. He was a very straightforward, decent human being.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Any guy in the world would be lucky to have your for a wife.

TAB HUNTER : The film was very successful. It was a major hit for Warner Brothers.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Battle Cry, the Warner Brothers' story of the Marines having its world premiere.

[00:23:27]

TAB HUNTER : I started getting so much recognition for doing it that I was offered a seven-year contract with Warner Brothers. I thought whoa.

[FILM CLIP]

STEVE ALLEN : Tab Hunter.

ROBERT WAGNER : And when that came on it was like you struck a match, and off it went.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Hollywood pays tribute to bright new stars of tomorrow. Awards go to blue-eyed and blonde Tab Hunter.

[00:23:50]

REX REED : They translated everything into box office receipts. Jack Warner saw box office gold in Tab.

TAB HUNTER : Once I was under contract to them, all this publicity came out on me, and the publicity exceeded the product.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Actor Tab Hunter signs autographs in a time-honored way.

[00:24:11]

TAB HUNTER : They were selling the all-American boy. Take him home to mother. It was a nice wholesome image.

[FILM CLIP]

FEMALE : How do you feel about dancing tonight, are you ready?

TAB HUNTER : A little awkward but I guess I'm ready.

GEORGE TAKEI : He was everywhere. We were being bombarded with Tab's presence and I was delighted because he was so exciting to be watching.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : America's favorite sweethearts, Tab Hunter and Natalie Wood.

[00:24:38]

TAB HUNTER : Natalie Wood was the sweetest little thing that ever came down the road. I loved her. She was like my kid sister.

[FILM CLIP]

NATALIE WOOD : You really got it made, haven't you?

TAB HUNTER : She had been very successful in Rebel Without a Cause with Jimmy Dean and I had been successful in

Battle Cry. Warner Brothers put us together. They wanted to make us into the new dream team. We went along with it, of course.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Tab Hunter, Natalie Wood.

[00:25:05]

ROBERT WAGNER : And they had a great time together. She adored him.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : I never met a gal with such spunk.

ROBERT WAGNER : He was on fire and she was on fire. They traveled a lot together. They went on tours together.

TAB HUNTER : Oh my gosh, there were thousands and thousands of kids.

JOHN WATERS : He looked like he loved being a movie star and he was a good one.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Warner Brothers stars Natalie Wood and Tab Hunter plant a Christmas tree for the annual Toys for Tots campaign.

[00:25:34]

JOHN WATERS : But I knew Tab first from his music.

TAB HUNTER : The recording career came about when Randy Wood of Dot Records said how would you like to record? I said I'd love it. Randy had me come over there. I cut the record. Randy yelled out that's it, it's gonna be a hit.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : [SINGING] They say for every boy and girl there's just one love in this whole world and I know I've found mine.

[00:26:18]

TAB HUNTER : It became the number-one song in the nation.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : [SINGING] Young love, first love.

[00:26:25]

LOU SIMON : When Young Love hit number-one on the pop charts it knocked Elvis out of number-one and stays for a month and a half at the top of the national charts.

TAB HUNTER : Jack Warner blew his stack. He said we own you for everything. He totally prohibited me from recording for Dot any longer. And I said, but Mr. Warner you don't have a recording company. And he said well we do now, and they started Warner Brothers Records for me.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : [SINGING] There must be 99 ways of losing the blues that I got from loving you.

[00:27:04]

LOU SIMON : Tab had a real genuine recording career. He was not a one-hit wonder. He released dozens of singles and albums. It was phenomenal and it was noticed by everyone.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : [SINGING] What a wonderful wedding there will be. What a wonderful day for you and me.

[00:27:32]

RONA BARRETT : He came along at a very brilliant time. It was the beginning of the teenage revolution in America. He had a million and one crushes from the largest group of teenagers that has ever lived in the United States, the baby boomers.

TAB HUNTER : They were the ones who could make a career overnight, and they certainly did with mine.

[FILM CLIP]

FEMALE : I can't help it. I've got a very bad case of Tab Hunter-itis.

JIMMY DURANTE : I know just how you feel.

[00:28:03]

EVELYN KRAMER : I had Tab's pictures on my wall. We all did. My wall was covered with pictures of Tab Hunter.

RONA BARRETT : Young girls just were crazy about him. The minute they took a look, he became their guy and he was marketed to those people.

EDDIE MULLER : It was the movie magazines that really made him a huge star, more than the films that he was making.

[00:28:35]

TAB HUNTER : The kids kept demanding all of it so I would get things like Tab Hunter buys a hat. Tab Hunter drives a car. Tab Hunter cleans a window. Tab Hunter goes to the beach. Woo.

[LAUGH]

[00:28:50]

JO-ANN COX BUNTON : One of the magazines had a contest and I won a date in Hollywood with Tab Hunter in 1956. Was I nervous? I could hardly breathe. When I first saw Tab Hunter I was very intimidated. And he smiled, and that smile was just truly magical. Tab Hunter was the heartthrob that I had seen in the movie magazines. And we had dinner and dancing.

[00:29:30]

I could not believe, Joanne, here you are, dancing with Tab Hunter. My date was over and he gave me a kiss. I felt like Cinderella and I had a kiss from my Prince Charming. It was a dream come true.

TAB HUNTER : In the 1950's love and marriage was the ideal theme. It's not always very real.

[00:29:59]

DEBBIE REYNOLDS : The studios had a system and they always wanted their starlets to go out on a date with a beautiful, handsome boy. And the one they chose was Tab Hunter.

TERRY MOORE : He was a guy that all the girls wanted to go out with. Of course I wanted to meet Tab Hunter 'cause he was the big, young male star at Warner Brothers and I was the big female star at Columbia Pictures, and so we had to date. He was a gentleman. He always came around and opened the doors, he picked up checks and my parents liked him.

[00:30:39]

VENETIA STEVENSON : It was fun. We did all sorts of things. We did all the things that normal people do when on dates, but we had a third person who was a photographer with us.

