

THE ADVENTUROUS LIFE OF GARY COOPER

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(Above) Gary at two-and-a-half, all dressed up. Like the hat? (Below, top picture) That's Gary on the left. Visiting the old swimmin' hole with his older brother and two friends. (Lower picture) Gary at twelve—in England, with some relatives.



Here's the story of Gary Cooper's life as it really happened. Not the story of a Hollywood Don Juan—the much-publicized hero of glamorous love affairs. Not the story of a movie actor with a palatial home and a foreign car. But the story of a very real, very likeable American chap who grew up on a ranch in Montana, having as many thrilling adventures as Tom Sawyer. And who, when he grew up, happened into a career as a movie actor

—The Editor

THE Adventurous Life of Gary Cooper began the day of his birth, May 7, 1902, in a small hospital in Helena, Montana. So slender was the thread of his existence that for the first two or three years Judge and Mrs. Charles Cooper were torn between being amazed, and then frightened, at his sudden strength and following relapses. It was just a toss-up whether Gary would pull through at all. But when he had successfully passed through all the children's diseases—the measles, the mumps, the chicken pox and a few more during his fifth and sixth years, his parents drew their first easy breath. If Gary could weather all that at once, maybe he could stand anything!

From the moment Gary was old enough to gaze out upon the world, which at that time was his father's thousand-acre ranch located sixty miles from Helena, he knew life as a struggle . . . and a hard one! He knew the hardships endured by his father and the ranch hands



There's Gary as a baby—about six months old. He looks chubby enough, but as a matter of fact, Coop had a pretty bad time for the first few years of his life. He caught all the children's diseases just as fast as he could. Kept poor Mrs. Cooper nearly frantic.



At three. Wearing his favorite costume and indulging in his favorite pastime—fishing. Dad Cooper's Montana ranch was a perfect small boy's paradise. When Gary was a bit older, Mrs. Cooper used to let him and his brother go out on two or three day trips.

to protect the crops and cattle from the ravages of the howling, destructive weather. He learned early the amazing fight of every living thing against Nature itself. For this reason, nothing in life . . . nothing that can happen to him . . . including movie glory and the ease of Hollywood, will ever be safe to Coop!

"It is when my life is apparently moving the calmest and the quietest that I really begin to worry!" Gary says.

His first real experience with Nature-on-a-rampage came when Gary was about six. The various illnesses which the youngest Cooper had combated had left him rather weak and Judge Cooper decided that he should spend the spring and summer on the ranch. Father couldn't get away, but mother and the two boys (Gary's brother was six years older) could have a great time out in the country. Besides, there would be Old Andy, the foreman, and a couple of cow hands to watch over them.

THE ranch was situated in a canyon with the Missouri River flowing about two hundred and fifty feet in front of the ranch house. Just across the river were the tracks of the railroad. Directly behind the house were the foothills of the eight thousand foot peaks that ranged and towered above them. Forty miles up the river was a dam that backed up a huge lake of water. Gary and his brother had spent quite some time pleading with their mother for permission to hike to the dam, but in the end she convinced them that forty miles was a bit too much for such young hikers. The boys immediately looked around for a new idea. How about putting up tents a ways from the house and living there? Mrs. Cooper finally agreed to this plan.

The first night of their "camping out," Gary was awakened from a sound sleep by a loud swishing noise. The dog had started to howl, too. The combination of howling, swishing and whining frightened little Coop and he called for his mother. "Go back to sleep," advised Mrs. Cooper, "it is nothing but the wind in the trees."

"Wow!" exclaimed Gary in reporting the incident. "You should have seen what we saw when we walked from our tents the next morning! *The Missouri River was just ten feet from the flaps of our tents!* The dam had broken and water was everywhere. Lucky for us we had pitched camp on the slope of the hill—or I wouldn't be here to tell you about it. The swishing I had heard during the night had been the furious onrush of the pent up water from the broken dam. And you should have seen the weird sights the destructive water had left behind! A large house had floated right up to our ranch house and stopped against a boulder—haystacks with chickens perched on them were floating down the stream—our own little cottonwood grove was entirely submerged. The railroad train, we learned later, had started down the line to warn all the ranches, but had been forced to stop before it got as far as our place. The rails were twisted and washed out across from us with some of the rails wrapped around large stones. What a sight!

"I suppose my brother and I were the only ones who really enjoyed the catastrophe. When the waters receded, we would walk through the fields barefooted and the mud oozing through our toes felt swell. The flood left thousands of fish in little ponds everywhere and we caught them by the handful. I rescued a one-eyed dog out of the wreckage and he was my inseparable pal for years.



