



DAVID'S TRAGIC ILLNESS

Part Two

**By Evelyn Ward
(David's mom)**

as told to Gloria Stavers

DAVID HAD had eye trouble with his eyes off and on since the age of two—*aside* from once being clobbered over the head (accidentally) by a playful chum when he was still a youngster living in Rutherford, New Jersey! David had tried everything from eye exercises and medication to corrective lenses in an effort to gain complete control of the outer eye muscles in each of his eyes. Because these muscles were weak—and many babies are born with suck weak eye muscles—sometimes David's eyes looked slightly "askew." To anyone else it was hardly noticeable, but to David it was a serious problem. For instance, he hated to have his picture taken because he was always afraid that his eyes would look crooked in the final print. As a mother, Evelyn Ward's real concern about David's eyes was not aesthetic so much as practical.

By the time David was ten years old—and he and his mom had relocated in Los Angeles—it had become clear that none of the corrective measures were *permanently* helping David's eyes and that the time had come to take a real step. A wonderful eye specialist and eye surgeon named Dr. Cogan was treating David at the time. He and Evelyn had a private consultation, during which he told her, "I know if I could operate and *see* what is causing the malfunction in David's eye muscles, I could straighten them out. It isn't a simple operation, but it's one that is done all the time." David, who had been seated outside in the waiting room, was then brought into the consulting room and Dr. Cogan put it squarely to him. "David, I have come to a decision about your eyes," he said. "I feel it's time to operate. We have done everything we can and you are not getting any better. How do you feel about this?"

Evelyn watched as David sat there in his California crew cut—a sort of skinny, big-eyed kid, exhibiting a great deal of bravery in hopes of hiding his fear. David swallowed and pursed his lips thoughtfully, and finally said in a strange, little voice, "All right. O.K. If that's it—that's it!"

Later that night, Evelyn explained to David some details about the operation, assuring him that she would be with him as much as she could during the operation and would definitely be right beside him when he woke up.

"I just want you to know this," she told David. "I will be there when you wake up. You won't be able to see me, but I will be there. Do you understand?"

David nodded slowly, "Yes, Mom." He was beginning to sound not so frightened.

"O.K., hon," Evelyn said. And she kissed David lightly on the forehead, trying not to betray her overwhelming feeling of love and concern. She knew that if she started to cry, David would start to cry—and both of them might not make it to the hospital the next day.

"BYE, MOM! BYE!"

So, at the age of ten and a half, David Bruce Cassidy entered Beverly Hills Hospital for probably the most important event in his life.

"I knew that the biggest problem of all for David would be waking up," David's mom recalls, "—waking up and being conscious, but finding that everything was *black*. I knew that this would be hard for David—that it would frighten him. That is why I had made sure to implant very firmly in his mind the idea that his mother would be right beside him and that he would *not* be able to see at first—and that he should *not* be afraid.

"I also told David that his eyes would be heavily bandaged. That his eyes—in fact, his whole head and face—would be bandaged and that he would have to keep these bandages on for a few days. And that *slowly* the bandages *would be* removed and that *gradually* all of them would be gone and he would be able to see *perfectly*—and, hopefully, from a pair of *absolutely straight*, sparkling hazel eyes."

The morning of the operation—which Dr. Cogan had told Evelyn would last ". . . maybe two hours at the most"—David was given medication to make him drowsy before he was wheeled off to the operating room. Right after David took his medication, Evelyn whispered in his ear, "Now, remember what I told you about not being able to see and—*don't worry*—everything will be *all right*."

At 9:30 A.M., David—in the usual sterilized, white, open-back "hospital gown"—was placed on a stretcher and nurses began to wheel him down a long corridor. As Evelyn stood watching the stretcher grow smaller and smaller as it moved down the hallway, David suddenly sat up, turned over and—squatting on all fours—yelled, "Bye, Mom! Bye!" (Later, David didn't remember this "Bye, Mom! Bye!" episode at all. He only remembered being in the operating room, seeing Dr. Cogan and the anesthetist with the ether mask and—finally—hearing Dr. Cogan say, "David, everything is going to be fine." And suddenly David was asleep.)