DOLORES HART : He was the kind of boy every mother would want to have married into her family. He had an honesty, he had a simplicity, he had a certain strength of character. He would not let anybody down.

[00:31:09]

DEBBIE REYNOLDS : We got along great 'cause he was always fun and sweet and he wasn't after me, so he wasn't on the make. And women like that. I really was a very naïve, young, innocent girl and I would never think that the most handsome boy would be gay.

[00:31:33]

TAB HUNTER : I would never discuss my private life with anyone. I was able to get close to them but I never really went that deep in the relationship. I had the ability to live behind this wall and you only allow people to break the barrier if you feel you can confide in them and you want to have that friendship.

INTERVIEWER : What was your first relationship with another guy?

[00:32:10]

TAB HUNTER : The first relationship I had was when I was ice skating with a fellow skater.

INTERVIEWER : Can you tell me about that?

[00:32:19]

TAB HUNTER : What do you want to know? [LAUGH] I always loved figure skating. I competed in the regionals and I went to nationals. I enjoyed just being on the ice.

DICK BUTTON : He was a very good skater and a very strong competitor as well.

[00:32:45]

DEBBIE REYNOLDS : A lot of his friends were ice skaters. Champion ice skaters with the Ice Capades.

[FILM CLIP]

BOB : Mouseketeers, meet Ronnie Robertson.

ALL : Hi, Ronnie.

RONNIE ROBERTSON : Hi Mouseketeers, hi Bob.

EVELYN KRAMER : Ronnie Robertson was known as a great technician. His skating was different than anybody else's skating.

[00:33:07]

TAB HUNTER : And he could spin faster than anybody in the world. Nobody ever spun that well. He was a major talent. We had an attraction for one another. And I drove him home one evening after a skating session. Next thing we were in a relationship. I'm sure there was talk about Ronnie and myself in the skating world. Particularly if you've got a talent and people are jealous of it.

[00:33:40]

There were times when I was certainly stressed, hearing things that had been said. But you learn when you're in the public eye to compartmentalize.

EVELYN KRAMER : A big issue was that Tab was around, and the political game at that time was you don't do that.

TAB HUNTER : There was one skater that didn't like the fact that Ronnie and I were friends, and took a skate blade to my new car and just went right down the side, [MAKES NOISE] to the paint.

[00:34:13]

EVELYN KRAMER : Tab came to the championships with Ronnie Robertson. Ronnie was told that he would not win the championships unless Tab would not come along. And Ronnie said it didn't matter. He wanted him there.

TAB HUNTER : And Ronnie skated oh, magnificent performance. The fact that I was there with Ronnie might've hurt his ability to win. And he should have won. My mother never really approved of the Hollywood stuff. Being private was very important to her. She only visited me on a set twice in all the years I was in the business.

[00:35:09]

She did one interview for a magazine but it was like pulling teeth to get her to do that. People would say, oh, Mrs. Gelien, aren't you excited about Tab? And my mother would say yes, that's nice but Walter's the intelligent one. My mother was always a very intense woman. She had a lot of pressure in her life. She was very high-strung. While I was doing Battle Cry I was in touch with my mother a lot. And I noticed a change in her behavior. She would fly off the handle rather quickly.

[00:35:46]

She was ranting on, behind a closed door in the bathroom in German, and she ran out into the street and collapsed in my arms. It just got more out of control and more out of control. My mother totally lost it and, uh, I had to commit my mother to a mental institution. And it was very difficult to do.

[00:36:20]

And on the way there I said mom, please try to understand what I'm saying. I really feel bad about this. And she said I know, I know. I had to commit my mother. I mean, there was nothing else that I could think to be done. She had to have 37 electroshock treatments.

[00:36:51]

I went down there to see her of course. I remember walking in and she was lying in bed, and they'd shaved her head, where she had all the treatments. And as I walked in she said why did you do this to me? She was very fragile when I went to see her but she was better. When I saw my mother as helpless as she was, I swore that she would never have to work another day in her life.

[00:37:26]

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Hello, I'm Tab Hunter. Did you know that mental illness claims more victims than any other disease? That's right. One American in every 10 is suffering from some disabling mental or emotional disorder.

[00:37:40]

GEORGE TAKEI : In the 1950's being gay was absolutely not acceptable. It was against the law. It was considered a mental disease. There were very devastating consequences. You couldn't have a life being gay back in the '50s. Tab would be foolish not to hide or he would not have a career.

[00:38:11]

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : What do you think of your dinner date here, Tab?

TAB HUNTER : She's very lovely, I must say.

MALE : Isn't she?

TAB HUNTER : The public saw me as one person and I was another. I didn't feel good about myself.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Hollywood's most eligible bachelor, Mr. Tab Hunter.

[00:38:27]

TAB HUNTER : I never felt that I deserved a lot of that stuff that was happening. You were rewarded for pretending that you were someone you're not. Henry Willson was a good agent but people outgrow one another. Then Dick Clayton became an agent. I signed with him immediately because I could trust him, and he was family.

[00:39:00]

I told Henry I was leaving him. He was furious. Henry was very, very upset. In fact, because of that I'm sure it's why he turned over that story to Confidential Magazine on me.

RONA BARRETT : In the 1950's, the magazine that you had to be most concerned about was Confidential.

TAB HUNTER : Oh, Confidential was the talk of Hollywood 'cause everyone was afraid that if there was a skeleton in the closet it would be released.

[FILM CLIP]

ROCK HUDSON : God knows I love you but I won't let Ned, nor Kay, nor anyone else run our lives, Carrie.

[00:39:37]

ROBERT WAGNER : Confidential Magazine, they had some information on Rock that was very damaging to his career and they were gonna print it. Rock Hudson was the biggest star that Henry Willson ever had. He built Rock and that was his meal ticket. He was gonna protect that.

[00:40:00]

TAB HUNTER : To save Rock, uh, Henry gave Confidential the story about me when I'd been arrested when I was just starting out in the business. Inside the magazine the article read Tab Hunter caught at a limp-wristed pajama party. I would say I was thrown under the bus. When the magazine came out I was sure that my career was over. I took Natalie to the Academy Awards. That was about the time, a little after the Confidential had come out.

