

SHIRLEY

MARTY

Shirley Jones
& Marty Ingels
with Mickey Herskowitz



An
Unlikely
Love
Story

make. (How right he was.) Finally, he said he might take me up on my offer. Of course, he never did. Perhaps pride, and certainly time, kept him from it.

With those mixed feelings, I went to the funeral of Jack Cassidy. The crowd was large. To my own astonishment, I had to choke back tears. (How would I explain *that* to anyone?) Really, I had a hard time dealing with my own feelings about Jack. You fall into these natural outside roles. My role was, I got the girl, I won. But, in fact, I would listen in the evening to some of their records, and I melted hearing them sing together. Their voices were magical together.

At the funeral, they played all his favorite music, and friends told loving stories. And there I was, sitting with his radiant wife and four beautiful boys. All the work was done, and there I was with the gifts. I was sad and humbled and proud and scared and shaky, all at the same time. All of it while keeping my face a mask for the cold mob around me and the constant photo flashes. I would have traded anything for a few old friends.



As they left the cemetery, some of Jack's closest friends edged over to Ingels and told him, in effect, this was not a day in the park, and we respect you for standing up and doing what you did.

If little in Cassidy's last years had been simple or tranquil, his death would not change the pattern. First, there was the matter of his will. Shirley was struck from it, not to her surprise, and Shaun's name was deleted from Jack's insurance policies. The month Jack had executed a new will, he and Shaun happened to be quarreling. The other sons received payments of fifty thousand dollars each. Everything else went to Jack's friends and his secretary.

It was a sad and curious irony that on the day of his death, Jack was not on speaking terms with two of his sons, David also having disappointed him in some way. In the weeks after their father's funeral, the boys each carried away a distinct and separate impression. Ryan, the baby, nurtured a fantasy about the perfect father. Patrick, the most emotional,

seemed to be hit the hardest. Shaun had to fight off his anger; as the eldest living at home, he had seen the whims and mischief and occasional madness.

Then there was David. To nearly everyone's consternation, Jack was intimidated by the success of David Cassidy as a teen idol. Unable to enjoy it, to take pride in it, to love David even for his inherited talent, Jack withdrew from him. To the extent that each of the Cassidy boys lacked a compatible, ongoing relationship with his father, each suffered in his own way.

Jack Cassidy had died two weeks before Christmas in 1976. Not many years later, before Father's Day, Ingels found an old photograph in an album of Jack Cassidy as a very young man, so handsome it almost hurt to look at him. He had four copies framed and gave one to each of Jack's sons. "I really wasn't trying to win points," he said. "It was far beyond all that. I was in many ways obsessed with the responsibility of keeping their father bright and alive for them. If nothing else, it was an easy way for me to puncture the myth—those involuntary roles, again—that I was intimidated by, and at odds with, the memory of Jack Cassidy."

What you had here was a gorgeous blond shiksa, a Jewish comic consumed with her and looking for another line of work, and, mind it or not, a ghost. To his credit, Marty didn't mind. He would marry her, the perfect mother of television's Partridge family, and he knew he would catch hell for it. "With a person as wholesome as Shirley," he analyzed his position, "there is a strong sense of possessiveness on the part of the public."

The year of the fire there were lives to be led, to restart, to rearrange. At the center was a love story with a twist. Marty Ingels had met and fallen wildly in love with Shirley Jones. Actually, what he did was fall wildly in love, first, and then arrange to meet her. From then on, and forever, he knew he would be in some kind of competition with Jack Cassidy.

tiny lift and rooms too small for those who shared them. Jack was gallant. He talked his roommate into offering Sari and me their room, which had a larger closet and more walking-around space. He insisted we trade, noting that we had more clothes and more things to spread around. Fifteen years later, he would never have made such a gesture, because he had more clothes than anyone.

His kindness created an opening, and he suggested that the four of us go out to dinner to celebrate our first night in Paris. His roommate, a popular actor named Will Kuluva, went off with Sari, promising to catch up with us later. Jack made reservations for the two of us at the restaurant atop the Eiffel Tower.

Of course, the rest was right out of *Modern Romance*. I was in heaven. He introduced me to his world. I had my first order of escargots, my first martini, my first champagne. We literally talked the night away. Jack was predictably the most articulate, the best-read, the most romantic man I had ever met. (No great distinction at that point in my untraveled life, but still I was impressed.) He quoted at length from Thoreau. He had no interest in politics or religion or economics, but he could argue about them endlessly.

