

# Bonaduce happy after years of problems

By ED MASLEY

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While other kids his age were playing Little League or maybe even "Tag, You're It," 11-year-old Danny Bonaduce was spending what could have been a normal year of childhood pretending he knew how to play the bass on the set of "The Partridge Family," signing autographs and doing all the other chores that come with being young and famous.

And it was great, he says.

In fact, he never understood why people want to try to make a big deal out of all the things you have to sacrifice to be a child star.

"I had a great time," he says.

"Who the hell wanted to play Little League when you could be Danny Partridge? Being Danny Partridge rocked. I had an excellent time."

Bonaduce was still in his teens when the excellent time went south and the series was canceled.

"At the time, I wasn't really worried," the actor, now 40, recalls.

"I just assumed that life would look like 'The Partridge Family' forever. I figured I'd always go to the set and things would always be easy. ... And I was mistaken."

In 14 years, he put in more than 20 weeks of work.

1991, a legendary incident in which the former Partridge punched a prostitute in drag.

But Bonaduce's taken full responsibility for messing up his life, unlike some other former child stars he met on the talk show circuit during what he jokingly refers to as the Ex-Star Child Gone Wrong Tour.

"Everyone else on the show — Todd Bridges, Dana Plato, Eddie Munster, whoever — was totally blaming the fact that they used to be on a TV show for all their problems. What a cop-out to blame the fact that you had it made for all your problems. I blame my problems that I had on being an idiot. When I was getting high, it wasn't with the Brady kids, you know? It was my neighbors and my friends. And when I went to rehab, I was the only ex-child-star there, but there were nine dentists. And nobody asked these guys if they thought their problems stemmed from being an ex-child dentist."

Unlike far too many former child stars, Bonaduce's turned his life around.

He's clean now. And working. And owing it all, he says, to Gretchen, his wife of eight years.

Looking back on the wreck he'd become at the turn of the decade, Bonaduce says, "The only difference between me and the guy in that gutter is my wife. I

former is so carcinogenic that it deserves a surgeon general's warning, somebody better call Ron Howard and Jodie Foster and tell 'em to lay down 'cause their days are numbered. If my daughter wants to go into show biz, I'm all for it."

Dad himself is back in show biz big time. Having launched a new career in radio 11 years ago, he's currently the co-host of a highly rated morning drive-time show on KYSR-FM in Los Angeles. He's also got his voice work. If you hear a voice on UPN that sounds as though it should be cracking wise to Keith or Reuben, that's because it's Danny, the voice of the UPN Network. He's back out in front of the cameras as well, having recently shot a pilot for FX as the host of a game show called "Checkmate." ("It's like the 'Newlywed Game'," he explains, "but instead of a man and a woman playing against other couples, it's the man and the woman playing against the same man and his ex-wife.")

But the biggest thrill by far for longtime Bonaduce fans will no doubt be the ABC premiere this weekend of "Come On, Get Happy: The Partridge Family Story."

It follows the rise and eventual fall of America's greatest TV band through the eyes of a young Bonaduce, who worked

absolutely necessary, anyway.

When he moved the family out to California, Bonaduce says, "I thought it would be appropriate for him to meet his granddaughter, so he has met Isabella, but no, we don't speak with any frequency. If there's a family occasion at which my absence would be real conspicuous, like Christmas or something, I still go, but we're not real friendly."

Was his home life as bad as it seems in the movie?

"Well, yeah," says Bonaduce.

"But they've got two hours to tell their story and I lived with this guy for 15 years. It's not like every second was torturous. Although, I must admit, it wasn't real pleasant. None of it was pleasant."

To escape the situation, Bonaduce often spent his weekends at the home of co-star Dave Madden. If the man who starred as Reuben Kincaid served as father figure, David Cassidy was Bonaduce's idol.

His relationship with Cassidy was good, he says. "And cordial. But you have to keep in mind, I was a 10-year-old kid and he was an 18-year-old man. If he had wanted to be best buddies, there would have been something wrong with him."

While working on the Partridge Family movie, Bonaduce