[00:40:33]

The press of the world was there photographing us, and one guy yelled out, smile pretty this way Tab, this is for the next issue of Confidential Magazine. Jack Warner, God bless him, he

turned me right back to the cameras and said, just remember this, today's headlines, tomorrow's toilet paper.

[00:40:54]

RONA BARRETT : Everybody was nervous but in those days they could cover those things up. So if you are a moneymaker for a studio, they are gonna protect that image like there is no tomorrow.

DARRYL HICKMAN : The press knew just about everything, and they kept it to themselves when it was to their advantage and to the advantage of the studios. It was a gentlemen's agreement, just keep it out of the press and don't make waves.

[00:41:27]

TAB HUNTER : Jack Warner and I never discussed my sexuality whatsoever. I was making a lot of money for them. As long as I didn't destroy this image that they were creating, that was important to them. They created this persona. That was your job to be that persona. You played the game, so to speak, if that's what they want. I did sign a contract and I was willing to do whatever they wanted me to do to fulfill that contract.

[00:42:03]

[FILM CLIP]

ERNIE FORD : Don't you ever think about marriage?

TAB HUNTER : All the time, Ernie. That's what keeps me single.

[00:42:10]

TAB HUNTER : I thought of marriage a number of times because it's expected of you. When I did the film Lafayette Escadrille, that's when I first met Etchika Choureau. She stopped me dead in my tracks. She was gorgeous. And we hit it off immediately. She didn't speak a word of English. My French was just awful.

ETCHIKA CHOUREAU : [SPEAKING FRENCH] I can't remember what we talked about because he did not speak one word of French and I only spoke three words of English. I don't know how we communicated. Undoubtedly with our eyes. But in any case, we got on like a house on fire. And he was irresistible.

[00:42:52]

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : I usually can think of a lot of things to say. Suddenly I can't say anything.

TAB HUNTER : We had wonderful times together and I was drawn closer and closer to her.

ETCHIKA CHOUREAU : [SPEAKING FRENCH] Yes, I had heard that Tab was homosexual. I think it was a soul-searching period of time about his sexuality. It must have been very painful for him. You know, actors often, always, have two faces.

[00:43:34]

TAB HUNTER : I did feel discomfort and I did feel a little bit of guilt also. But I did seriously think of marrying Etchika.

ETCHIKA CHOUREAU : [SPEAKING FRENCH] I was flattered to have been chosen of course. If I was to marry Tab it would have been for love. I would inevitably have never accepted to share him with someone else. And I certainly would not have married him to protect him and hide his homosexuality. I think Tab was too good of a man. He would never have accepted such a thing. It would have been a lovely story if only it could have been rewritten.

[00:44:18]

TAB HUNTER : She went back to Paris. I just couldn't commit to her. It wouldn't have been right to be with Etchika. I felt that if you were with a man you were sinning, and if you were with a woman, you'd be lying. Tony and I met at the pool at the Chateau Marmont.

[00:44:48]

He was in California doing Friendly Persuasion.

[FILM CLIP]

TONY PERKINS : I don't wanna die. I don't know if I could kill anyone if I tried.

TAB HUNTER : He was a good actor.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : What is there about Tony Perkins that made the young people of America acclaim him as their star of the future?

[00:45:06]

TAB HUNTER : I'd been in the business longer but I respected the fact that he'd done Broadway plays. I thought he

was very intelligent. And, uh, he was just fun to be with. We just kind of hit it off.

TONY PERKINS : [SINGING] Let's go on a moonlight swim.

TAB HUNTER : And I went up to his room with him. That's when Tony and I, uh, got together for the first time, and that's when we started seeing each other.

[00:45:36]

VENETIA STEVENSON : When I first saw Tab and Tony I knew that they were more than friends. It was pretty obvious.

TAB HUNTER : I had a wonderful relationship with him. I did trust him. I was comfortable with him.

VENETIA STEVENSON : Tony and Tab were totally different. Tony was east coast, Tab was west coast. Tab was very macho. Tony was very sensitive, introverted.

[00:46:09]

TAB HUNTER : I would see him quite a lot. He stayed at my place, lived there for a while, got an apartment around the corner. Then I would go back east, I'd stay with Tony at his

place. I knew that he was very dedicated to being an actor in Hollywood.

[FILM CLIP]

FEMALE : And the most promising male star of tomorrow is the fine young actor, Tony Perkins.

[00:46:33]

TAB HUNTER : Tony was very concerned about his image, and doing the right thing.

VENETIA STEVENSON : They would go to a lot of pains not to be seen together.

TAB HUNTER : At first when Tony and I used to go out we would go out together. But he would get recognized, I would get recognized. He felt very uncomfortable. I always did, too, because the idea of two young actors around together might start some talk.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : [SINGING] Yes I'm in love. Don't tell a soul.

[00:47:04]

TAB HUNTER : Natalie Wood and I would go to a premiere and then we'd go to Ciro's afterwards and be photographed dancing. Then we would leave and she'd go out the back door and she'd have a date with Dennis Hopper and I'd go see Tony.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : [SINGING] Sshh, don't let it get around.

TAB HUNTER : Tony and I did go out on double-dates together.

VENETIA STEVENSON : Tab and Tony and I went out together. I suppose I was a beard. But I was happy to be a beard because we were having a good time. I knew the game and we were playing it. In the fan magazines there'd be a picture of Tab and I, and then in the next page there'd be a picture of Tony and I doing something else, but never just Tab and Tony.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : [SINGING] Sshh, don't let it get around.

[00:48:02]

VENETIA STEVENSON : I did feel that Tab and Tony had a real relationship. I could see them together. But it was a painful relationship, at least for Tony. Tony was more in love with Tab than Tab was with him. Whenever Tab and Tony got into a fight, Tony would come to my house and cry on my shoulder about how mean Tab was.

