

Is death the final chord
in the symphony that binds
two people together?
Like Emily McLaughlin,
some believe it is not

“Love Brought My Late Husband Back To Me”

By DAISY CHARLES

Photos by Frank Edwards



It has been several years since Emily McLaughlin, Nurse Jessie Brewer of *General Hospital*, was widowed by the death of her second husband, Jeffrey Hunter.

"When he first died, I thought my life had finally come to an end, too," Emily recalled. "Even the realization that I had a son to live for was difficult to perceive through the first terrible days and weeks of that awful time. But now I know that although I can never have Jeff again, the fact that I did experience this beautiful thing in my

"I felt that only by constant activity could I keep from thinking about the past."

life has made me aware of how fortunate I was, how fortunate I am to have such memories to comfort me.

"I also know now," Emily added, "that Jeff's love for me went beyond the world we shared as man and wife. I know that his concern for my happiness has reached through whatever invisible barrier there is that separates us from our loved ones who have passed on. I do believe that he came to me to tell me that he wanted me to live as full a life as possible."

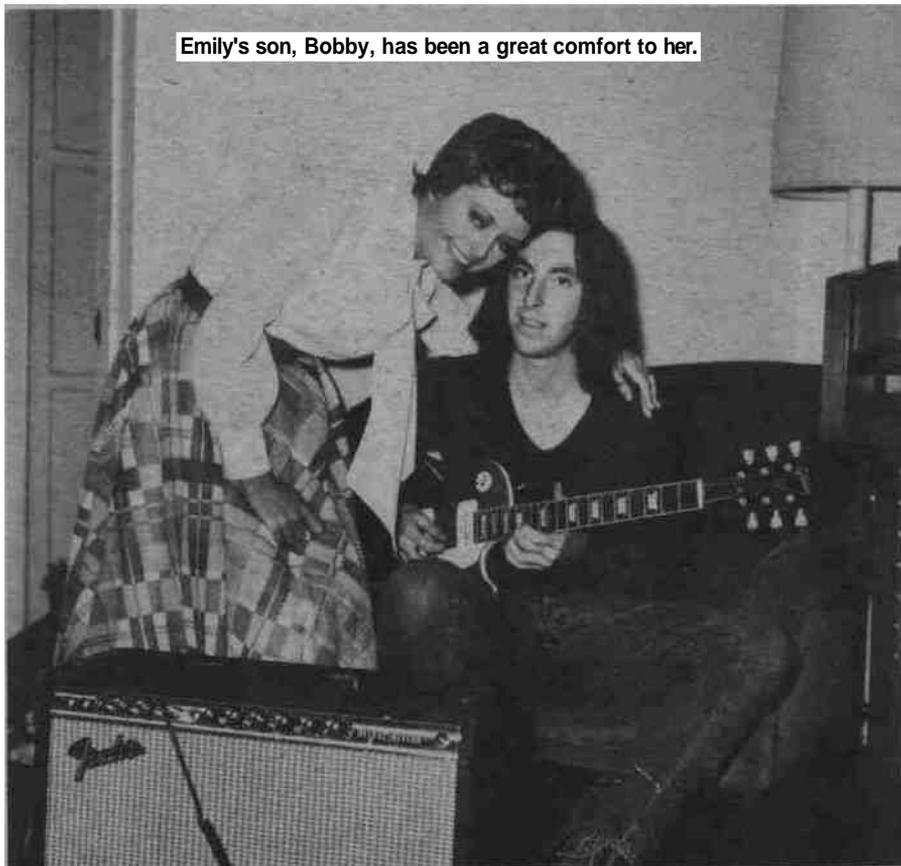
As many of Emily's fans know, her first husband was actor Robert Lansing. She has a son, Bobby, by that marriage.

After she and Bob Lansing were divorced ("I always believed that somehow we could work things out, yet when it was inevitable that we couldn't I was determined to make the break as clean as possible so that our son would not have to suffer any more than he already had"), she plunged into her work. "I was going to spend my time fully occupied," she said. "When not at work, I would devote myself to Bobby. I felt that only by constant activity could I keep from thinking about the past."

And then Jeffrey Hunter came into her life.

"He and I—well," she said, "we never had to talk very much. There was always a sort of unspoken language between us."

Jeffrey, a fine actor, had appeared as Jesus in the film *King of Kings*.



Emily's son, Bobby, has been a great comfort to her.

"The role," was a mixed blessing. While it made his reputation internationally it also made some producers a little wary. After all, how can you ask a man who has played the Saviour to play an ordinary man?"

