



Emily
McLaughlin
Reveals
the Truth

ABOUT HER HUSBAND'S TRAGIC DEATH!

Jeff Hunter was much too young and healthy to die ... and in the early days of her grief, Emily couldn't talk about it . . .

Now she does!

• Emily McLaughlin and Jeffrey Hunter shared the miracle of their new love and happiness with the readers of *Movieland* and *TV Time Magazine* in exclusive interviews which appeared in the June, 1969 issue.

Neither Jeffrey or Emily could know then how brief their togetherness was to be here on this earth. I say this, for Emily feels that Jeffrey has never really left her.

"I feel his closeness near me all the time," she said quietly, her eyes shining with misty unshed tears. For there comes a time, when tears must stop and life must go on.

"Life is for the living."

Emily is grateful for what she and Jeff had, short as the time was. Now she devotes her time to her son Robert Lansing, Jr., and her work on "General Hospital."

How many times that has rung in Emily's ears. "Life is for the living. Life must go on."

At the initial shock and grief, when sorrow was so intense, there didn't seem at first a plausible reason for living on in such abject empty loneliness—except for her wonderful boy, Bob Lansing, Jr. Emily is a brave soul, a young woman of courage, and she is going on, living on, with the comfort of: "the happiness we knew—some people don't find in a whole lifetime of living. I say every day. Thank you, thank you.' I'm so grateful for what we had."

I called Emily a few months after Jeff's death. I had hesitated to call. I had sent condolences along with hundreds of people all over the world, besides their own close friends of course. As I picked up the telephone to dial, it seemed like yesterday when I had said, "Emily, did you see the interview and pictures of you and Jeff in Movieland last month?" I explained that I had been out of the country and I assumed they had already seen it all.

"No," said Emily. "We were in Spain. We just got back. But I'll send Jeff out right now to get a copy. If they are all sold out on all of the newsstands, he'll keep on driving around until he finds one. We'd love to see it."

The very next day the world of Jeffrey Hunter and Emily McLaughlin was stunned with shock. The radio gave the news that Jeffrey Hunter was dead!

He was so young, too young, to die. He was aglow with life and vitality. He was newly and happily married. He had everything to live for. Why? Why? Why?

The news reports said death was due to a fall. The young widow was too grief-stricken to be questioned. So I waited until now before I called to ask her about how it had happened.

Emily was wonderfully composed and graciously sweet, when I asked if I could

come out to their home that night, the house Jeffrey had rebuilt adding on rooms and fireplaces, making it their perfect honeymoon home.

"Please do come out tonight," Emily replied. It was then that I learned that neither Emily nor Jeff had ever seen the exclusive wedding story and pictures published here in Movieland and TV Time Magazine. The newsstands had been sold out when Jeff went looking. And the next day he died.

"The only pictures of Jeff and me together were those taken for the story," Emily said. "I wonder if your editor could possibly give me one from the files, so I could have one picture of us, Jeff and me together for framing? There was a picture taken of us together in Spain, but I never saw it. So I have nothing. (Lil Smith sent Emily the pictures. They arrived on her wedding anniversary day.)

"I don't need pictures really," said Emily. "They are all here inside of me. I see Jeff and me together everywhere all of the time.



Emily and Jeff had a whirlwind courtship and three and a half short months of married happiness. "The happiness we knew, some people don't find in a lifetime of living!" Emily says sadly.

"We were so happy, so happy," she said. A little sigh escaped, and she caught her breath as she sat there by the

fireplace quietly composing her thoughts, her emotions, and remembering, always remembering, as she always will.

Jeff's close friend, Bob Hudson, and Emily's son, twelve-year-old Bob Lansing, were preparing steaks for dinner in the kitchen nearby. Emily and I sat in this new room that Jeff had loved and had rebuilt. There was his big red leather chair and ottoman. And the circular steps leading down to the room that he had built, and from which he had fallen that last day, that fatal day.