[00:48:30]

TAB HUNTER : My relationship with Tony I never discussed with anyone. And if one of my so-called friends or my friends would mention it, I probably would've gone berserk. I would've hated it and denied it emphatically. I could blow up very quickly.

[FILM CLIP]

STEVE ALLEN : Tony, as the audience ovation indicates, your career is certainly going full steam ahead.

[00:48:52]

VENETIA STEVENSON : Tony was on his way to being a pretty big star. Tony's career was most important to him, more than anything. He could be extremely charming but I think he had a hidden agenda as far as his career was concerned.

TAB HUNTER : You never really knew Tony 100 percent. There was always a secretive side and he was a bit of a game player with people's minds.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Can't you see it's a brush-off? They're trying me out in a position they know I can't play, and just as I make a few errors they're gonna drop me? Can't you see it?

[00:49:29]

TAB HUNTER : The first live television show I did was Fear Strikes Out. I played, uh, Jimmy Piersall. He was a ball player who had mental problems. Tony caught my performance and told me how much he liked it. I confided in Tony that I wanted Warner Brothers to buy the project for me to make a movie out of it. One evening we were playing Ping-Pong on the terrace and he said, oh by the way, Paramount just bought Fear Strikes Out for me.

[00:50:01]

And it just was like whoa. He had mentioned it to the studio and, uh, they got it for him. He was a very ambitious young man and a very fine actor and should be working. But I did feel betrayed, uh, by that move.

[FILM CLIP]

TONY PERKINS : Win Jimmy, win, that's all you ever cared about. And you're killing me. You've been killing me for years, yes you have, and it's too much.

[00:50:35]

TAB HUNTER : He was very good in the film but our relationship was strained after that. He told me that his studio didn't want him to see me anymore. We saw less and less of each other. And we just sort of grew apart. Damn Yankees was a huge Broadway hit. Jack Warner bought Damn Yankees for me.

[00:51:10]

It was the first really good project for me from Warner Brothers. Jack Warner brought in the whole New York cast, except for the lead, and he wanted me to do that. I was the only outsider in it.

RAE ALLEN : It needed some sparkle, which he had.

[FILM CLIP]

RAE ALLEN : What's the story on this kid?

SHANNON BOLIN : This Tab Hunter was like a breath of spring.

MALE : Wow.

[00:51:36]

TAB HUNTER : The director was George Abbott. He didn't want me at all. He wanted Don Murray.

BILL WELLMAN, JR. : Warner said I want you to use Tab Hunter. He's the biggest star at my studio. Every one of his pictures is popular. Tab was certainly at the top of his game.

[00:51:57]

TAB HUNTER : George Abbott and I did not get along. The first time I met him was at the read-through. The whole New York cast was sitting there. After I read a few lines he said I want you to read it like this. He gave me a line reading, which actors do not like.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : I want to exercise the escape clause which is to take place on the 24th, which is today.

[00:52:17]

TAB HUNTER : So I read it the way he wanted me to. We went on and he stopped me about two or three or four times, and finally I just had had enough. So I stopped and I said Mr. Abbott, from what I gather you'd like me to do it the way Stephen Douglas did it on Broadway. He said yes, yes, that's exactly what I would like. I said well, I thought Stephen Douglas had a magnificent voice, but I thought he was a real stick. If I play the character, first of all, he's gotta be a human being. That was the wrong thing to tell him.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Oh, I'm honest but, uh, I'm dumb too.

[00:52:52]

TAB HUNTER : He closed his script, said thank you all very much. He got up and left the room and I was fired off the picture. Jack Warner went to Abbott and said I bought it for Tab Hunter. Tab Hunter's going to do it. You don't say no to Jack Warner.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Okay, you win, get a uniform.

TAB HUNTER : You mean it?

MALE : I mean it.

TAB HUNTER : Wow I made it.

[00:53:13]

TAB HUNTER : So I did the film but it was difficult knowing that he never wanted me right from the start.

[FILM CLIP]

GWEN VERDON : [SINGING] Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets.

TAB HUNTER : And Gwen Verdon, Gwen always called me like a New York cab driver, Tab Hunter. [LAUGH] I loved it. The choreographer was Bobby Fosse. You can't get any better than that. Bobby Fosse made me look like I could dance even though I have two left feet. And he said don't worry about it, Tab, you'll be fine.

[FILM CLIP]

SHANNON BOLIN : You see, Mister, Mister, uh --

TAB HUNTER : Uh, Hardy, Joe Hardy.

[00:53:52]

SHANNON BOLIN : I just felt like I wanted to take him in my arms. Well, he was perfect for the role.

RAE ALLEN : He was delicious in it, and I think that Mr. Abbott was very satisfied with him ultimately.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : A carton of Winstons, and Tab, thanks a million.

TAB HUNTER : Thank you very much.

[00:54:10]

ROBERT WAGNER : He was always, always trying to be better. Probably at that time, his looks got in the way a bit.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : I've had a great evening, really I have. I'll never forget it.

ROBERT OSBORNE : The era that Tab got kind of stuck in was that era when we were all very attracted to the Brando angst and the Jimmy Dean angst.

[FILM CLIP]

JIMMY DEAN : You're tearing me apart.

[00:54:37]

TAB HUNTER : Warner Brothers had Jimmy as the rebel and they had me as the all-American boy, so they had their bases covered. They did discuss me for the Jimmy Dean role in Rebel Without a Cause. Can you imagine that? [LAUGH]

ROBERT OSBORNE : He didn't get the opportunities with some of those parts that he could've done very well. They were terribly complicated people. And one of the great assets of Tab Hunter was the fact that he didn't look like a terribly complicated person.

[00:55:08]

CONNIE STEVENS : You know, it's a curse and it's a blessing to have that kind of career where they think that you are that infectious smile, or you are that person that jumps off the screen to them.

RONA BARRETT : Tab had a very difficult time trying to prove that behind his face there really is a talent.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Playhouse 90, tonight starring Tab Hunter.

