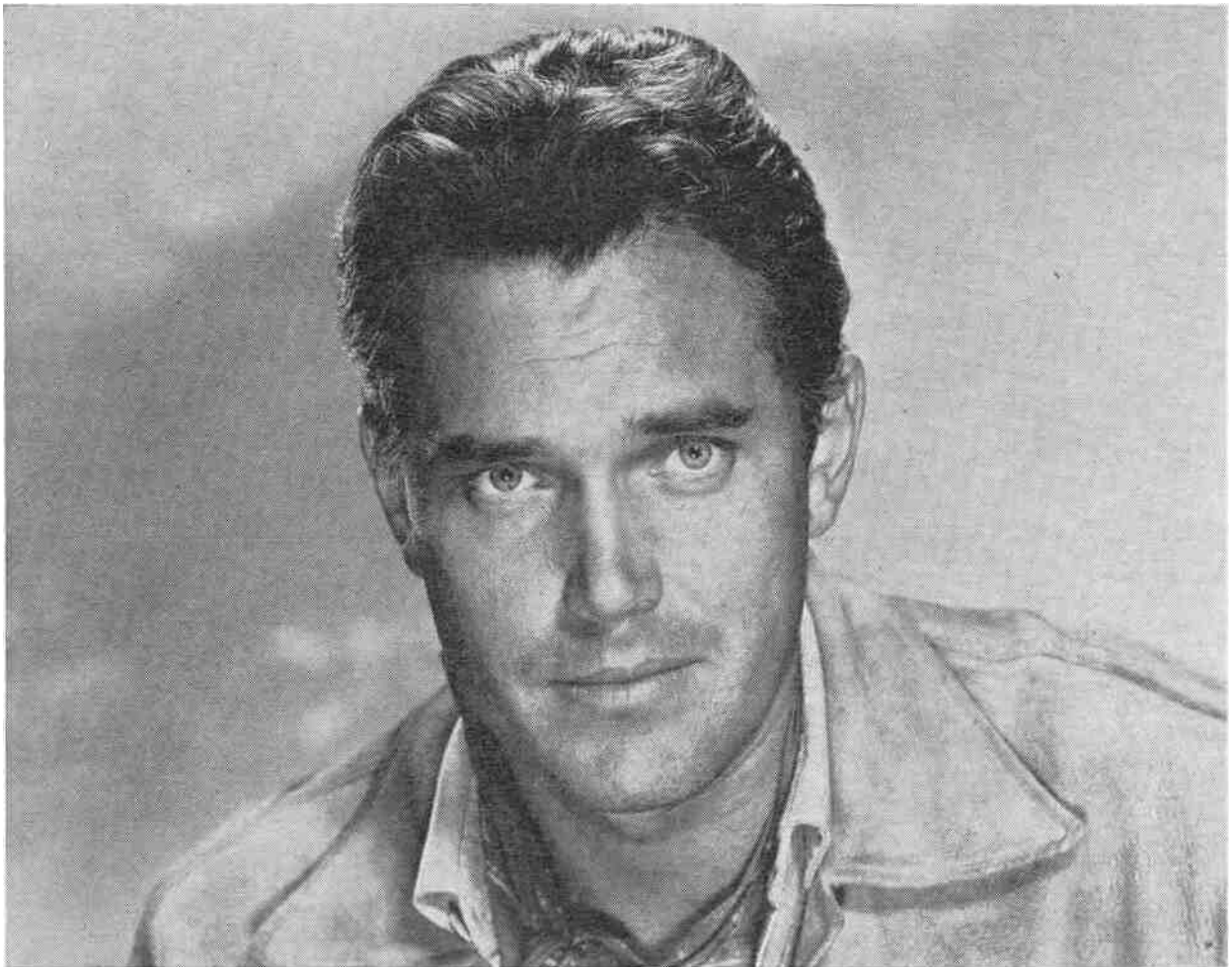


"General Hospital" star
Emily McLaughlin shattered
by sudden death of
husband Jeffrey Hunter



**DEATH ENDS
THE HONEYMOON**

All Hollywood was taken by surprise when Emily McLaughlin and Jeffrey Hunter eloped to Juarez, Mexico, last February fourth, after a courtship of less than a month. But the couple seemed ecstatic, and their friends were glad that two such lonely, love-seeking people as warm, sweet Emily and friendly, handsome Jeff had found each other. Then, suddenly, less than four months later, it was all over . . . tragically. . . because of the death of Jeff, who was only 42. His life was ended by a brain injury probably resulting from a fall.

Happy as they were with each other, the marriage of Emily and Jeff had seemed ill-starred almost from the beginning. They had no sooner returned from their honeymoon than the steady stream of bad luck began. They had a small party for friends and Jeff went to pick up a *(Continued on page 96)*

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cooked turkey from the butcher. Unknown to him, the pan holding the bird was full of hot grease and stock to be used for gravy. Picking it up, he suffered third-degree burns. But Jeff bravely ignored the pain, because he was due to make *Viva America*, in which he co-starred with Pier Angeli. Emily had time off from *General Hospital*, her daytime ABC-TV series, so she was able to accompany her bridegroom to Europe for the *Viva* filming.

That was when the second mishap took place. The Spanish "experts," who were supposed to blow out the window of a house Jeff was in, blew the glass into the room instead—and Jeff received powder burns in his eyes and cuts on his face!

Finally, on a stopover in England, an old friend delivered another blow, quite accidentally. The man, a former British Commando, hit Jeff on the chin with a judo chop. Although Jeff knew judo, he didn't react quickly enough—perhaps because his reflexes had been dulled by the previous accident while on location.