And here was Emily with her arm broken and in a sling. "I fell down those (same) steps," she said quietly. Turning aside any pity, she quickly said, "They simply wrote my broken arm into the script of 'General Hospital' for the TV series. And I go right along working."

A moment of reflection settled in, before she began telling me what really had happened. It seemed as though God and fate had called Jeff home, by the incurring series of events that brought about his untimely death.

"It all began," said Emily, "one night when we went to pick up a turkey. We both loved turkey. Jeff was born on Thanksgiving Day. We'd laugh that that was the reason why he loved turkey. I had bought a fresh one early at the market, and had dropped it off to be cooked at a wonderful place on my way to the studio. After work we drove over to pick it up. In some way the pan slipped and turned, and the hot juice poured onto Jeff's lap. He always refused to say he was hurt, or in pain in any way. He had a thing about never complaining about anything. When we got home he washed away the grease that had soaked into his pants, then changed them and he didn't say anything more.

"I'm enough of a nurse from working in the show that when we went to bed and I saw the burns on his legs, I was shocked. He had third degree body burns. I wanted to call the doctor but Jeff wouldn't hear of it. I put medication on them, and he insisted he felt fine. He insisted that it was all nothing.

"He was leaving for Spain to make a picture. On the plane enroute, he went

into shock. He was taken off and put into an ambulance in Madrid and rushed to a hospital for treatment. The burns were severe.

"Jeff still didn't tell me. I had my vacation coming, and I was going to join him in Spain within a month. We talked on the telephone every day. Sometimes twice a day. He'd call in the morning and then again at night.

"We missed each other so much, we vowed then there would never be work or any picture or otherwise that would separate us again.

"Jeff had made six pictures in Europe through an agent whom he knew well. There had never been any problems. And for this one he didn't insist that the money be put into escrow first. And trouble arose.

"When I arrived in Spain I was horrified to discover that Jeff's legs had been worse than I had feared. Far worse. Then a second freak accident occurred on the set at the studio.

"A car window blew up in his face instead of going the other way. He was badly hit on the head by it. He received a bad concussion.

"I was worried so much because I instinctively knew that Jeff was in pain. even though he refused to say he was. He insisted he felt just fine.

One day on the set he was fooling around with a friend and got a karate chop full on the chin. His head hit a door and he was hurt pretty badly, I knew. (This was the third accident with injuries and in a row. With the bad head injuries, Jeff still kept saying he'd be okay.) Anyone knowing Jeff with those laughing blue eyes and easy way, would know that he would never admit pain or that anything was ever wrong. He was too lovable, too kind, too brave.

"We went walking in the park in Madrid one whole day. We had lunch in a famous German restaurant. And when the waiter raised my feet and put them on a pillow, I turned to Jeff with, 'What am I supposed to do?' He said, 'Enjoy it.' And we laughed happily. We were both care-free, but the nurse instinct in me worried about all of those injuries he had

sustained in such a brief time. And the ones to do with his head. But Jeff still wouldn't allow any fuss or bother about it. He insisted he felt fine.

"Things went wrong on the picture. In the middle of filming they still hadn't paid Jeff or the crew. They'd run out of money. Jeff told them that if they didn't pay the crew, he would walk out.

"After all, we could take the loss of wages, but not the little people who worked on the picture. As typical with so many foreign film-makers, they had run out of money. So Jeff and I returned home.

"When we were married, Jeff didn't want a wedding ring. In Madrid, we'd gone window shopping, and we saw some rings in a jewelry window. Jeff told me then, he would like a wedding ring after all. The one I had was a little tiny one, the only one we could find when we were married in Mexico.

"So the first thing after returning from Spain and Jeff was able, we went to Marvin Himes, the jeweler, in Beverly Hills, and got our wedding rings." Emily looked at her fourth finger, left hand, which carries Jeff's and hers and the first one he gave her, three in all.