[00:55:37]

TAB HUNTER : The director Arthur Penn, said there's a great script I've just read. It was called Portrait of a Murderer. He said will you do it? I said oh, I don't think so. Live television, that would scare the hell out of me. I was awfully guilty of saying I can't do that, or I'm afraid to do this. But you've just gotta go [MAKES SOUND] take the plunge.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Portrait of a Murderer, directed by Arthur Penn.

[00:56:07]

TAB HUNTER : It was the true story of Donald Basher, a man who committed burglaries and murdered these people. It was a very powerful piece of material.

[FILM CLIP]

FEMALE : Put that back right now. I'm calling the police. You're going to get arrested for breaking in here.

DON MURRAY : He was frightening, really frightening. He played it so well because it seemed to be going against his own persona.

[00:56:40]

REX REED : Here was Geraldine Page from the Actor's Studio in New York. It was a whole different way of working. Tab kept up with her.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : I don't want to bring you back luck.

GERALDINE PAGE : Bad luck? You're my good luck, my best luck.

RED REED : This was big time. This wasn't just some teenage heartthrob who got a break.

[00:56:59]

TAB HUNTER : Oh, I was proud of that show. It was a good show. Television was giving me the opportunity to do things that I could not do in motion pictures, with the most creative people in the industry. Directors like Sidney Lumet, John

Frankenheimer. Really good actors and actresses and good writers. I loved live television.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Tab Hunter.

[00:57:24]

EDDIE MULLER : Then it started to click where he was getting cast in things that made sense and he was no longer a joke.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Come on just let me brand them.

MALE : I told you to put that gun away.

TAB HUNTER : Yes sir.

[00:57:40]

TAB HUNTER : I'd played heavy on television but never in a film. It just was such a good character, such a pathetic character.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : From now on I'm going my own way, me, Ed Hackett.

GARY GIDDINS : He's a complete psychopath.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : I'm giving you an order.

TAB HUNTER : You can go to hell.

GARY GIDDINS : He's a racist.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : You mean to tell me you'd marry that no-good half-breed?

[00:58:01]

GARY GIDDINS : He's a murderer.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Mister, you made a mistake in pulling that gun.

GARY GIDDINS : He's just waiting to explode.

TAB HUNTER : Of all the films I've done, Gunman's Walk was some of my best work as an actor. After Gunman's Walk, Hollywood started to see me in a new way. I started getting cast in some very nice productions. They Came to Cordura with Gary Cooper and Rita Hayworth, The Pleasure of His Company with Fred Astaire and Debbie Reynolds, That Kind of Woman with Sophia Loren. These wonderful films were not being made at Warner Brothers where I was under contract.

[00:58:47]

Warners would loan me out for like \$250,000 a picture. Then they would pay me my regular Warner Brothers' weekly salary and they would pocket the difference. I was getting a little upset about that. The two films that Natalie and I did together were both big hits. So the studio wanted to put us together in another film. But I read the script and I thought I can't do this. I turned it down because I knew what I liked and knew what I didn't like and I wanted to grow.

[00:59:22]

I'm not a puppet so I asked the studio for my release. Well needless to say Jack Warner wasn't about to have that happen. And I said, well Mr. Warner, how much would it cost? And he

said if you want out you pay us \$100,000 for the remainder of your contract. That was a lot of money, like a couple million today. But to express myself and be my own person, I figured I've got to do it. Products of Hollywood are interchangeable, and ultimately replaceable.

[FILM CLIP]

TROY DONAHUE : Get out of here, dad. If you weren't half drunk I'd throw you out.

[01:00:07]

TAB HUNTER : Troy Donahue was a young actor. He was one of Henry's clients. Actually Henry Willson tried to stick me with that name before they gave me Tab Hunter. Warner Brothers was trying to make Troy Donahue in the image of Tab Hunter. They started building Troy's career and gave him a very good career. You been a good old wagon but you done broke down.
[MAKES SOUND] You're out and somebody else is in there.

[01:00:38]

Leaving Warner Brothers was career suicide. I thought there'd be opportunities for me at other studios but that was not the case. The days of studio contracts were over. I was now a freelance actor on my own. And my primary concern was taking

care of my mother. I had a lot of responsibilities and it was tough to keep your head above water. I would do anything to pay down my debt.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Operation Bikini, starring Tab Hunter.

[01:01:13]

TAB HUNTER : My career was really drying up in Hollywood, so I would take whatever was available. I was no longer looking for the keys to the kingdom.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : The Golden Arrow, starring Tab Hunter.

TAB HUNTER : Well not many actors can say that they rode a flying carpet. When you have to live and you need a job, you'll accept what's there.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Tab Hunter in a dual role as a heroic security officer, and a treacherous enemy agent.

[01:01:43]

TAB HUNTER : Birds Do It with Soupy Sales. That's a winner.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Tab Hunter is Steamer. He goes all the way for everything Hawaiian.

TAB HUNTER : To this day people are still coming up and saying, oh I loved you in all those beach movies. I only did one. That was Ride the Wild Surf. Everybody kept thinking of me as a surfer. And at that point I felt that I was a little long in the tooth for that one. I was 32 at the time. They would have us on a little red flyer wagon on our knees with a process shot behind us of this mountainous wave. And then a prop man would be in front of us with a bucket of water, going splash, splash, splash, splash.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Someone point me toward the nearest bank.

[01:02:26]

TAB HUNTER : This was called paying the bills and keep working. That's what it's all about.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : The Tab Hunter Show.

TAB HUNTER : The television series that I did, this was bottom of the barrel.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : But that's impossible.

[01:02:38]

TAB HUNTER : This so-called comedy wound up with a director who would say to us, come on, come on, faster, faster. Fast is funny but faster is funnier.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : When do you meet her? Right now.

[01:02:51]

TAB HUNTER : It was really bad stuff. The bloom came off the rose and my career was going [MAKES SOUND].

[FILM CLIP]

SOUPY SALES : Beat it, Tab. Can't you see I'm busy?

