

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The following interview and story was written just a week before the tragic death of Jeffrey Hunter. At the time, we decided not to print it but, on further reflection, we saw that it was a fitting tribute to the memory of a man who had found a brief happiness. The writer of the story had told us: "It was such a happy home, that I hated to leave."

Whatever belief one may have in a future life, it stands to reason that there must be some small hope of finding happiness in this life as well. If this were not so, then life would be unbearable. Emily McLaughlin Hunter has had her share of sorrow and no one would want to prolong it. Therefore we print the following story because we want to pay our respects to Jeffrey Hunter's memory and to extend our hope that his widow will find peace at last.

by PENNY PENCE

• "It always upsets me to hear a woman say, 'I'm just a housewife...'" sighed Emily McLaughlin, taking a sip of coffee and gazing into the crackling fire.

Still dressed in her bathrobe, Emily settled back into the thick overstuffed couch in the family room of the home she and husband Jeff Hunter share, and thought over the importance—and the joys—of being a woman.


It was a subject Emily knew well—for far more than being a busy television personality, Emily is a woman—dedicated to her home and her family.

"Raising children and keeping up a full house should be considered an art," she went on. "I feel terribly sorry for the woman who puts herself down for being JUST a housewife with—five kids. It takes an outstanding type of talent to manage that.

"It's difficult enough for me just to get my one son off to school and Jeff off to work in the mornings as you can see!" she added in an attempt to apologize for greeting a reporter at the door in a bathrobe and rollers at 9:15 in the morning.

The entire Hunter home is a warm place, but the family room is obviously the heart of the family activities. It is a room with wood and color, and the overstuffed Spanish-style furnishings are not modern or new but comfortable and welcoming. An imposing

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Jeffrey Hunter had been married twice before. He had been at loose ends for a few years and had finally begun to work again when he had his tragic accident.

EMILY McLAUGHLIN HUNTER

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stone fireplace demands your immediate attention. It is not a place you might call "fancy"—but you are struck with an air of elegance the minute you walk in.

So it is with Emily. There's nothing fancy about the lady who has occupied the key role on General Hospital for seven years—but there is something about her that says class with a capital C and women with a capitol W.

"It's like Grand Central Station around here in the mornings," she went on in her narrative. "But it's wonderful to have life around the house again. I love it. It was much too quiet for far too long."

Her words held no secret meaning. Emily admits with candor that the years following her separation and subsequent divorce from Bob Lansing were difficult, lonely years for herself and her son.

"We had been married 12 years," she explained. "When the marriage failed, I took it as more of a personal failure than I suppose I should have."

Many actresses, who walk away from a court of divorce, run immediately into a frantic professional life—a frantic social life in an effort to reconstruct a sense of feminine security.

To Emily, however, security and worth meant more than numerous appearances on television—more than pretty cocktail parties. As a woman, she felt she had failed in her main purpose—the care and feeding of the men in her life.

"A woman needs a man," she explained in simple conclusion.

It was with great reluctance that some time after her divorce she forced herself into attending a filmland cocktail party given by a friend. There she met Jeff Hunter; there her whirlwind romance with the actor began—a romance which was no more than two months in duration and "Like a 1940 movie complete with violins and the sun setting down behind the golden gate bridge"—and a romance which took the couple straight to Mexico to wed.

"We've been living happily ever after," she smiled—contentment and quiet pride glowing in her eyes.

"Actually Jeff and I struck up a friendship over our children. That's what our conversation was about the first night we met."

Children and their well-being was as vital a subject to Jeff Hunter as it was to Emily.

"Jeff moved into an apartment in Brentwood—a great huge place with practically no furniture," a wrinkle came into Emily's eye and she shook her head as if to say, "Isn't that just like a man."

"He did miss the feeling of home and companionship," she added quietly. "He was lonely too."

Suddenly you become aware of a huge, overstuffed "man" chair—complete with a thick ottoman—occupying a place of prominence in the room.

Jeff's entrance into the household of Emily and her son could not have been more wanted or needed. "Bobby's crazy about him," Emily sighed.

"I was so relieved, too. I was scared to death to tell Bobby that Jeff and I were getting married. I was simply panic-stricken for fear he would disapprove."

"But when I told him, he said very simply to me, 'Mom, I'm so happy'."

"I know his feeling is real, too, because his father (Bob Lansing) has told me that when Bobby was visiting him he broke the news in his own special way. He said, 'Mom's marrying a guy I really like.'"

"I'm so thankful that he feels that way. I honestly don't know what I would have done if he had not felt good about it."

Emily maintains a close friendship with her ex-husband Bob even now.

"Well, after 12 years of being married to each other—we know each other too well for tantrums."

"Besides, Bobby needs his father. Bob is in town working a great deal more than he was for a long time and we have an agreement that Bobby lives here with me but it's his own decision as to when he would like to visit Bob for a week or a weekend or so."

Emily was silent for a moment, watching the fire in the stone cavern flicker. "This is a very difficult age for any boy. It's been especially difficult for Bobby."

"Jeff has been so good for him. A boy needs a man around—he needs a father."

"When I told Bobby that Jeff and I were going to get married, he asked me 'What shall I call him?'"

"I suggested either Jeff or Hank (Jeff's real first name). Bobby asked if he might call him 'Dad'."

"I nearly cried. Now Bob is Dad #1 and Jeff Dad #2."

In the Hunter living room is a large electric organ which Jeff plays with a professional ability. Young Bobby is also multi-talented musically and already the leader of a small combo that appears for school functions. Music has been one main bond between the boy and his Dad #2.

"But they have so *much* in common, Jeff and Bobby. They get along so well," said Emily.

Jeff had only recently returned from shooting a film in Spain—and his work in Europe had given Emily and Bobby good reason to take a long deserved vacation to join him.

"We had a wonderful two weeks," said Emily. "As a family we'd like to travel a lot—but there just isn't as much time available as we would like there to be."

Notice that Emily said ". . . as a family . . ." She is not so keen on the amount of travel required of Jeff in the filming he does abroad.

"It's not *fun* when you're alone and working. I think the separation is the hardest thing for any couple. We're hoping he can tie some things down here in town in the future so he won't be away very often."

Ask Emily about exciting plans for the future—and her first thought is not the professional projects ahead.

"Jeff's folks gave us a station wagon for our wedding and we plan to fill it up with Bobby and his friends and visit the Yosemite National Park. None of us have ever been there."

The interview ended as Emily discovered that the lunch sack she had prepared for Bobby had been accidentally left behind.

"I'd better get this to my son before he thinks he'll have to go hungry today," she laughed—and as we left, she went on her busy way—being *just* a housewife—plain and unglamorous to most—but the most exciting, vital role in the world to Emily.

Write to Emily c/o ABC-TV, Prospect at Talmadge, Hollywood, California.

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