"Not only did Jeff make me feel like a woman again but he filled a vacuum in Bobby's life. While I always encouraged Bobby to maintain a close and loving relationship with his dad, I was aware that on those occasions when Bobby needed a man to talk to it was a painful thing to have to wait for the next visit with Bob. When Jeff came to live with us he provided this wonderful man-to-man experience for my son.

"Marriage to Jeff was sort of a dream come true ..."

And the dream ended in a shattering nightmare when Emily

"Jeff provided this wonderful man-to-man experience for my son."

returned from the studio one afternoon to find her husband dead. The doctors said a cerebral injury was the cause. It may have stemmed from a previous—almost forgotten—blow on the head that Jeff had sustained a few days earlier. "Or," she said with that soft Madonna-like expression that captivates those to whom she speaks—"it may simply be that Jeff was called and he answered."

Such acceptance of tragedy did not come easily. "For a long time I tore myself apart asking why it had to be this way, why such a man had to die. Why? Why? Why? So many questions—and no answers. And then one day the answer came—"

Emily had agreed to give interviews again and also agreed, one day, to an at home photographic session. It was some time in the spring. "I remember thinking, as I walked around the garden of my home, how back in

"There was always a sort of unspoken language between Jeff and me."

Westchester County in New York, the first green buds of the new season would be coming through and the birch trees would be taking on the magnificent crowns of leaves that shade the earth from the coming summer's sun. In winter, the birches are bare and let whatever rays of sunlight there are come through unhindered. In summer the branches filter the light, tempering it just so.

"I was in that reflective but not sad mood when the photographer arrived. He posed me in different parts of the house, had me stir a pot on the stove, water a plant—do things, as it were.

"And then he posed me beside the television set. I had had it on while he was changing lights at one point and just before we were ready to shoot again I had turned the sound down and now moved to turn the whole set off.

"'It's all right,' the photographer said. 'With the film I'm using we won't pick up any images . . .'

"Well," Emily went on, "as the time passed I began to feel different. I was glad now that I had agreed to this photo session. It was helping me to come out of that long retreat I had gone into after Jeff died. I even began to sense that Jeff would be pleased that I was doing this, that I was feeling this way.

"A day later," Emily continued, "I realized that I had good reason to have sensed what I had during the session. Good reason, indeed.

"Jeff, you see, had reached through to me. I know it. I believe it. And ever since that time I have tried to live as full a life as I can, knowing that that is what he wants me to do."

Emily sat quietly for a moment, stirring the coffee we'd ordered in the luncheonette on the ABC-TV complex in Hollywood. Then she told us what had happened the day after the shooting that helped to confirm her feelings that Jeff had reached out to her.

"You recall the TV set was on, although there was no sound. There were images on the screen, although the photographer didn't notice them, and even if he had he had indicated that they wouldn't pick up on his film. Well, they didn't. Except for one . . ."

We learned from the photographer how deeply he was shaken by what he had seen and what he later told Emily—

"As I was developing the pictures I noticed that on one there was an image on the screen.

"There was," he continued, "the face of a man, the face of a man wearing a beard and looking very much like the face we think of as Jesus.

"It was Jeffrey Hunter's face looking out at Emily from the screen, and I proved it when I remembered the day and the time I took that particular series of photographs. Emily had the channel tuned to the one she normally watches around that time. A call to the studio confirmed it all. Because it was close to Easter they had scheduled a rerun of the film *King of Kings* and they had used an excerpt from it with Jeff as an announcement.

"Nothing else showed up on my film but the strip with Jeffrey Hunter."

An electronic quirk?

Something "different" about that particular portion of the roll of film the photographer used to catch the dancing electrons on the screen so vividly as to develop into a picture of

almost perfectly exposed quality? Aside from how it happened that the camera did catch anything at all from the TV screen—why should it have been just this one picture?

Coincidence?

"Perhaps," Emily smiles. "But why not believe something much more credible than mere chance? Why not believe it was a manifestation of something I very much needed if I were to go on living as life should be lived?

"Why not believe that Jeff had come to me because I needed him?"

"Why not believe that love can do anything? I believe it. And I know it to be the greatest truth of all."

She smiled again but this time the smile seemed to come from deep inside.

"Love is a strange force. A beautiful, mysterious thing. It brings joy and pain. It can bring miracles. Love—our love—brought Jeff back to me and, in time, our love will reunite us." •

Emily with a portrait of her father.