TAB HUNTER : Without the protection of the studio, my boy-next-door image was in total freefall. People could say and write what they wanted and they did. If I had still been under contract, they'd have nailed it like that. I was sick of Hollywood. Sick of the media. And I had just about lost faith in everything.

[01:03:32]

As I was doing films, I would always run back to the stable. The thing about being alone on a horse, it helps you divorce yourself from yourself, because you're working with an animal that has a life of its own. It's a marriage that's quite marvelous. I found my touch of reality in that unrealistic world of Hollywood.

[01:04:02]

NEAL NOORLAG : He was riding a jumper. I was in awe of him because of how he rode. I was standing at the back gate and we just started talking. I didn't know who he was. And he asked me questions like, do I ride? And I said oh yeah, I grew up on a horse. He said do you ride jumping horses? And I said no, I've not done that but the thought appeals to me. And he said I'd be willing to teach you some jumping. I took him up on it and so we became friends after that. He didn't have all the

trappings, I didn't think, that a star would have. He was a very real person.

[01:04:50]

TAB HUNTER : It was the first long-term relationship that I ever had. We were together for about seven years.

NEAL NOORLAG : Hollywood turned their back on him and I realized what it must be like to be very popular and to be very unpopular. I certainly commiserated with him. But he didn't ever want to talk about it much.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Tab's been out of town for a while. Now he's back, just horsing around, waiting for the day he's discovered again.

[01:05:25]

TAB HUNTER : I was very concerned. So I bought space in Variety to just tell people, hello is there any possibility of getting a job somewhere around here?

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : I just wanted people to know that I wasn't dead, that I'm still alive.

TAB HUNTER : And a couple of responses, really sweet people, said yeah, get lost or yeah, drop dead.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Tab Hunter, who was every high school girl's idea of a dreamboat. He was a boy who never seemed to get any older. Well, he has.

[01:05:54]

TAB HUNTER : Well I might as well have been a relic from the Silent Era because people wanted real people in real situations, no more Hollywood, made-up personas.

[FILM CLIP]

PETER FONDA : We wanna be free to ride our machines without being hassled by the man.

[01:06:09]

TAB HUNTER : The new actors were anti-establishment and I was apple pie and all-American.

GARY GIDDINS : It would've taken some director to give him the kind of a part that would make everybody look at him in a

new way. In order to make the change he would've had to do something really radical.

TAMARA ASSEYEV : This was a low-budget horror film, made on a shoestring. It needed a very handsome, debonair man who would love women to death. Tab Hunter would be the last person you would expect to do that.

[01:06:50]

TAB HUNTER : Sweet Kill was certainly way out there. I did it because the movie roles were just not coming along.

GARY GIDDINS : Tab was so much a part of that Eisenhower era. The '50s as an era was repudiated in the '60s.

[FILM CLIP]

JERRY RUBIN : Young people are the only people in this whole country that have saved the soul of America.

GEORGE TAKEI : It was a completely changed world. America was at war with itself, as well as at war with Vietnam.

[01:07:30]

TAB HUNTER : My brother was in military medical evacuations. He had joined the Navy. He wound up in Vietnam as so many young men did. I was at a horse show at the Cow Palace in San Francisco, and I was sitting on my horse at the back gate waiting for the announcer my horse Knob Hill and myself for the next entry into the arena. And I saw a man in a military uniform coming.

[01:07:59]

And he walked over to me and he said are you Art Gelien? I just want to tell you, your brother was killed in Vietnam. I thought why him? Why not me? Walt was married and he had seven children. I remember taking the moment, closing my eyes, and saying Walt, I'm gonna win this class for you. And my horse won the class that night.

[01:08:37]

And then afterwards I went back to the barn and when I was in the stall with my horse I totally lost it. I was scared of my own shadow. My brother was the one who opened the doors of life for me. I really looked up to him so much. My mother was very stoic about my brother's death.

[01:09:08]

She was getting better but it took a while. I was very concerned about her wellbeing and I would see her a great deal more than I had when I was running around with the movies. I found her a little apartment in Long Beach. Whatever she needed, I would be there for her. Well I made a promise to my mother to take care of her, and I definitely was going to keep it. I had to create work in some way.

[01:09:40]

I discovered dinner theater. Dinner theater was a place where people could come and stuff their faces, then sit back and while they were getting ready to belch, watch the show that you were doing. [LAUGH] They were becoming very, very popular.

LIZ TORRES : There was a stigma attached to working dinner theaters. They said that it was the place that old actors went to die.

[01:10:09]

TAB HUNTER : I was making more money in dinner theater than I was waiting for a picture now and then in Hollywood, that's for sure. Six weeks here, eight weeks there, four weeks here, all over the country. I felt I had to keep going, once you put yourself in that gear. I was on the road constantly.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : You're starring in Here Lies Jeremy Troy which is at the Grand Dinner Theater in Anaheim.

TAB HUNTER : That's right. We'll be there for eight weeks. It's right opposite the entrance to Disneyland.

LIZ TORRES : It's a very lonely, lonely existence. You perform in front of 1,500 people and you go home to a hotel room in the middle of nowhere by yourself.

[01:10:50]

TAB HUNTER : Working in dinner theater was very exhausting. And doing that every single night took a toll on me. I wore myself right into the ground, to the point of where I had a heart attack. I was sure that, uh, it could be the end. I was wondering if I was gonna be able to make it, and I was praying a lot. I did give up dinner theater after that.

[01:11:20]

I learned to try to relax a bit. I learned to be grateful for every moment and thankful, thankful. I love the church. I love my religion but I still just felt like I was such an outcast

because of my sexuality. It took a long time for me to find my way back. It was so peaceful and it was so important that I try to be a part of it.

[01:11:58]

And I struck up a conversation with a priest who I felt that I could really communicate with. I told him I was a Catholic and I told him I had some terrible reservations. He was so receptive and he really made me feel better about myself.