(Above) Taken in Bath, England. His grandmother and uncle are with him. (Left) With his mother and father. (Below) In the top picture, with Buddy Rogers and Dick Arlen in "Wings" and below that, with Vilma Banky in "Barbara Worth."



"They had temporary tracks laid in about three weeks and the trains were about to start again—when it started to rain! And *how* it rained . . . for twenty-eight days and nights without a stop! The days were so dark that we had to keep the lamps burning. The river started mounting again; bridges were completely washed away and we were as marooned as though we had been on a desert island. Mother was terribly worried because she couldn't get a single word to father, back in Helena, concerning our safety—and father, we later learned, was on the verge of insanity because he could learn nothing concerning us. The more dangerous our situation became, in those days of darkness and nights of storm and disaster, the better I liked it!

AS though the ravages of the flood and rain were not enough, another very real danger was dumped right at our doorstep. The moment the rain ceased, the railroad shipped one hundred and fifty immigrant Turks into our territory to help with the new roadbed. Of course, they *had* to be dumped right near our property with only enough box cars to house half of them! The Turks were big and illiterate . . . still wearing the fez and sash of their home country. Each had a curved knife carefully concealed at the waist. After about two nights of sleeping on the damp ground in the open, those who had no cars to stay in got mighty well out of hand. It rained a bit the third night—and at dawn, seventy-five Turks went on the warpath.

"We were awakened just as it began to show light, and looking out the front windows of the ranch house we saw this horde of murderous looking men rallied in a



The young man is growing up—on the left. Taken after his return from school in England. How those Montana pals of his did whoop at his English duds and English accent! It seems there was a little private session behind the barn—after which the English accent became suddenly Americanized.

muttering, protesting body—right in our front yard! They were mad . . . we didn't need an interpreter to know that they wanted the warmth and protection of our ranch house. They would spit toward the house and shake their fists at the windows where our little group was clustered. One of the cow hands (who could drive nails with a six-shooter) got a little burned up and was all for letting them have it. Mother stopped him and for her judgment we can all thank God.

"While the men had their backs turned, mother suddenly threw her shawl over her shoulders and stepped out the door—right into the midst of all those dirty beggars. They were so surprised that they ceased muttering—nor did they make any effort or gesture of defiance. Our boys covered mother from the windows with their guns.

"Mother said: 'This is private property—but if you are cold you may sleep in the barns. The boys will build a fire for you there.' So gently did she speak to them that those seventy-five Turks turned and quietly followed her to the barns. I shall never forget that picture of my mother walking resolutely and unafraid among those cutthroats . . . swinging her lantern for light against the coming of a dark day. To me, she seemed a figure far braver than the glamorous heroes in the stories she read to us!

"From that time on, the Turks were quite friendly. When, about a year and a half later, there were only a few of them left on the section gang, I was very pally with them. The reason I saw them so often was the fact that there was a cold spring back of the ranch house in the trees and into this the Turks always put their bottles



Gary at twenty—just about the time he was trying to astound the world as a cartoonist. And just before that very frank Western producer said, "I don't want an actor—I want a guy who can manage a horse" and gave Gary his start on the Hollywood road. Like Gary's hair brushed back that way?

of beer for cooling. Late every evening they would come over to the spring and, after building a fire, sit in a large circle and drink beer. One Sunday afternoon, I wandered down to the spring to find out what all the noise could be. There were the Turks having a beer bust. They all offered me a bottle and finally I drank one. Eight-and-a-half years old . . . and a full quart of beer!

"I shall never forget the look on mother's face as she watched her young son stagger and reel up the path from the spring to the house. I can't recall whether she spanked me or sent me to bed . . . surely one or the other. The following morning the lectures began—and lasted almost the whole day. The beer hadn't made me sick, however, so the only regret I had was the fact that mother had been hurt by my actions."

GARY started to school that spring in the little log cabin schoolhouse located on the edge of the ranch. There were only ten pupils. The teacher, Miss Blessing, lived at the Cooper ranch house. (When Gary was doing one of his earlier Westerns, "Nevada," Miss Blessing visited him on the set . . . and they both got a great thrill out of the reunion.) But when Gary was young, Miss Blessing represented "schooling"—a form of compulsion that Gary cordially detested. He waited five days each week for Saturday to come so that he could go fishing and hunting.

"My first big game," smiled Coop, "was a chipmunk! Later I was able to bag ground hogs, rabbits, skunks and weasels. But it was a big thrill to get that first chipmunk. I remember bringing it home and telling my brother, 'When I grow up, I am going (Continued on page 99)

to be a big game hunter and lead expeditions into Africa!" Of course, one of our greatest treats was permission to pack up one of the horses with supplies and go on a hunting and camping trip. Sometimes a neighborhood kid or two would go along on these 'big game hunts' and we would stay for a couple of days at a time.