He had been in show business since he was fourteen. He had married at twenty-one, had a child, a baby, David. I knew the story—perhaps not all, but as much as Jack wanted me to know. I accepted it.

Evelyn Ward was a dancer, dark-haired, exotic-looking, much favored by photographers who described her as a cross between Linda Darnell and Hedy Lamarr. She once replaced Gwen Verdon in a show called *New Girl in Town*, but my guess is—and I know David believes it—that she gave up her career to raise her child.

As Jack represented it, they were chorus kids in a show that was on the road for twenty weeks. When the run ended, they decided to get married. It was as if they had said, Well, the show has closed, what else have we got to do? Nothing is ever quite so clear as when we attempt to justify ourselves. No doubt Jack skipped rather lightly over the feelings that may have been there once. But whether they were in love or just lonely, they were both young and sweetly irresponsible. They really didn't know each other.

no interest at all in leaving. Cassidy kept saying, "Listen, don't you think it's time to give us a little privacy now?" "That was how we spent most of my wedding night," Shirley recalls, "drinking champagne with my agent."

Her storybook romance would have a nice, new beginning, with one exception. . . .



The night before the wedding, Evelyn called and said that David was hysterical over the news, and how could he do this to him? Jack would have to come to New York and explain to his son what it all meant. He was shaken by the call. Who could be indifferent to the torment of a seven-year-old? I heard him say, in measured words, "Evelyn, I will not, I cannot, leave now. You are going to have to handle this. You have to prepare the boy for the fact that I am marrying someone else."

She was furious, unsparing in blaming Jack for whatever had gone wrong: He was a bad father, a bad husband, and a worthless person. That night was the beginning of a long vendetta between them, a vicious turn they had taken, with David always the pawn. Evelyn felt betrayed, and she was embittered. Perhaps she had reason to be. I didn't know, still don't, what the past had been for them. I knew they had separated twice and gotten back together. After the divorce, she went back to work, and in those formative years David was partly raised by his grandparents, who were lovely people.

Jack paid alimony and child support until Evelyn remarried, and then the alimony was waived. Later, she took us to court twice to raise her child support. I was successful then, at the height of my movie career, and although Jack was not working consistently, I'm sure she felt we both owed her.

The scene in court was brutal. Jack had to take the stand and testify, in effect, that I was keeping him. I had to confirm that he had not earned more than a certain modest amount of money since our marriage. All of which was true,



Shirley's surprise fiftieth birthday bash at The Bistro, one of Marty's most ambitious endeavors. Every step was a production.

Patrick's 1987 wedding. *From left:* Shaun, Patrick, Shirley, Marty, David, and Ryan.



If I ever needed to know how it felt to have my heart ripped right out of my chest, that was the moment.

Shaun stayed only one semester. We learned later that he was in more trouble there than he ever could have concocted had he been in the Beverly Hills school system. Drugs were rampant. He and a friend or two would sneak onto a train, hide in the rest rooms, and spend their weekends in New York, roaming the streets and panhandling for money.

He was fifteen years old. He took a fierce delight in the irony of it, in exposing the folly of his father's decision.

After Jack and I separated, his father tried to regain Shaun's affection, and to an extent he succeeded. He never did make his peace with David, which was so unfortunate for the two of them.

Shaun's feelings about his father improved, but he disliked the weekend visits. Jack could not resist being critical of him, as he had been too long with David. The sloppy look was in; boys spurned suits and ties and crew cuts. If Shaun didn't make A's in school, if he cut classes, he knew he would feel his father's wrath. When he co-starred on the Hardy Boys and had his taste of real success, Jack told Shaun he was proud of him. I don't know if he had ever said so before, nor would he again. He died not many weeks later.

But they talked, and the relationship was better at the end than in the middle. Shaun had no misgivings or guilt about his father, the way David would.



He was a bigger star in his time than his father, a man of stunning talent, was in his. He earned more money in a year or two than his famous stepmother had in her career. David Cassidy became a teeny-bopper idol around the globe, riding the success of *The Partridge Family* on television. While David inched closer to discovering who he really was, the show created a certain confusion among his fans.

"The irony for me," David reflects, "is the fact that during *The Partridge Family* years Shirley really became my 'mom.' To the people who watched us on TV, I became Keith Partridge, and David Cassidy became the son of Shirley Jones.