DOLORES HART : He was discovering something about his own truth. For a man to have to live and someone else's presuming about who you should love, how do you ever know yourself? He was going to go where his heart told him to go.

[01:12:44]

TAB HUNTER : By going back to my church and beliefs, that really, really helped me through a very difficult period. And little by little I just felt, uh, the weight of the world was lifted from me.

JOHN WATERS : I knew Tab as an image, you know, and that was the thing that was so very important to me and why I so much wanted him to be in Polyester.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : It's Todd, honey.

DIVINE : Todd?

TAB HUNTER : Todd Tomorrow.

[01:13:20]

TAB HUNTER : John Waters called me up on the telephone and said I've got a script I'd like you to read for a film with Divine.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : What do you think, sweetheart?

DIVINE : Oh, it's very high-brow, Todd.

[01:13:30]

TAB HUNTER : And then he said how would you feel about kissing a 300-pound transvestite? [LAUGH] I just said I'm sure I've kissed a hell of a lot worse. John's films were outrageous.

JOHN WATERS : I prayed that he would never go watch Pink Flamingos.

[FILM CLIP]

FEMALE : Happy Birthday, fatso.

JOHN WATERS : And he did.

[FILM CLIP]

DIVINE : How could anyone be filthier than Divine?

JOHN WATERS : Even then he didn't say oh, well never mind. He was unafraid.

[01:14:00]

TAB HUNTER : I remember an agent saying to me at the time, you can't do that film. And my response was what have I got to lose? Where's my career now? I thought this will be a lot of fun.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Why don't you show me your bedroom, honey?

DIVINE : Mother, may I?

TAB HUNTER : Yes you may.

DIVINE : Ooh.

JOHN WATERS : I could only afford him for one week. I'm sure it was the least Tab Hunter was ever paid and it was by far, the most I've ever paid anybody.

[01:14:26]

TAB HUNTER : Doing a film for John, you know, you gotta find a spot on the floor where you can sit down between takes. Cold pizza at two a.m. [LAUGH]

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Are you my little flesh pot?

JOHN WATERS : It was the first time ever we had, quote, a real movie star come in and work with my movie stars. Tab made out with Divine who was in drag. People could not believe their eyes. That's why the movie worked, because they together were a great screen couple.

[01:14:57]

TAB HUNTER : A couple people said oh, don't worry about it, nobody's gonna see this film. The movie came out, it was a hit and it definitely revitalized my career.

[FILM CLIP]

FEMALE : Mr. Tab Hunter, yay.

TAB HUNTER : Well there was a whole new audience that never heard of Tab Hunter.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Now what is the best time of the month for a woman to conceive?

TAB HUNTER : I feel like a new old face, or an old new face, so I'm getting my toe in the door to start all over again. It's very exciting.

[01:15:24]

JOHN WATERS : Tab was serious about his career but he never took himself that seriously.

[FILM CLIP]

MALE : Tab, what do you do for a living?

TAB HUNTER : Well Erno, I'm a Hollywood movie star and I've been in over 40 films and I live in Beverly Hills.

MALE : That sounds exciting.

LAINIE KAZAN : He found himself amusing. When you have a sense of humor about yourself, people appreciate you in another way.

[01:15:48]

TAB HUNTER : I wanted to work with Divine again. I had come up with the idea of doing a western comedy. It was called Lust in the Dust.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : Tab Hunter is the stranger. And Divine is Rosie Velez.

DIVINE : Come and get it.

[01:16:06]

TAB HUNTER : I turned over every stone I possibly could, trying to get Lust in the Dust going forward.

ALLAN GLASER : The first time I saw Tab in person was when he walked into my office at Fox to pitch Lust in the Dust. Tab still had that star quality.

[01:16:24]

TAB HUNTER : And I mentioned the project to Allan and he hit on it right away and said what a wonderful idea.

ALLAN GLASER : Once Tab left the meeting, I thought yeah, Lust in the Dust could work.

TAB HUNTER : I knew I could trust him almost immediately. I found Allan very attractive, very bright, and I wanted to spend more time with him.

[01:16:46]

ALLAN GLASER : Tab started calling me and I thought initially it was just to follow up about Lust in the Dust but it went beyond that. Tab was 30 years older than I was. I was 23. Tab was 53, but once we did connect I couldn't imagine us not being together. And then the more our personal relationship grew the more I was determined to get that movie done.

[01:17:18]

I tried to get it going at Fox and there was a little bit of interest but they ultimately passed on it. Tab said to me I should get involved and produce this. That would mean having to leave my secure job at Fox, which I did. People told me I was taking a big risk leaving the studio. But I had a hunch that my future would be better with Tab, so I left.

[01:17:46]

TAB HUNTER : And he singlehandedly raised all the money for that film.

[FILM CLIP]

LAINIE KAZAN : You got it all wrong honey, you've been cheap all your life.

DIVINE : Cheap?

LAINIE KAZAN : I was the sister of Divine.

[FILM CLIP]

DIVINE : This furniture's cheap.

LAINIE KAZAN : I look like a drag queen, you know? That was, [LAUGH] I think that was the idea. My love scene with Tab Hunter, we were in a shower. It was delicious.

[01:18:13]

NOAH WYLE : The first film I ever appeared in was Lust in the Dust. That set in particular had a real sense of frivolity and fun about it. And I remember being stuck by Tab's naturalism, how effortlessly everything he was doing was coming across.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Victory shifts from man to man.

MALE : Deuteronomy?

TAB HUNTER : Homer.

[01:18:32]

NOAH WYLE : Everybody was sort of paying it larger than life.

TAB HUNTER : Lust in the Dust was well-received and it certainly opened doors for us to do other things.

ALLAN GLASER : Tab definitely had a value. I got a lot of meetings just because Tab was attached. We were doing these independent projects and Tab's celebrity helped me raise the financing. It was a very productive time for us. For me it was a challenge to make it work, which I enjoyed, but not so much for Tab. He didn't find that same excitement that I found in trying to get these projects going.

