

Stars of Daytime Drama

All The Way Home

• Almost three years have gone by since the tragic death of handsome actor Jeffrey Hunter, yet cherished memories of him are very much alive in the mind and heart of his widow, Emily McLaughlin—better known to daytime viewers, for nine years, as Nurse Jessie Brewer on the ABC-TV dramatic serial, *General Hospital*.

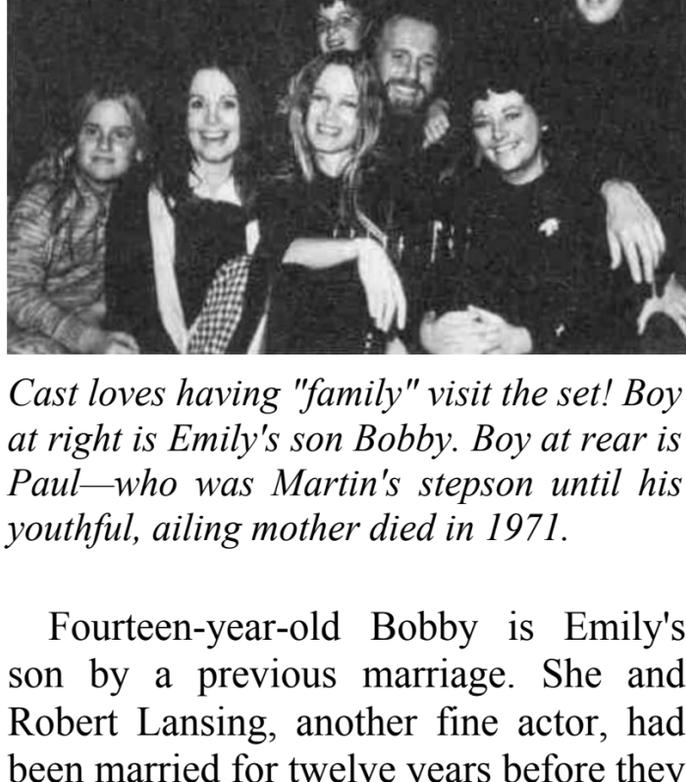
A gentle smile crosses Emily's face as she speaks of Jeff . . . but the sadness which shadows her large brown eyes reveals how much she truly misses him.

"I guess we were both searching for something in life to cling to," she says softly, "and we found it in each other.

"Since Jeff's death," she observes serenely, "I've become very religious. I pray quite a lot now, but I also say thank you. *Thank you* for what I have! At least, Jeff and I had five wonderful months together. That's more than many people have. I have my son Bobby and a few good friends. I have a house I love and a marvelous job. What more could I wish for?"



Emily has been Nurse Jessie Brewer on General Hospital since it began on April 1, 1963. Martin West (rear) and Craig Huebing are prominent members of the current staff.



Cast loves having "family" visit the set! Boy at right is Emily's son Bobby. Boy at rear is Paul—who was Martin's stepson until his youthful, ailing mother died in 1971.

Fourteen-year-old Bobby is Emily's son by a previous marriage. She and Robert Lansing, another fine actor, had been married for twelve years before they finally separated. As Emily puts it, "We stuck it out that long because of Bobby." Basically, these were two totally different people who wanted totally different things out of life, and their divorce was not a bitter one. They're close friends now, and Lansing wholeheartedly approved of Emily's marriage to Jeff.

Asked how her young son reacted to the marriage, Emily smiles warmly. "As soon as Bobby heard about it, he called all his friends in the neighborhood and said, 'My mom is marrying a guy I really like!' Then he asked what he should call Jeff. I explained that he could certainly call him Jeff—or 'Hank,' which was his real name. Bobby asked, 'Can't I call him Dad?' Well, when Jeff heard about this, he told Bobby he'd better check it out with his real father. Bobby pondered that, then solved it in his own way. He called Bob 'Dad number one' and Jeff 'Dad number two.'"

