



A staunch Jerry Lewis fan, Patti has played "straight woman" to a million gags for the last 18 Valentine's Days.

tic jokes I felt the gentleness of this young man and his deep need for affection.

In 1946, Jerry joined Dean Martin. Their almost instant success thrilled us all, and Jerry's insane comedy routines, both on stage and off, had everybody collapsing with laughter. When Jerry and Dean appeared in New York, Jerry stopped traffic for blocks by playing a saxophone in his underwear from a hotel balcony.

I was often embarrassed by such clowning, but I kept hoping it was a problem Jerry would work out for himself. These were the years when Jerry and Dean spent months on the night-club circuit. Because of the children, I couldn't travel with Jerry, who hated to be alone, and so the two partners became like brothers. Jerry was the goofy kid and Dean was the older boy who encouraged and laughed at the antics.

Once, after reading about a raucous party in Chicago, I said to Jerry: "I know you want friends, and I ask only one thing. Please don't do anything that will make people feel sorry for me."

Jerry promised to try, but the need to be loved by strangers remained terribly urgent. He kept clowning, and every time the columnists reported another of his wild stunts, I felt like wincing. At one point, I became so depressed I told Jerry: "I've waited so long for you to start behaving like an adult, and now I'm not sure I want to wait any more."

WHEN JERRY realized I meant these words, it came as a jolt—but it was a turning point in our marriage. From that day, he began to make a serious effort to understand what he was doing and why.

The wild antics finally came to an abrupt end when Jerry and Dean broke up their partnership. Few people know how hard this decision was. Jerry loved Dean, but they were such different people that tension between them as performers was inevitable. The days that followed the breakup were perhaps the most painful in Jerry's life. He seemed completely lost. He even refused to go out to a restaurant unless I accompanied him.

We decided to vacation in Las Vegas, and Jerry began to feel better. Our last day there Sid Luft called to say that Judy Garland had laryngitis and couldn't do her night-club

show. He asked if Jerry would go on in her place.

I saw the scared, little-boy look on Jerry's face; it had been years since he had done a single. "What do you think?" he whispered to me, his hand covering the phone.

"I think you're big enough to do it," I said.

Jerry took a deep breath and said, "Yes," into the phone. That evening he swept the audience into wild applause with one of the finest performances of his career.

I felt tremendous pride in Jerry that night. The pride has been growing ever since. He has become more mature and confident. When he is working on a movie or tv show, he may sometimes clown as in the old days, but it's less frantic. Everyone, from technicians to producers, knows he is serious about his work and respects him for this.

I'M NOT SAYING Jerry no longer needs people around him. He still hates to be alone, and at night he finds it hard to fall asleep unless he has me or a close friend nearby. When he had to go to Arizona recently to shoot sequences for his new movie, "The Nutty Professor," I flew out with him at his request.

One trait of Jerry's that surprises most people is his yearning for perfection in everything. This occasionally creates problems for his sons.

There was one occasion several years ago when Gary, our oldest, was deliberately rude to me at the dinner table. Some fathers might have shouted, but Jerry immediately grabbed his belt for a whipping.

After the punishment, Gary ran to his room in tears while Jerry stood trembling. We have an intercom system which allows us to talk and hear from every room in the house. It was turned on when Gary said to me a few minutes later: "You know, Mom, I think Dad must love me very much. That's why he gets so angry and wants to hurt." When I got back to Jerry, he was in tears. I don't think he has ever forgotten those words.

There's a growing gentleness in my funny Valentine these days. Perhaps he is learning that the people who count in his life really do love him. The other night, he said: "Honey, I love you, but I also need you. Loving and needing—they go together."

When Jerry said this, I knew how deeply I loved and needed him, too.

SAD Sue!



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