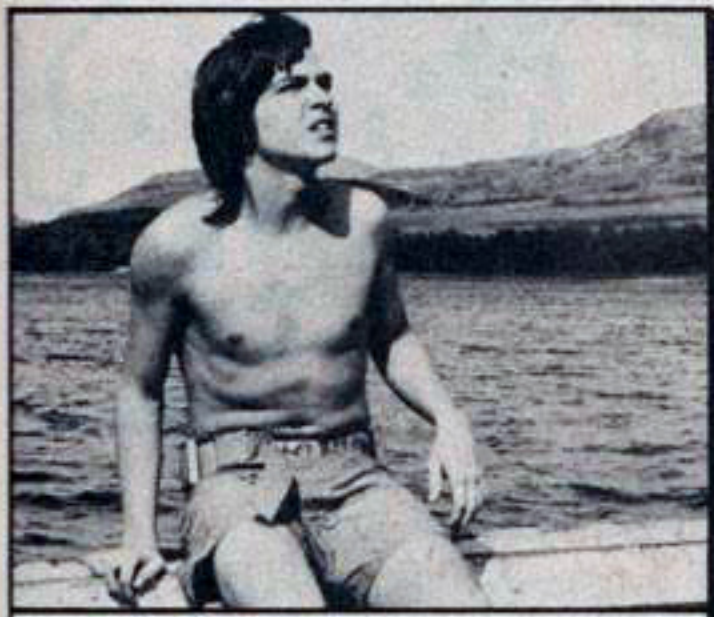


things like, "A big city like this, and you can't get hummingbird's tongues." I suggested that he get a tiny thermometer and go outside pretending to want to take hummingbird's temperatures, and when they opened their mouths. . . . But he wasn't in the mood for any of that.



IT WAS Hawaii for David after they finished shooting "Partridge"!

"He's wasting away," he would say. "Can't you see that he's wasting away?" And, in fact, it was David who was losing weight. Halfway through dinner he'd get up with a little of everything on his plate squished into his hand and go running to the bathroom to tempt Albert.

By the time he got back his dinner was cold and all he had to show for his trouble was a hand with food all over it. He would stop in the kitchen door and make his announcement as if it were the first time he'd ever said it: "He's wasting away."

David's book, *Enjoy Your Alligator*, said the following: "If your scaly little pet doesn't eat every single day, don't worry. Alligators have been known to go three or four days without eating a thing." David shut the book with a groan. "Two weeks," he said. "It's been two weeks and he's wasting away."

But David wasn't prepared for exactly how far away Albert was going to waste. He came into the bathroom one morning and the tub was empty.

DOWN THE DRAIN!

His first reaction, typically, was an accusation: "You let him go down the drain!" he said darkly, eyeing me with possible violence in mind.

Fortunately, my natural logic rose to the occasion. "I would like to point out," I said, "two things: (a) that he was bigger around than the hole, and (b) that I must have let him go down the drain while managing somehow to keep the water in the tub. Tell me how I did it, and I'll confess."

He looked down at the four inches of water in the tub, clearly Albert's own from its unpleasant color and consistency, and then he looked back up at me.

"He's loose in the house," he said.

That was not the news I had been most eager to hear. I immediately lifted myself on tiptoes and looked around me. "Great," I said, lowering my voice to a whisper for some reason, "you've unleashed a ferocious prehistoric beast on us.

"He's lurking under the sofa in the living room or at the foot of my bed, or in one of my shoes, or he's curled up in one of the stereo earphones. . ." the list of possibilities stretched on and on, but I was too horrified to continue.



DO YOU think Bullseye had anything to do with Albert's absence?

David and I searched every inch of that house, from floor to ceiling, from the closets to the refrigerator. No Albert. He had indeed faded away. After several hours, we sat dejected in the



MAYBE Albert wandered outdoors —that's what Dave went to find out!

living room, looking at one another like a couple of failures, which is what we were.

"Now what?" I asked. "What do we do now?"

"Wear our shoes," David suggested. "And turn down the blankets and check before we get into our beds." He was silent for a moment, and then he said the thing that was worrying me, too.

"He'll turf up."

The question of course, is how he'll turn up. I hope I don't have the answer to that question the next time I write to you.

Wish us luck.

Sam



YOU WILL BE SEEING Ricky Segall on many of the "Partridge" shows.