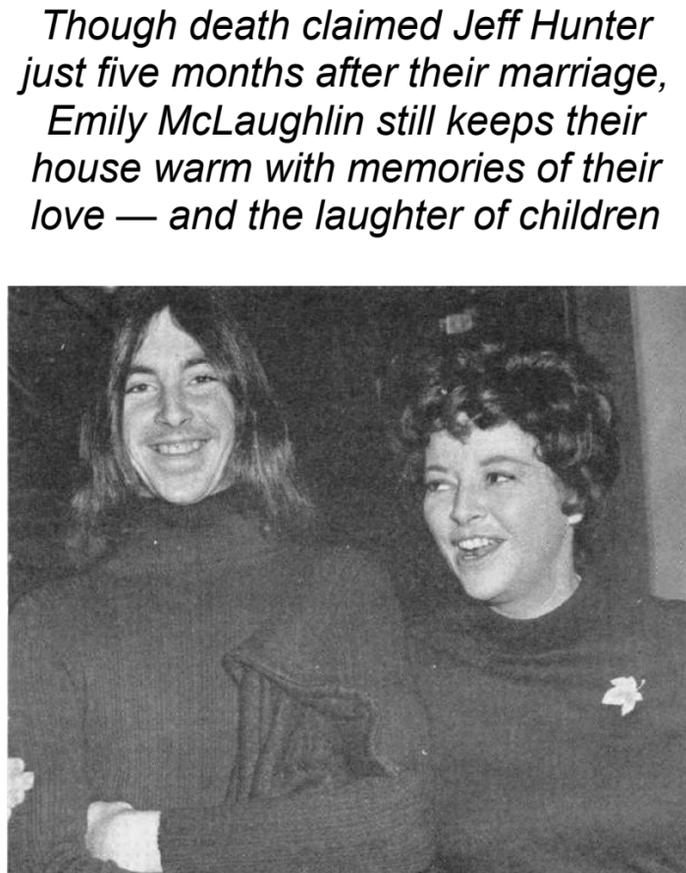
Bobby was "best man" at the wedding and even accompanied Emily and Jeff on their honeymoon to Mexico. When they all returned to settle down in their Van Nuys house, it was a very happy time.

Jeff—Emily remembers—had a childlike quality about him and soon became a Pied Piper to Bobby and his friends.

Emily and Jeff made their house a very popular "hangout." They once bought a second-hand pool table, thinking they'd saved some money. Then they realized they didn't have space for it, so they had to build an extra room.

On the less crowded side, Jeff was an accomplished musician and taught Bobby to play the piano and organ. He also composed a number of songs, and Emily began writing lyrics.

Though death claimed Jeff Hunter just five months after their marriage, Emily McLaughlin still keeps their house warm with memories of their love — and the laughter of children



Bobby—whose "Dad number one" is Robert Lansing—helps Emily remember the happiest days with Jeff, "Dad number two."

In only five short months, all this happiness came crashing to an end. Emily had gone to work that day. Everything normal. Everything fine. It wasn't until she got home that she was told the shocking news.

Jeff had fallen down a flight of stairs in the house and had been rushed to the hospital. A massive brain hemorrhage had overtaken him at the top of the stairs, and his skull had been fractured in the subsequent fall. An operation was performed to relieve the pressure.

A few hours later, Jeff died....

At first, Emily was put under sedation. Although she gradually began feeling better, her body was still numb.

In her own words: "As the days went by, a strange silence began building. I guess many widows have felt this . . . but there's a *huge* silence, and it's there day after day after day. I overcame it by getting involved with other people—friends especially—*their* problems. If you do that, you don't keep dwelling on your own. I've been very fortunate, though. One great marriage . . . and one that really wasn't bad."

As she tells you of that earlier marriage to Robert Lansing, there is no faintest tinge of regret: "We were both starving young actors, living in a railroad flat in New York City. Times were terribly funny back then. We had wine bottles with candles dripping over the sides, and we ate lots of spaghetti. Bob was really just starting his career. For a while, I worked at Scribner's Book Store. Then Bobby came along and things weren't so funny anymore.