“And this is really important to me—that Shirley understood how frustrating that had to be for my mother, and she respected her feelings. I was an only child. My mother gave up her own career when she remarried, and she gave it up to raise her son, and I can never thank her enough for that.

“Shirley and Marty had us over for Christmas, so it’s a good situation. Having kids of her own, she knows what it means to Evelyn Ward to be recognized as my mother. Shirley didn’t try to play that role. She was my father’s wife.

“The first time I met her, I was six or seven, and not impressed with whether she was famous. She had been performing in *Carousel*. Now Mickey Mantle would have impressed me. I lived in a small town, and my parents had split up, and I was kind of oblivious to the rest of it. You have a basic resentment because you want your mommy and daddy to be together. I wanted to dislike her, as I guess any child would.

“We met in their apartment in New York. She walked into the room with this beaming smile, bright-eyed, just so warm and real and loving. There was no way you could ever hate this person. The resentment lasted, like, six seconds. I saw who she was.

“Later, coming from my environment, I didn’t know if I would like my brothers. I was a product of West Orange, New Jersey, raised by my mother and my grandfather until I was eleven. I was the soloist in the choir, very WASPy, but solid in terms of the values in my life. I grew up very much as Shirley did.

“And my brothers were Beverly Hills High, Brentwood, and movie-star heaven. They came from such a different place and consciousness. I’m nearly nine years older than Shaun, eleven years older than Patrick, and fifteen years older than Ryan, so there was a serious age gap. There had been another life they knew nothing about, when Jack Cassidy was married to Evelyn Ward.

“For a long time, I felt as though they were the family, Shirley and the boys, and I was the guy they let in the door now and then. Probably the way Marty felt, but that was just my insecurity.

“*The Partridge Family* had a lot to do with changing how I felt. I drew closer to Shirley than to my father, because he

was having a hard time. He was a brilliant man but frustrated, and his frustration was compounded by the fact that his wife sort of had “it” happen to her, and he was fighting and struggling and could never get over the hump. Then I go into the business at eighteen, and in two years I’m on the cover of *Life* magazine and I’ve sold twenty million records.

“Where was the justice? After his death, people who knew him would stop me on the street and tell me how great he was. I had people tell me he was a great stage actor, a genius. I would look at them and think, Where were you when he was alive? Why didn’t you give him a job?

“It was only in the last few years that he received any real recognition as an actor and a singer. A lot of people never knew what a magnificent voice he had. It took him so long to come up through the ranks . . . he did so many shows and so many musicals. He must have felt humiliated to be ‘Mr. Shirley Jones,’ but he gave her a lot. I saw it when they worked together. She would always ask, ‘What do you think, Jack?’ She was the star, but he was the maestro.

“When I became successful, it was tough on him, and Shirley helped me to deal with what he was going through. He was an ultrasensitive, temperamental child in a lot of respects. But I thank him for the gifts that I got from him; that I will always hold on to and embrace. I am indeed very much like him, but I think without the neurosis and the Catholic guilt he had laid on him.

“Shirley and I worked together every day, up to twelve hours a day, for four-and-a-half years. You get to know each other pretty well. That whole experience was remarkable because neither of us knew the other was doing it. There was no fix, no nepotism. I showed up with another guy to test for my part, as you do in television all the time, and I didn’t know they had signed her a few nights before. It just happened.”



Shirley confirms David’s version of the event: “My agent then was Ruth Aarons, and she liked the script, as I did. The fact that it was a musical family I felt might work. When

David auditioned, the producer, Bob Clayburg, liked him very much, but he had a reservation. He called me and said, 'Shirley, do you know that David is testing for the role of Keith?' I told him, truthfully, that I did not. He said, 'I don't really like the idea of a mother and son working together, because that could cause problems. How would you feel about it?' I said, 'You needn't worry. He's my stepson. I didn't raise him, and I'm not going to have to baby him. He's an actor, and he's talented, and we have a very good relationship.' So it was almost the other way around. Instead of my helping him get the job, they nearly turned him down because of me."



Careers would be made on the show. A pretty young girl who played Shirley's daughter, Susan Dey, would be popular in motion pictures a decade later. But the undisputed winner was David Cassidy, who was all but adopted by *Tiger Beat* and the other teeny-bopper magazines. He was in his early twenties, looked seventeen, and was less than thrilled by the fact.

