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*Dress by Jeanne Campbell for Sportswirl



How Bob Horton

His youth was a nightmare of injuries and illnesses that taught

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

TODAY, 36-year-old Robert Horton stands on top of the world. He is the star of "Wagon Train," one of television's highest rated shows; he owns his own plane and home; and he has enough money to retire if he wished.

But to get where he is today, Bob has had to overcome so many handicaps that he isn't likely to go easy on himself—or anybody else, for that matter.

Bob's early life reads like a report from a medical journal. By the time he was 12, he'd had three major operations and five arm fractures, been run over twice by cars, fallen out of a second-story window, and for two years, from 10 to 12, been considered an incurable invalid.

Accident- and illness-prone, Bob suffered setback after setback that prevented a normal growing up. Because of physical inactivity and the resulting frustration, he turned to eating constantly. Food became such an obsession that when he was 17 and only five feet, 10 inches tall, he weighed 205 pounds.

The fellows called him "Fatty." Girls refused to date him. And, as so many men have found out, the women in a man's life—or lack of them, in this case—proved a turning point. Bob had accepted his years of incapacity with fatalism, even self-pity. But when girls at

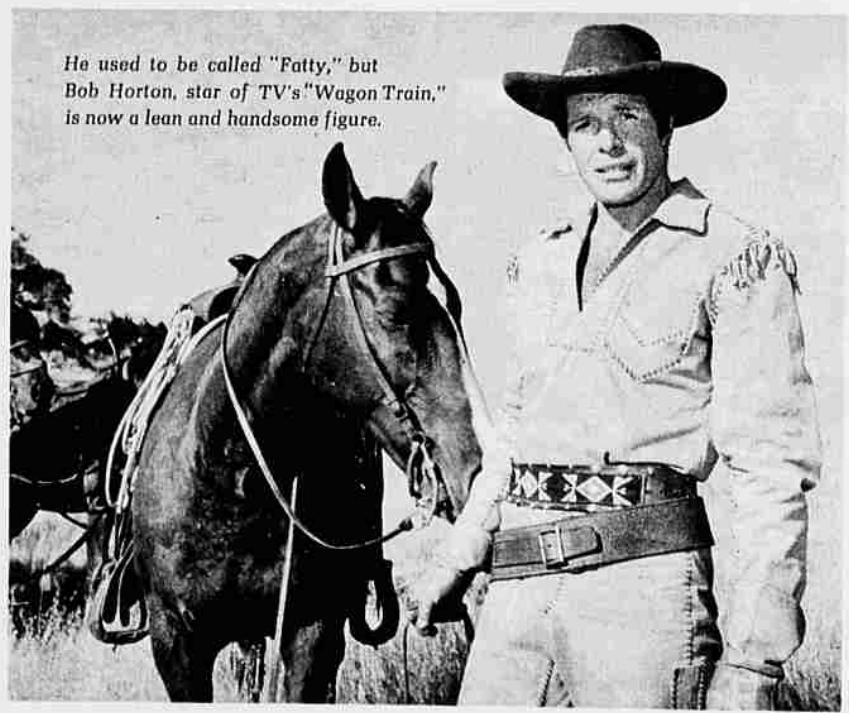
his high school rejected him, he started fighting back. Bob went on his own crash diet, lost 30 pounds in three months, and determined to live life with all the expected vigor of youth.

What's more, he did. And once he learned what he could do with determination, he never stopped setting goals for himself—and reaching them. It has led him to a career, wealth, and fame—but not always happiness.

Women are one example. Bob has been one of Hollywood's most sought-after bachelors. But success in marriage has eluded him until recently. Marriages to script reader Marilyn Jobe and actress Barbara Ruick ended in divorce. There was a long stint at playing Romeo before Bob's recent marriage to Marilyn Bradley last New Year's Eve in Las Vegas.

LIKE SO MANY other "self-made men," Bob Horton is not overly popular with everybody in Hollywood, and he doesn't care. He doesn't make friends, he says, because "actors just can't have friends, no matter how hard they try."

"Actually, I haven't done too badly," Bob says. "I have two people I can count as friends—Robert Walker, a casting director at 20th Century-Fox, and Dr. Hans Kohler, a Viennese dermatologist.



He used to be called "Fatty," but Bob Horton, star of TV's "Wagon Train," is now a lean and handsome figure.

Overcame His Handicaps

him how to get what he wanted—but not how to make friends

"That's doing pretty well. It's one friend more than a lot of people can count on, and two more than some."

Bob has had difficulties with his coworkers, too. He blames his outspokenness, as well as his conviction that you have to fight for what you want. This was obvious when he argued with "Wagon Train" producers for equal billing with the late Ward Bond, and won his point. Reportedly, it led to jealousies between the costars, aggravated when one got more publicity than the other.

There was considerable gossip about Bob's "feud" with Bond, but as Bob put it: "We had our differences, but they were from a professional viewpoint. His death was a great loss, and 'Wagon Train' won't be the same without him."

As for Bond, himself a tough competitor, he laughed off the feud. "Bob is a very talented young man," he said just before his death. "His portrayal of Flint McCullough has done much to make 'Wagon Train' the success it is. This so-called 'feud' I've been reading about is nothing more than the pipe dream of some very imaginative writers."

Nevertheless, Bob would probably be the first to admit he's no charm guy. It doesn't worry him, though. If aloofness ever becomes a big enough handicap, he will find a way to overcome that as well.



The late Ward Bond, who costarred with Bob, laughed off their "feud."

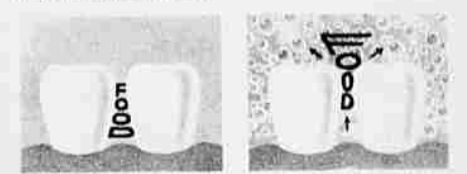
Bob took a new bride recently, Boston concert singer Marilyn Bradley.

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