

# Original Teen Heartthrob

## David Cassidy and His Heartbreak

### *A Conversation About Mom's Alzheimer's Disease*

INTERVIEW BY CAROL STEINBERG



Once known to screaming teens in the '70s for mega-hits such as "I Think I Love You" and "C'mon Get Happy," icon David Cassidy recently strummed his guitar to a more serious "Ain't No Sunshine" to a cross-generational crowd of concertgoers. Performing in New Jersey, where his mother, actress Evelyn Ward, was born, the entertainer dedicated this particular song to her for a reason: his mother, he said, has "disappeared" into a severe state of dementia.

And since, Cassidy has been taking the disease center stage, talking about his family's experience to bring attention to the cause. Among his appearances, last May, he headlined the Alzheimer's Foundation of America's caregiving conference in New York.

Born in 1950 to Ward, now 89, and actor Jack Cassidy, the baby boomer has been entertaining audiences worldwide for the past four decades. He first skyrocketed to super stardom in his role as the eldest son in a pop music family on the '70s TV sitcom, "The Partridge Family," and went on to score 24 gold and platinum recordings, have record-breaking concert tours, and perform in varied TV and Broadway shows. This fall, Cassidy will be doing a series of concerts in Britain—and championing the Alzheimer's cause whenever he has the chance.

In this interview, Cassidy talks about his personal life, including his mother's Alzheimer's disease, and his professional life.

**Since your mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, what have been some of the most difficult things to watch during the progression of the disease?**

It has been very difficult to watch the disease progress. As I would see her every few months, she had a very rapid decline in her memory, and shortly after, she lost her ability to speak. Her lack of communication led to her being unable to take care of her bodily functions and eventually her physical inability to walk created the necessity for her to live in adult incontinence products and need constant assistance to even move out of bed. Caregivers have become my heroes.

**What are some of the issues you've faced with your mom that other family caregivers, especially long-distance caregivers, might be able to relate to?**

After doing due diligence I found the proper nursing facility for her to live in. Since then, I have had a family friend go and check on my mother and her condition once or twice a week 52 weeks a year when I am not in Los Angeles.

**We always hear that families have a flood of emotions when a loved one has Alzheimer's disease. What kind of emotional roller-coaster has it been for you?**

This has arguably been the most painful and gut-wrenching personal experience in my life.

**What do you hope to contribute to the cause by being an Alzheimer's activist?**

I think anyone who has had the experience that I have, who has the opportunity to reach people, to educate, to be pro-active in realizing the depth of this problem, realizes that we have just experienced the tip of the iceberg as far as Alzheimer's disease and dementia are concerned. I feel it's a privilege to help other families in their search for answers and to help fulfill the need for awareness.

**Given all the buzz these days about the crisis of Alzheimer's disease, do you think people are thinking of it differently than 10 years ago, even one year ago?**

Yes, absolutely. Remember, baby boomers represent the largest percentage of our population—87 million+ of us. As of 2011, the eldest reached 65. The perception has changed now that the Alzheimer's Foundation of America and so many other nonprofits serving this cause have brought a lot of attention to the disease.

**Many people confuse the fact that Shirley Jones is not your real mom, although she played this on TV in "The Partridge Family." Was that difficult for you and for your own mother?**

My mother went through years of pain as a result of it. I am her only child and now am her only living relative.

**As a baby boomer yourself, do you have concerns that Alzheimer's disease might be in your future? Any steps you are taking to help reduce possible risks?**

As someone who is a baby boomer, and who now has garnered an enormous amount of information and been educated on the disease, I plan, before the end of 2012, on getting myself thoroughly tested. I try to reduce the possibility of the disease with diet, exercise and using my brain in various ways to keep it alive and healthy.

**You've had quite an extensive career. What stands out the most?**

I live in the moment. I try not to live in the past. Clearly, my experience in the early days, beginning with hour television shows prior to "The Partridge Family" and then consequently touching millions of people's lives and having the largest fan club in history stand out in most people's perception. However, I've also been fortunate enough to be successful in so many other diversified creative arenas, such as writing, producing, acting in the theatre, composing television themes, etc., which have made the longevity of my career so satisfying,

**If there was one thing in your personal life and one thing in your professional life that you could change, what would they be?**

I'm happy in the place I am at this moment so to change any course of the path that got me here would be pointless.

**Photos: Then (top), David Cassidy in his "Partridge Family" days, and (bottom) now, with his mother.**

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