"One bright spring morning, during my eleventh year, I was surprised to find that my one-eyed dog had had a large litter of pups during the night. We watched them all morning but when we came out after lunch all but one had disappeared! We weren't able to figure it out until we looked up toward the hills and saw a small band of Indians. They had stolen our dogs! Brother and I started out to trail them. We stayed behind them for three miles and then they stopped and built a fire. We couldn't get close enough to watch them, but in about an hour they moved on again. We ran up to the place where they had been cooking and found the remains of all the little missing pups! That was my first adventure into nausea."

In the spring of Gary's twelfth year, the Coopers went to England for the purpose of visiting Mrs. Cooper's family. Gary was enrolled as a pupil in the grammar school at Dunstable, Bedfordshire. At first he hated it. He thought the kids were 'puttin' it on' with their accent and fancy clothes. He liked the open plains of Montana much more. Nor did the damp climate help Gary's health any.

"Study was the only thing left to do," explained Gary, "so I studied. I was at that impressionable age when a kid is easily influenced by his associates and surroundings. I began to drift into the new way of talking and dressing . . . both of which I had considered so sissy upon my arrival. But after about three years of England (and colds) Mother thought it was time to return to Montana and the open life."

The neighboring ranchers accorded the Cooper family quite a welcome—even the kids came along to yell 'howdy' to Gary. But once the old gang got a load of Coop's English duds (plus the rare old accent) they decided to give him a *private* welcome out behind the woodshed! When that was over, his imported clothes were in shreds and he had almost learned to talk American over again.

FOR the next two years, the Coopers alternated between the ranch in summer and Helena (the best schools were there) in the winter. About this time, Gary commenced to ride in real earnest. He went with the Indians on trapping jaunts and was proud of the fact that he even learned enough of their language to talk with them.

Then came the war. Gary wasn't old enough to go . . . but his brother went. This meant that a new man must be placed in charge of the ranch (Old

Andy had died). The new man had been in charge but a few weeks, however, when the Coopers began to miss a lot of calves. It only took Gary about ten days to get enough evidence to cause the new foreman to take out for the tall timbers pulling leather. Gary was put in as foreman in charge of a thousand head of cattle. When the beef was ready for the market, Coop got on the cattle train and personally took his stock to Minneapolis to the market. That was great fun.

Immediately upon his return, and much to Gary's disgust, Mrs. Cooper sent him to Montana Wesleyan School—from which he was kicked out almost immediately for joining a fraternity—frats being taboo at Wesleyan. From there, Gary went to Bozeman, Montana, where he prepared himself for college, (as Gary says: "God knows *how!*") and immediately entered Grinnell University in Iowa where he stayed for two years.

Except for a girl named Doris with whom Gary fell madly in love, college was a complete washout to him. He would have quit the first six weeks if Doris hadn't come into his life. She begged him to finish his schooling. He begged *her* to marry him. They compromised: if Gary would finish school, Doris would marry him. He stuck to his agreement for two years and then decided to quit and earn enough money to rush Doris off her feet.

(I wonder if a certain girl named Doris ever thinks of Big Coop, as she gazes at his name on a theater marquee? He has the reputation of being Coop, the bachelor—Coop, the man who won't get married—in Hollywood. Well, Doris could have changed all that. She could have married him fully three years before he came to Hollywood if she had wanted to. "Lord knows I begged her hard enough!" remembers Gary. But all Doris would say was, "Coop, you shouldn't even *think* of getting married! Married men have to stay set! You don't even know the meaning of the word!")

Gary was young and stubborn—used to having his own way. He decided to "show Doris." After he became a big game hunter—or a famous newspaper cartoonist—he figured she would be sorry enough she hadn't accepted him. But Africa was a bit far away, so Coop drifted back to Helena and managed to get a part-time job on a local newspaper. Gary's mother was visiting in San Diego, California, at the time and thus couldn't hustle her big, unruly son back to school. He took a few trips to the ranch with his father, but for the first time the ranch life bored him. He was growing restless for the more involved adventures of life. He wanted to be on the go. "I suppose I *really* wanted to be on the loose!" he grinned. He spent two or three months in Helena—drinking more than he should; gambling far more than he should and acquainting himself in general with

some of the more "experimental" phases of what he loved to call "actually living life." The failure of his idealistic romance with Doris had embittered him with all women. He made up his mind that he would never again "lay down his heart to be stepped on." If that was the way women wanted to play the game, all right—he would play it with them!