But there were a number of compensations, including the relationship he formed with his stepmother:

"I was fortunate because there are things you can't share with your mother that I could share with Shirley. And I think we could confide in ways that she couldn't with Shaun and Patrick and Ryan. She is really my friend and I love her, and whether we talk every day, or once a week, or once a year, I always get to the same place with her. I don't ever feel that I have to start over with her.

"I learned a lot just watching her work. I admired her professionalism. She is always so level. I'm more like my old man, volatile. She helped me to deal with the pressure of being successful. She is so very gracious in relating to the public, as my father was. There was a period in my life when I was so hot I couldn't go out, it was just mania. It was in some ways a horror to go through, and I could talk to her about my confusion and paranoia. She was protective of me, and she didn't resent the attention I was getting.

"Tastes in music had changed. It's a cycle. In the sev-

enties, her kind of music was out, then it came back. I love to watch her perform. I love her music, Gershwin, Rodgers and Hammerstein, the themes. To watch her as an artist is a thrill for me. And there was never a time when she couldn't let go of it. She lived for Jack Cassidy. Imagine, she had to be what he wanted her to be, what she was at nineteen. She had to stay the person he fell in love with, and I can only guess at how frustrating that might be.

"And the reason my brothers are as good and as real and as together as they are is because they had a real mother, not a movie star. They had a mother who wanted to drive the car pool and go to the PTA meetings. She never in her life thought of herself as a movie star.

"I feel very close to my brothers. The day our father died, I remember feeling for the first time that we were all one. I walked into the house and I held them in my arms, the three of them, we all had our arms around each other and we were all sobbing. And I felt my father go through me, and it brought us a lot closer together.

"My brothers are great guys, and my father instilled certain things in them. He grew up on Long Island in that Irish-Catholic environment, and for all his style and charm and being a bon vivant sort of guy, he believed there were things more valuable than money, such as family and caring and affection.

"One day I had all of my brothers over to my house. We were sitting around the piano, and I was watching Shaun and Patrick agitate each other. They have this competitiveness between them, which is great. They were pushing each other off the piano bench.

"I was giving them parts to sing, teaching them harmonies. I sing every day of my life. I just do it because I love doing it. I had never heard Ryan sing, and we were having a great time, feeling very close, and I looked over and said, 'Ryan, sing this part.' He started out real soft, and as he got more confident, as he saw that he was fitting in, his singing got stronger, and you could tell he has a good voice.

"And it was interesting to me that he had resisted this gift, and I understood why. You come out of the family of Jack Cassidy and Shirley Jones and then three brothers, it's a little intimidating. There are expectations and your own

doubts: Maybe I'm not as good. Not as handsome. Not this or that.

"There is some of my father in each of us. And there is Shirley in all three of them. Patrick reminds me the most of my dad, he even looks like him. Shaun and Ryan I felt had more of Shirley's temperament. Ryan is unusual, extremely sensitive, a really sweet guy. He hears a different drummer. He's turned more inward than the rest of us, more inside himself, in his own world. Shirley says when I was younger, I was much like Ryan.

"I feel close to them. To my stepmother and my brothers. I feel a part of that family, and I include Marty, and I have to tell you, that is a long way for me to come. To call Marty family. But I feel that way about him. I care about him. I admire his moxie, his guts. He can be overbearing, for lack of a better word, but his intentions are good.

"I had a real problem with Marty Ingels because I had a problem about my dad when he died. I never wanted to think about Shirley being with another person. In time, it came down to this: No one has the right to dictate how or with whom we share our lives. When it sank in that my stepmother was happy with the way this man loved her, the friction with Marty began to fade away."

In the telling of these relationships, the story Shirley wrestled with the most involved her youngest son and his trial with drugs. In the end she talked with Ryan and, together, they agreed to include it in the book because, in a sense, this could be any family's story.

Writing or talking about this plague is, of course, a part of the recommended therapy. If what follows helps anyone else to understand how to deal with it, all the better.

Ryan was sent away to a drug rehabilitation clinic. Once there, he very nearly didn't come back. This is a story with no joy in it, no anger, but long months filled with a feeling close to panic. Shirley recalls it reluctantly:

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If I could say there was any period in my life that I tried to block out, and wanted to erase from my mind, this would be it.