

**GENERAL  
HOSPITAL'S  
EMILY  
MCLAUGHLIN**

# **I CAME THROUGH HEARTBREAK TO HAPPINESS!**

By **CHRISTOPHER DENT**



"My memories of Jeff get better as the years go by"

**O**ne fateful night six years ago, *General Hospital's* Emily McLaughlin rushed to a Los Angeles hospital and watched her husband of only five months, Jeff Hunter, die. The actor's death was caused by a head injury sustained when he fell off a ladder at their home only minutes after Emily had left for work. Suddenly, she was thrust into a life of loneliness, heartache and anguish. She was a widow, but Emily refused to linger in the unhappiness she felt.

"Even before I left the hospital, and during those days before the funeral, I didn't question Jeff's death," Emily explained, relaxing in the comfort of her California home. "I don't know where it came from, but in my mind I kept saying, and I continue to do so to this day, 'Never ask why, just say thank you for the good times shared.'"

"And I never have asked why. I think that's a terribly important thing for anyone who loses someone. You must accept death as part of life, just as birth is part of life. Even though we were only married a short time, I could never just wipe those months out of my life.

"I didn't find it difficult coping with the memories because I don't want to ever forget any of them," Emily asserted. "To me, my marriage to Jeff was the most incredible thing to happen to me, second only to the birth of my son, Bob. And in a way, the memories just get *better* and I don't go to pieces the way I did the first six months, first year or two years because they're such wonderful memories.

"So that's why I say don't ask why your mate is gone, but say thank you for what you had when you were together. I think that's terribly important.

"Admittedly," she said with a sigh, "going into seclusion is a big temptation, and I gave into it somewhat. But, I would force myself to go out socially—even though I did not particularly enjoy it—just to be going, to be moving. The biggest temptation of all is just to close the door to the bedroom and that's it! But I think it's important for everyone to come out of that as fast as possible, find some function, something that has meaning to you—be it charity work or whatever—something that justifies you taking up space on this planet.



**This is the only photo Emily has of herself and her late husband, film actor Jeffrey Hunter.**

"Going to parties or to friends' homes are also important, though hard at first. You have a choice—you can go alone or you can go with somebody who perhaps doesn't interest you particularly. I've had some marvelous friends and I've gone to functions with them, but I've also gone alone. You can do that if you just get a hold of yourself and if you don't try to be terribly cheerful or terribly anything.

"Just be yourself," Emily advised wisely, "and have self-confidence. That's particularly important if a woman has children. My immediate reaction was to send my son out of town. I called his father (actor Robert Lansing, Emily's first husband) and he took him to San Diego.

"However, some of the children in the neighborhood who'd known Jeff started to come around because he was incredible with children, and they wanted to go to the funeral.

"So I called my son and said, 'Don't answer me now, but do you want to come home to go to the funeral? Think about it and call me back in 15 minutes.' He called back and he was here, which was simply marvelous," the actress smiled proudly.

"Of course, then you suddenly have to learn to take things over, and you learn the hard way, all the functions of a man in our society. Jeff had taken over all my concerns so completely that it was like, 'Me Tarzan, you Jane.' I loved that, and so I had to learn how to cope with things—be it the car breaking down or whatever. But you must learn to do it!" she insisted.

She paused for a moment to contemplate the idea of another marriage. "I think that in part, it might have to do with a person's age. A younger person might be more likely to try another marriage, but any woman who can adjust to companionship has my support. People do need people, and I think that's the way it should be. I don't think it would work for me, however, because I think I'd be constantly comparing a new union to my marriage with Jeff.

"Every day was a honeymoon for us and we were insanely happy. After having that really joyful, perfect marriage, which I never looked for and never thought was going to happen, I don't think I'd be able to try to adjust to a new relationship. I can't imagine having another relationship like that, and even though it gets lonely, I wouldn't want anything less.

"So you see, I'd always be comparing. However, if a woman can avoid that, and say to herself, 'That was one life and this is another one,' that's marvelous.

"I can't emphasize enough how important it is that you get a hold of yourself at the outset. I was fortunate because I was with my husband when he died. I saw it happen. I held him, I was with him, I knew it was happening and while it was still a terrible shock, I think it was easier to accept the reality of his death that way.

"I realized that death is an awful thing for the living to cope with, but it's a very peaceful thing for the dead, and I think that's important. So that is another reason I never have asked why, because I know Jeff would never ask why himself.

"It does take a lot of strength to go on—there's no denying that—but you can make it. You really can."