AFTER about four months on the newspaper had brought him a degree of success with his cartoons, Gary decided that Helena was too small a field for his talents. Still highly pleased with his newly acquired cynical outlook on life, he packed his few belongings and started for San Diego to visit his mother. "But that town was too sleepy and peaceful for me," reminisces Gary. "After saying hello to Mother, I set out for Hollywood, which I had heard was a hell of a gay place!

"Well, perhaps it is. I'm not going to argue that Hollywood is just another 'small town where nothing happens'. Plenty of excitement goes on . . . and if you're honest you'll admit it. It's the most turbulent and upsetting place in the whole world, but not to an outsider such as I was in that first lonesome year. In fact, I sometimes think that first unhappy year in Hollywood when I was trying to get a break as an artist was the most 'adventurous' of my life. I think more things actually happened to me, the person, than has come from all sorts of external happenings which have dotted my life of adventure. The adventure of finding a job, for one thing, just about floored me. No one in Hollywood, it seemed, was desperately in need of an artist or a cartoonist. I did finally get a job with an advertising company, but they went broke before I got my first pay check. Part of the time I was hungry . . . part of the time I was mad! A friend of mine, another adventurous gentleman of life who shared his food and lodging with me when he had them, suggested that I try the studios for extra work. I thought he was lying when he said that I would get \$7.50 per day. That seemed like entirely too much affluence!

"So I started hanging around the studios. Paramount was the closest, so I did most of my outdoor lounging against their casting directory sign. Once in a while I would get a job . . . especially if there was riding to be done. No, I never had any ambitions toward becoming a star then. I didn't like the idea of having to earn my living by sticking my face up with pink grease paint—it seemed like sissy and undignified work for a man!

"I was quite amazed one afternoon when a man named Hans Tiesler, an independent producer on Poverty Row offered me the leading male role opposite Eileen Sedgwick in a two-reel Western. I told him I wasn't an actor. 'I don't want an actor,' he said, 'I want a cowboy who can ride. If I engage one of these ham actors who have never been on a horse in their lives, it'll just mean that I'll have to hire a double to do the riding. This way I can hire you to play both parts. It's cheaper!'

And so, in this frank and undignified fashion," laughs Gary, "I became a Hollywood leading man!"

AN agent who delved among the unknowns of Poverty Row pictures looking for fresh screen material happened to see Gary's first horse opera. Two days later he phoned to say he had signed Gary up for the role of Abe Lee in "The Winning of Barbara Worth." Gary's days of leaning against the Paramount casting sign were over!

"I suppose I must have left an imprint on that sign," said Gary, "for my next screen call was from B. P. Schulberg of Paramount. Boy, I got a kick sailing past that office boy into Mr. Schulberg's office."

The outcome of that meeting between Schulberg and two of his associates and the embarrassed, awkward Coop was a Paramount contract! He didn't even make a test for it. They said they had seen his work in "Barbara Worth" and found it satisfactory. They wanted to know if a salary of \$125 weekly would be okay.

"That first check of \$125 brought the wildest adventure of spending and eating and having fun of my entire life . . . that far," says Gary.

His first Paramount role was a very small one—with Clara Bow in "It." Gary played the part of a young newspaper reporter. He was awed by being in the same picture with so much fame as Clara represented at that moment. He felt a lot more at ease and poised, however, in his next picture, "Children of Divorce," with Clara again and Esther Ralston. Upon the completion of that picture he was assigned to the big Paramount special, "Wings," to be made with Clara Bow, Richard Arlen and Buddy Rogers (two other Paramount newcomers) in Texas.

Remembering the flying scenes in "Wings," Gary said to me, "I'll never get over that sick, gone feeling when I took my plane off the ground for the first time alone. But I didn't want William Wellman, the director, to know I was nervous. He's a swell guy . . . but he's not the one to let in on a weak moment. I knew he would ride me to death. My first scene was a war scene in which I was stormed and bombed. I know it wasn't real war—but it might as well have been. Since then I've been in some pretty tight spots, especially on that African hunting jaunt, but never again have I had that feeling of not caring whether I came out the winner of the adventure or not. Enemy planes (the picture planes, of course) were beginning to whirl and circle and close in on me. Suddenly I seemed to forget all I had learned about keeping a ship to the clear—bringing her safely down. The damn thing started to spin and careen. 'O. K., Coop,' I thought to myself, 'here goes nothing . . . and such a nice new shiny movie actor, too!'

Don't fail to read the final installment of Gary Cooper's story in the May issue. Get the inside slant on his love affairs, his African trip, and last-minute news about his career.