[01:19:14]

TAB HUNTER : Well I never paid a lot of attention to what was happening in Hollywood. I let Allan do all of that 'cause he was really good at it.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : How are you? Tab Hunter.

ALLAN GLASER : By this time Tab wasn't too happy to continue acting. Tab was still getting offers but he turned 90 percent of everything he was offered, down.

[01:19:37]

TAB HUNTER : People were coming out, and that was their choice to do so, and I respect that. Personally I didn't want my sexuality to define who I was. I just didn't talk about it.

It's not my comfort zone. I was point-blank asked about my sexuality.

[FILM CLIP]

LARRY KING : Wasn't it difficult to be in a closet?

[01:20:03]

TAB HUNTER : Some of the press occasionally would cross that boundary. I'm entitled to have that line there and if I don't want to share that with you, I won't.

[FILM CLIP]

HUGH JACKMAN : I think it probably means I finally made it. I mean, you can't be a star without having a gay rumor out there, can you? [LAUGH]

EDDIE MULLER : In some respects the business is still like it was in the '50s.

NOAH WYLE : It may be a lot more socially acceptable to be gay, but I know several people who are very prominent in this industry who feel perhaps legitimately that if they came out, it would affect their box office appeal.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Let's put it this way, fellas, a Gillette shave turns a trick.

[01:20:43]

PORTIA DE ROSSI : For someone who is the fantasy for women all across America and the world, to come out in the public and say I'm gay and expect to play leading men, is an issue. It's still tricky. Every actor who has a secret like being gay, there's a part of us that are afraid of Hollywood. We're afraid to, to be who we are completely. That's a hard life to lead.

[01:21:15]

TAB HUNTER : After decades of being in the public eye, all I wanted was my privacy. In order to achieve that I just withdrew from it all for good. My life had been very transient. I never thought of settling down. But then Allan came into my life and just opened up whole new vistas.

[01:21:50]

ALLAN GLASER : We're so much a part of each other now because we have been together for so long and it's just one of those things that works.

TAB HUNTER : Allan's a very stabilizing influence. I have a wonderful relationship with Allan, that's grown over 30-some years. This is really an incredible person that I want to spend my life with.

[01:22:22]

ALLAN GLASER : What brings Tab pleasure on a daily basis, and I can sum it up in one word, is Harlow.

TAB HUNTER : This old cow, look at her.

ALLAN GLASER : Harlow, Tab's horse, is what gives Tab joy.

TAB HUNTER : This is what makes me happiest. This is where I really feel more at ease than I would anywhere else.

ALLAN GLASER : It's getting up in the morning, having to go clean out that stall, having to groom that horse.

TAB HUNTER : Whoa, listen to your belly growl.

CLINT EASTWOOD : That sounds like a pretty good life, riding horses and just kind of cooling his heels.

[01:22:57]

TAB HUNTER : Okay move your tush, sweetheart.

CLINT EASTWOOD : He's a better man than I am. I try to stay away from anything weighing 1,400 pounds and has a brain the size of a walnut.

PORTIA DE ROSSI : When you have a passion that fulfills you, you don't look to other areas to fill you up. Tab is an incredible horseman and always has been. And that is a career in itself.

[01:23:27]

TAB HUNTER : Well, my acting career I look at as being all in the past. I loved it, but I love where I am now in my life and I am happy to be forgotten.

ALLAN GLASER : Tab's attitude to his Hollywood career is been there, done that. He calls it his past life, which drives me nuts. I found this at a flea market. It's something that he could embrace but he doesn't care to do it. He did it, he let go of it. He doesn't even want to see himself on television.

If he's laying in bed and an old movie of his comes on, he doesn't stop for one second.

[FILM CLIP]

TAB HUNTER : Forget it.

[01:24:11]

ALLAN GLASER : He just flips through the channel like it was a dog food commercial and keeps going.

[FILM CLIP]

TONY PERKINS : Well a boy's best friend is his mother.

ALLAN GLASER : We were casting Lust in the Dust and there was this character named Hard Case Williams and I thought Tony Perkins would be perfect for that role.

[FILM CLIP]

VOICEOVER : 22 years later Norman Bates is home.

[01:24:36]

ALLAN GLASER : Psycho II had just come out. Tony was getting a tremendous amount of publicity. Tab was having a career resurgence at the same exact time Tony Perkins was.

[01:24:48]

TAB HUNTER : He said Tony Perkins, do you know him?

[LAUGH] I said yeah Allan, I know him. [LAUGH] I contacted Tony, went up to his house up on Mulholland. I hadn't seen him in a long while. His wife Berry answered the door. Tony had married, had a family. And I presented Tony with a script.

[01:25:16]

And he said he really would like to do it but he just didn't think it was the right project for him at the time. When Tony and I said goodbye that afternoon, that was the last time that I saw Tony.

[FILM CLIP]

FEMALE : AIDS has taken the life of actor Anthony Perkins. He died Saturday at his Los Angeles home.

[01:25:37]

TAB HUNTER : I never felt that Tony was struggling with his identity. And when I did hear of it I was really quite surprised. Maybe he was deep down unhappy with himself about being gay, and wanted to change that. His choice was right for

him, and it's all part of a person's growth. Tony was who he was, or maybe who he wanted to be. That was good enough for me.

[01:26:08]

I had no right, no one does, to be judgmental or to second-guess his pursuit of happiness. There are an awful lot of people who have feelings and they're in conflict with themselves. And it's a terribly difficult thing to have to go through. I think you have to be true to yourself. My mother never said I love you a lot, but she'd show it when you'd least expect it.

[01:26:49]

My mother and I were sitting on the back terrace having breakfast one morning after church, and she leaned over and kissed me on the cheek and said I love you very much. I was in a good place with her, I know that. And she was in a good place with me. I miss her.

[01:27:13]

DEBBIE REYNOLDS : There's something well-grounded about Tab. That's why he's lasted all these years, is that he's real. He's like the earth. He's solid. He's happy in his own special way, to live his life and he's had a happy life. He chose that right road.

[01:27:46]

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