Then, while in the plane returning to the United States, Jeff's right arm suddenly became semi-paralyzed and he lost the power of speech. The doctors later said it was the pressurized cabin that brought his injury into focus. An examination showed that a vertebra in his neck was out of place. It is not known which of his earlier accidents had caused this.

Emily later gave great credit to the airline for its fast action when it was discovered Jeff was ill: "They took Jeff directly from the plane to the hospital. He was dressed in his robe and didn't even have his wallet. I arrived home without my

luggage, but they took care of delivering it later."

Home from the hospital

Jeff was hospitalized for a couple of weeks on his return to Los Angeles. For the first time, he was able to start watching *General Hospital*; as he told his bride, "It was like an extra visit from you each day." Finally came the happy morning when Emily was able to bring him home.

When she returned from the studio later that day, she found a fire built. It was a warm night, but Jeff knew how much she liked a cozy fire. They had dinner by the light of candles and the glow from the burning logs, and they toasted each other with wine. It was like a second honeymoon.

The next day, Emily gave an interview to this reporter, whom she has known for years. She seemed so full of plans for the future, so content with what she had . . . and a few words with Jeff made it obvious he felt the same way.

Emily had been married once before, to actor Robert Lansing. It lasted thirteen years and produced a son, Bobby, now 12. Jeff had two previous unions, the first to actress Barbara Rush, by whom he had a 17-year-old son, Christopher. The second was to model Dusty Bartlett Rhodes. They had three sons, Todd, 9, Scott, 6—and Steele, 15, who was Dusty's child by a previous marriage, but was legally adopted by Jeff.

During her conversation with this writer, Emily told for the first time the complete story of her romance with Jeff. "When we met," she explained, "I had no idea of marriage at all. Yet, like all women, particularly those who've been married before, I wanted and needed a man to do for, someone to plan for, to cook for. . . ."

"Of course, I had my son. But I didn't want to engulf him. He has his own life to live. No child can be a substitute for a husband.

"I'll never forget that feeling I had the day Bob and I actually filed for divorce. I was suddenly scared, unsure. I felt alone and unprotected. I had tried desperately to hold our marriage together, partly because of Bobby, partly because of pride.

"After it was over, I kept telling myself: *Somewhere there is someone as lonely and empty inside as you are, and you will find him.*"

A meeting by chance

Emily almost didn't. The night her path crossed Jeff's, she had decided *not* to attend the party to which she'd been invited. As she put it to a friend, "I've met enough bores and would-be seducers." But the friend had said, "Look, Emily, you *must* go. You never know who you'll meet. The most amazing people can walk into your life if you'll let them."

So Emily went. She told the doorman not to park her car far away, because she wouldn't be staying long. As it happened, Jeff was leaving just as she arrived. They introduced themselves and started talking. The immediate thing they knew was that both wanted to get out of there and have dinner. Emily suggested that—since her son Bobby was expecting her and she had plenty of food at home—they go there.

Bobby was playing his guitar when they arrived, and he and Jeff took to each other immediately. Emily thought, *This is totally incredible to me—that I've found a man who likes all the same things and wants from life what I do.*

It was actually "love at first sight" for both Emily and Jeff.

Of course, Emily fussed and fretted over Jeff when he was recovering from his first three accidents. The doctor had said that Jeff would be fine, if he would only take things easy. The newlyweds laughed over the old adage, "Trouble always comes in threes." They had had their share of bad luck—and it was behind them.

Jeff was signed for what would be one of the finest roles of his career, co-starring with Vince Edwards in *A Band Of Brothers*. They went out to Tail of the Cock, their favorite restaurant, to celebrate. But they made it an early evening, because the next day was Monday and Emily had an early studio call.

Once on the set, she was still filled with the news of Jeff's upcoming role and happily told her co-stars about it.

Emily left work, that fateful day, utterly unaware that when she arrived home she would discover her husband had been found by a friend . . . lying unconscious at the foot of the stairs in their Van Nuys home . . . and rushed to the hospital.

That night, an operation was performed to relieve the pressure of a massive hemorrhage of the brain. Standing vigil with Emily during those long hours was her ex-husband, Bob Lansing—who had thoroughly approved of her marriage to Jeff. (As Emily puts it, "After our divorce, Bob and I became extremely close. We should have been best friends and never married. But then, we wouldn't have had Bobby, so we have no regrets.")

Sudden end of a dream

When Emily left the hospital early Tuesday morning, she believed Jeff was out of danger, though still unconscious. Being the pro she is, she even reported for work, planning to return to her husband's bedside at noon.

But, at 9:30 A.M., it was suddenly all over for Jeff Hunter.

Finished, too, were all the plans and dreams he and Emily had hoped to share. They had discussed doing summer stock together when he finished his film, thinking it would be fun to co-star for the first time. They had even picked a play: *The Rainmaker*.

Emily was so shocked by the news of Jeff's death that she collapsed and had to be put under sedation. An autopsy performed by the coroner's office has indicated that Jeff apparently suffered an intercranial hemorrhage at the top of the stairs, causing him to tumble all the way down, and his skull had been fractured in the fall.

Now Emily is alone again. But being the warm, brave woman she is, she will go on. It will not be easy, she knows, but with the help of family, friends and work, she will face the future as she knows Jeff would want her to: with a smile on her face and some brief but beautiful memories in her tortured heart.

—EUNICE FIELD