

David Cassidy's life finally back on track

BY DIANA E. LUNDIN
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He says he was never "that guy," the one in the crushed velvet suit playing a guitar, his handsome, androgynous face emblazoned on teen magazines, lunch boxes and the heart of almost every 12-year-old girl in America in the early '70s.

"People assumed that the character I was playing on a television show was me," said David Cassidy. "Suddenly, I became that guy. And it, this David Cassidy thing, became so much bigger than life."

The former teen idol recalls the highs and lows of his radioactive fame in the new book "C'mon Get Happy: Fear and Loathing on the Partridge Family Bus."

The slightly built, hazel-eyed Cassidy long ago traded in the velvet Keith Partridge uniform for a stylish charcoal suit, brown T-shirt and black loafers.

In retrospect, he found the fame of his early days to be double-edged. "It was way too good, way too sweet, way too perfect, way too wonderful," he said.

Time has passed and Cassidy, 44, has moved on with it. Just last week, he closed on Broadway in "Blood Brothers," in which he starred for more than a year with half-brother Shaun — another former teen heart-throb.

"It was probably the highlight of my entire career," he said. "Yeah, I mean it. It's such a powerful, potent piece of work. It's definitely the best role I've ever had as an actor in television, film or on the stage."

The Cassidy brothers weren't the original stars to open the Broadway production, but business tripled when they headed the cast.

Now his 3-year-old son, Beau, watches "The Partridge Family" reruns on Nick at Nite, and he finds the young version of his daddy funny.

"I think that's still what people get from it. It's a fun, light piece of Americana. It's a last gasp of innocence. It was a good television show when we made it. It still holds up."

Besides enjoying fatherhood, Cassidy said he is married happily to his third wife, songwriter Sue Shifrin, whom he first met in London in 1973 after standing up the Queen of England for lunch. He blew off the meal with the monarch because he had no interest in any royal, but serendipitously, he met his wife.

"Instead, I had lunch with Sue and I'm glad I did because here I am 21 years later having lunch with her again. Still," he said.

His new book provides a detailed account of his personal life, from the early years when he sat on the stoop of his New Jersey home waiting for a father

who never showed up, to the sexual escapades he indulged in while on fame's wild ride.

"It's important that people understand, for me, I have embraced it, I loved it, it was fantastic on so many levels," he said. "I feel fortunate I survived it."

"I'm one of the few that have had that kind of fame and success that has gone on, has another career, and has been successful again."

Danny Fields, a journalist who covered Cassidy for fan magazines in the '70s, said Cassidy was the best at what he did.

"He was the greatest teen idol there ever was," Field said from his office in New York. "There was no one like David Cassidy. ... And it wasn't just because he was cute. It's something more. Something in him knew how to turn a part that was essentially beneath him, aesthetically, into a triumph."

Barbara Pazmino, president of Just David, a fan club born in 1974 after Partridge Family label Bell Records disbanded the official one, said Cassidy is admired still because he is sensitive, hard-working and stable.

"He knows where his head is. He takes his career seriously. He knows where he wants to go and stays on course. He's not one to hang out in the Viper Room," she said.

There are 10,000 members paying \$15 a year to belong to Just David, down from a record 15,000 in the '70s. (The official club once had 200,000.) The average age is 34, with members as young as 9.

"I feel so — how can I say it? — cleansed, so comfortable being me today and really happy with this person," Cassidy said. "It's been a long, hard struggle to wake up and 'C'mon Get Happy.'"

The title of his book comes from the theme song of "The Partridge Family."

"I used it because I thought people would get it. ... There's a real depth and meaning to it that, perhaps after reading, they'll understand. It's light, it's fluffy and certainly relates to 'The Partridge Family,' but it is about the path and the journey for me to get happy and to feel really good about my life. And I really am," he said, touching the gold ring with the Cassidy family crest his father made for him when he turned 20.

When the series ended in 1974, Cassidy's career — though never his fame — began circling the drain. The '80s were a particularly cruel period, years that remain shrouded in a fog because of his dependence on drugs and alcohol.

"Understand, I had a hard time that I wasn't that guy, and that I was a very serious actor," he said. "When you're on the back of a lunch box ... how can you then turn around and say to the director of a serious film, 'I'm a real serious actor.'"



David Cassidy is surrounded and kissed by regional presidents of his "unofficial fan club" from various parts of the United States and Europe in this 1983 photo.

Cassidy had to find a way to become what he always wanted to be, a working actor, and break what was essentially an evil spell from his sweet television persona.

"People's perception of me was so vivid of this guy playing this character on television, I couldn't get beyond it," he

very sweet, the last three or four years for me."

Cassidy received an Emmy nomination in 1978 for his guest work in an episode of "Police Story," and also in the past several years has released an album and starred on Broadway in "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

Along with his wife, he wrote "Stand and Be Proud," a recording to benefit Rebuild L.A., an organization that popped up after the 1992 Los Angeles riots. He also wrote the theme song to NBC's "The John Larroquette Show," a bluesy tune he submitted under the name Blind Lemon Jackson so that it would have a chance to be considered fairly.

Still, with all that has come before, Cassidy said he could have turned bitter, angry.

"I'm not, because I see it as something that I've been able to be resilient, I've been able to go on and do — finally — the kind of work I wanted to do," he said. "And I think my greatest gift is people — whose lives I've touched and have had an impact on — have always been there for me."

The '80s remain shrouded in a fog because of Cassidy's dependence on drugs and alcohol.

said. He found solace in the theater.

"It really helped me in terms of credibility. And once they see you can not only sell tickets but you're good, and that you have depth and that you're a lot more versatile and there's a lot more there than you ever displayed in a half-hour sitcom, half your life ago. It's been