

by Jeanne Martin

IT WASN'T the hundreds of guests crowding the annual "Share" charity party for mentally retarded children that made me catch my breath as I looked up at the ceiling. It was my husband, Dean Martin, precariously balancing himself on a saddle 100 feet above the night-club dance floor, singing "I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby" as he was slowly lowered to the stage.

I'd tried to talk him out of the stunt after he became nauseated from the height during rehearsals the night before, and almost fell off. He wouldn't listen. He said that it was the most effective way to start the evening's entertainment—and worth risking his neck!

That's typical of my Dino, who's been taking chances all his life. Marrying me was one of them. He knew how different we were in background, attitude, temperament. I'm happy to say it has worked out all right. On Sept. 1 we celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary.

The years have not always been easy for either of us. We were separated twice, once nearly divorced. We were confronted by lawsuits, financial difficulties that nearly ruined us and the split with Dean's partner of eight years, Jerry Lewis. I was spoiled by his generosity one day and completely ignored the next. It took me years to become adjusted to Dean's well-meant but utterly unpredictable behavior. Our wedding was a good indication of what I could expect as Dean's wife. It started as a typical Hollywood affair with hundreds of guests, invited and otherwise, reporters, photographers, gay decorations, soft music, champagne, caviar—and a groom who seemed to vanish the moment he was supposed to say "I do."

When the ceremony reached the point where the minister asked Dean for the wedding band, his hand slipped into his pocket—and came out empty. It went in and out of all the other pockets, without success. With a blank expression and a shrug of his shoulders he turned to his best man, Jerry Lewis. Jerry fumbled through his pockets and shook his head. No, he didn't have it either.

No one, including me, knew what to think when Dean's face suddenly lit up, and without warning or explanation he dashed to an adjacent room. Not till later did he explain that he'd realized the ring must have been among the items taken out of his pockets and left on the dresser when he changed into his wedding suit.

But it wasn't. It had fallen into the wastebasket, which the maid emptied into the trash container. At least that's what Dean hastily figured out as he raced to the street, turned the trash can upside down on the sidewalk and searched through the contents—till he came up with the ring.

And so we were married.

A month later I thought he'd deserted me. Dean had worked late that night on a television rehearsal. When he finished about 3 a.m., he was so tired that instead of coming home, he automatically headed

for his parents' house, as he had done before we were married. When he arrived, he quietly took off his shoes, tip-toed to his old room, fell into bed and instantly went to sleep.

I worried all night. When he didn't show up by eight the next morning, I frantically called the police, hospitals and Dean's parents. His father, unaware Dean had slipped into the house, told me he hadn't seen his son in two days.

I was just packing my bags when Dean broke into the room, sorry and apologetic. At the sight of him I burst into tears of anger and relief. Then I unpacked.

I quickly learned not to let my feelings get hurt too easily. For the first few months he often called me by his first wife's name. At times he still gets confused about the children. This may not be too surprising. He has four from his previous marriage, and three by me. It took me a long time to get used to Dean's forgetfulness. During our first five years as husband and wife he forgot my birthday three times. He still doesn't recall our anniversary unless I remind him—usually by filling the house with flowers. Once he even forgot Christmas.

BUT my biggest adjustment was necessitated by his gambling habits—and by gambling I don't mean just dangling from the ceiling for a benefit show, throwing away \$5,000 in Las Vegas in 12 hours or having a slot machine moved into our living room. He's taken chances on people, real estate, prize fights, income tax, everything! Usually he wins. Sometimes he loses. That doesn't discourage him.

His gambling spirit really shouldn't surprise me. After all, Dean used to be a professional. His father once told me that when he first saw his son at the hospital nursery, his little fists were clenched so tightly he could have sworn they held a pair of dice. They might as well have. Dean learned to use them before he was out of the first grade.

By the time Dean reached his teens, taking chances had become second nature to him. Once, he told me, he took a girl to a club which offered a \$5 first prize for the dance contest. Dean counted on winning it to pay the check. He won. Another time he made a down-payment on a second-hand sedan, confident a job he had applied for would assure the balance. He didn't get the job and the finance company got the car.

Dean often talks about his childhood in Steubenville, Ohio, when he was Dino Crocetti and lived in a three-room house on Slack Street. There wasn't enough yard to put up swings and slides. Even if there had been, there wasn't enough money to buy them. If he wanted to play off the street, he walked across the road to the public library play ground or used the municipal pool at Beatty Park. Only once did I detect any resentment against these early days. About six years



Despite fear of heights, Dean sang suspended above stage for charity benefit performance.

ago we ran into a girl whom Dean apparently had a big crush on as a teen-ager. "She would never go out with me," he recalled with a hint of bitterness. Seeing my curious expression, he added, "She lived on top of the hill—we lived downtown."

Because his father barely made enough as a barber to support his wife and two sons, Dean did his share to boost the family income—but not in the conventional manner of delivering newspapers or pushing market baskets for elderly customers. He delivered whiskey for a bootlegger!

When our children weren't around, Dean once admitted to me he never cared much for formal education. "All I was interested in," he said, "was English and arithmetic." Dean was absent from school so much, his truant officer usually walked past the ball park or the old swimming hole at Wintersville, three miles from Steubenville, to see if he was there before even checking the school.

Dean quit school in the 11th grade to go to work full-time as a gas-station attendant till his older brother Bill (now his personal manager) got him a job in a steel mill in Weirton, W. Va. Occasionally Dean still has nightmares about the mishap that made him quit: a four-ton coil of steel dropped from a crane, missing him by inches!

Knowing how gentle he can be today, it's difficult for me to visualize him running around with a group of toughs who made him so adept at fighting that he tried it professionally, under the name of "Kid Crochet." Five defeats and two broken noses later, he decided that this was another bad gamble.

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