However, Emily was now ahead of herself. She recalled, "While we were on the plane coming home from Spain, Jeff suddenly went into shock. He couldn't speak. He could hardly move. Pan-Am was so marvelous. They did everything. They wired ahead and we were met by an ambulance. We left our luggage and everything on the plane. We were put on an immediate flight to Los Angeles, with seats cleared so no one would be staring at us. Jeff was rushed to the Good Samaritan Hospital. A month later, he seemed and he said he was feeling great. He had done so much building here at our home. And he was already drawing designs for a new home for us.

"We went shopping, as I said, for the wedding rings, and life seemed wonderful again.

"Even so, I had a funny feeling, when I left for rehearsal that day. When I came home I found Jeff lying there on the stairs. He had had a massive head hemorrhage. I

called the fire department. They rushed him to the emergency hospital!

"For fourteen hours Jeff lay there in a coma. I sat by his side talking and talking to him. I don't know whether he heard me. I like to believe he did. And then he was gone, gone without a word or a sign—he just breathed and stopped. My Jeff was gone."

Emily met Jeff at a cocktail party at the Beverly Hills Hotel, January 3, 1969. "I didn't want to go to the party, but I had become such a stay-at-home after work that a girlfriend persuaded me my studio would like me to go. And she would meet me there. I had never dreamed of romance, nor of ever marrying again. And Jeff came into my view and changed my whole life. He opened up a whole new wonderful world for me. We began talking. And when he asked me to go to dinner, I suggested with my usual Scottish thrift that he might like to go home with me, for I had left-over turkey in the refrigerator from Christmas. And he and my son Bob, who is musical, began playing and singing after dinner. There hadn't been so much happiness in our house for such a long time. My young son was so happy, and I was so happy. Jeff had given us this.

"We were married February 4th. We'd been to San Francisco to appear on a TV show. And we had sat at the Top of the Mark watching the beautiful sunset. Jeff had said, 'Emily, let's get married!' Did anyone ever say 'Let's get married' while watching a sunset? We did. We'd only known each other for a month.

"Jeff died on May 27th.

"We had five and a half months of a happiness that nobody else has had. I keep saying, 'Thank you for that. I am so grateful.'

"Jeff's friends have never let me be alone. I had been a sort of loner before. But Jeff opened up this whole new wonderful world for me of friends, music, of living. And his friends are here, or someone's always here, in the house. You expect perhaps the first three weeks people will be with you. Then silence. But I am never left alone.

"Jeff's parents, who gave us a station

wagon for a wedding present, have been so wonderful too. Just everyone." Tears came to her large brown eyes, but Emily didn't cry. The time for tears was past. That is, tears that show before people. Alone? That's her own privacy to do with as she will.

Jeff's organ stands in the front living room. "He had been teaching Bobby to play it. The other day," Emily said, "my young son sat down and played a piece that Jeff had written. It was beautiful.

"I have that screen," she pointed to a portable movie screen. "I have learned to work a projector. I have rented all the films I can find of Jeff's. I run them over and over. I like particularly one he liked, 'No Man Is an Island.'

"I am piecing together a documentary of Jeff, from so much film he had here. This is just for myself," Emily said softly.

Jeff's personal effects are still about the house. His clothes hang in his closet. "Some people give away everything personal of a person who dies," Emily said. But she has maintained an even balance here. "I am giving things away as the need of other people comes along for them. I don't make a big thing of it.

"Jeff once said to me, strangely enough, and I now remember as I remember every word, and recall everything we did and had together, he once said, 'If I cross the bridge first, I'll be waiting on the other side for you.'

"I have an acceptance of that. I don't want to sound like a Pollyanna, but I say in my heart over and over, Thank you. Thank you for what we had, for our togetherness.' For our togetherness has never left me. I don't believe it ever will. Jeff's love is always here with me."

Jeff's friend called out that dinner was ready. Emily smiled bravely, and then with reality, and graciousness, we crossed the floor and she walked up the steps that Jeff had built.

THE END