"When Bob landed a part in an Off Broadway Tennessee Williams play, his pay was \$65 a week. And we considered ourselves suddenly *rich!* The first thing we did was to go out and buy the biggest bed in New York. The one we'd been sleeping on sloped in the middle—like a valley—and we'd both had constant backaches. The new bed was so large that the movers had to bring it in by sections. When it was finally installed, we found that we had to walk *over* the bed to get from one side of the apartment to the other!

"One day," Emily laughs, "I got a phone call from a woman who had seen me in a play when I was first pregnant. Now, it was two years later. And frankly I was scared to think about going back to work, even on the air. I did a reading for a part in *Young Dr. Malone*, and I was hired.

"This meant we'd have to hire somebody to take care of Bobby, and I did all the things my mother had told me *not* to do. I hired a lovely girl—I thought! I'll never forget that image of her. She insisted on wearing a white ruffled cap with streamers, a black uniform and a white pinafore apron. It was hilarious to see her answer the door of this flat overlooking Second Avenue, climbing over the bed in the middle!

"Actually, Bob and I did have fun," Emily says candidly. "We never fought. We just never should have got married. But then we wouldn't have had Bobby, would we? So, I'm grateful. As I said, we're good friends now. Bob lives nearby, which is great for Bobby, and we see him often."

However, most of Emily's friends today are old friends of Jeff's, such as Bob Hudson. During those long and painful hours at the hospital when Jeff was undergoing surgery, it was Hudson who stayed at Emily's side, trying to comfort her. He was engaged at the time, but after Jeff's death, he insisted that Emily come along on evenings out, making it a threesome.

Hudson owns a house down at Newport Beach and often invites Emily there with Bobby and his friends. "We just have a great time," Emily smiles.

In her private hours, when Emily is alone, she enjoys reading. And writing poetry and short stories "for myself." Although she has a B.A. degree in American Literature from Middlebury College in Vermont, she never cared much for school, as a child growing up in White Plains, a suburb of New York City. Her childhood was a sheltered one and there had been inevitable "restraints" put on her behavior because her father happened to be mayor of White Plains at the time.

What about Emily's future? Will she marry again?

Right now, she doesn't contemplate marriage. Since Bobby is still a growing boy, she wants as much time with him as possible. Despite offers of roles in plays and films, she's much too happy portraying Nurse Jessie Brewer. And she doesn't have the time to add any other assignments to her schedule.

"After all," she points out, "I'm a working mother. I get six weeks' vacation in two-week periods. I always arrange it so that I can take my time off when Bobby's on vacation.

"Besides, I love the show! I believe in it because it fills a great need out there for lots and lots of people. I can tell by the fan mail—not just my own, but for *General Hospital* itself. People often write in for advice, but you'd be surprised how many of them write in just to say, 'Thank you for all the hours of pleasure you've given me.' I give all the credit to the producer, the writers, and the fine casting.

"Sure, there are also plenty of people who criticize 'soap operas'—but we're dealing with very real problems. Problems like divorce, women who can't have children, illegitimate childbirth, alcoholism, even impotence. I have no sympathy at all for actors who appear in shows and then go around knocking them. If you don't believe in a show you're doing, get out—you don't belong there!"

Right now, the Emily McLaughlin Fan Club is in the process of sending a girl through nursing school. And Nurse Jessie Brewer is the lady who inspired the idea. Emily discusses the project with great excitement and pride. This is truly a warm and beautiful woman.

As we say goodbye at her dressing-room door, she remarks, "I'd better be on my way home, too. After all, I've got a hungry army at home to feed . . . lots of hamburgers to make for Bobby and his friends!"

We know Jeff would have liked that. But then, he never expected less of the wife he had hoped to live with "happily ever after." —IRENE DE BLASIO