
The Partridge Family

4 Seasons: 96 half-hour episodes

Network: ABC; Color

Debut: September 25, 1970 / **Finale:** March 23, 1974

The Partridge Family was originally conceived as a series for real-life family band The Cowsills, who were very popular in the late 1960s. When a deal couldn't be reached with them, the fictitious Partridge Family was created, led by real-life stepmother and son singers Shirley Jones and David Cassidy and complemented by a talented young cast to complete the family. The series begins several months after the family's father has died, and finances are a problem. The kids decide they can help out by forming a band to supplement their mom's income, and they become an overnight sensation. Stories are of the usual domestic comedy sort; an original song is thrown in before the end of every episode and typically relates to the episode's plot.



A set shot from *The Partridge Family*. Shown from left: Susan Dey, Brian Forster, Shirley Jones, Danny Bonaduce.
ABC/Photofest

DAVID CASSIDY

(Born April 12, 1950)

Character: Keith Partridge

It's tough being a pop idol! It's also hard being the son of Jack Cassidy and having your stepmother play your real mother on a family sitcom. David Cassidy had these issues to deal with. However, upon leaving a series, it was a good thing to have your father's manager take over your career, renegotiate contracts, and secure on-camera jobs. David sold millions of albums, invested in Thoroughbred horses, and bought real estate. But then . . . he was arrested three times for DUI, and he declared

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bankruptcy in 2015. David has been married and divorced three times and has two children. Now he is out of rehab and continuing on a worldwide performing tour—maybe some of those tickets can buy him back onto the road of success.

DANNY BONADUCE

(Born August 13, 1959)

Character: Danny Partridge

As the middle child in the Partridge family, Danny made his presence known by blasting his personality as a smart-alecky kid and his loud music as the bass player into the show. When the series ended, Danny went through some rough times; he found himself homeless, living in his car, and abusing drugs and alcohol. He was arrested for attempting to buy cocaine from an undercover officer and then for robbing and beating a transvestite prostitute. In the '80s and '90s he found work as a radio disc jockey, in reality shows, and occasionally as an actor in episodic TV. After two stormy marriages, he is now clean and sober and married to Amy Railsback, who acts as his manager and oversees their company, Gravel Tones productions. It has indeed been a stony road for him.

SUSAN DEY

(Born December 10, 1952)

Character: Laurie Partridge

Susan's first main acting role as the beautiful Laurie Partridge grew out of her experience as a teen model. Having reached the magic age of eighteen, Susan was

able to work the long hours required for a top sitcom. The show was difficult on her, and she became anorexic, supposedly eating only carrots on occasion. After the show ended, I once visited her at her canyon house on the outskirts of Beverly Hills; she had just given birth to her beautiful baby girl, Sara. Susan was quite nice, but I sensed a sadness in her. Three years later she divorced her much-older husband, famed William Morris agent Leonard Hirshan. Susan captured another successful series, *LA Law*, and was lauded for her role; she won the Golden Globe award for her performance in 1987. A year later she married the creator and producer of that award show, Bernard Sofronski. She has taken on some parts since the demise of *LA Law* and appeared in two of her husband's films. When you are married to a very successful producer of film, TV, and award shows, it is much easier to make the transition from child star.

SUZANNE CROUGH

(March 6, 1963–April 27, 2015)

Character: Tracy Partridge

Redheaded, vivacious Suzanne was a natural for commercials, which she continued to do even while *The Partridge Family* was shooting. Suzanne was one of the few Partridge children who actually played her instrument, thrumming her tambourine while pounding on the keyboards. When the series wrapped, she continued acting in parts on TV and attended cast-reunion shows. Susan Dey had repeatedly turned down those reminders of the past. By 1980 Suzanne was through with showbiz and opened a bookstore in Temecula, California, which she owned and operated until 1993. Moving to Bullhead, Arizona, with her lawyer-husband, Bill, and two daughters, Samantha and Alexandra, she died unexpectedly in April 2015 at the age

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of fifty-two; it seemed that she had put her head on a table and just fallen asleep. But a medical incident had occurred, perhaps from a rare heart condition, perhaps from something else; some speculated that it was brought on by the extreme stress of financial obligations that had the IRS repeatedly banging on her door.

JEREMY GELBWAKS

(Born May 22, 1961)

Character: Chris Partridge I

Jeremy was the first embodiment of the character of Chris Partridge. After only one season of shooting the series, Jeremy's "real" family reigned supreme: His father was transferred to Reston, Virginia, and the tribe followed. Although Jeremy has iterated some "what ifs" ("I coulda been a star"), he found happiness and success not on the big screen but on that small one we use so often—the computer. After studying chemistry at UC–Berkeley in 1983, he became a computer analyst and went to work for a major technical services company. Sometimes it's nice to have a steady job.

BRIAN FORSTER

(Born April 14, 1960)

Character: Chris Partridge II

Brian seemed to be the apt replacement for Jeremy. Brian had to his credit over twenty commercials, TV roles, and a litany of creative successful relatives in his background, including his actor father Peter Forster, uncle Alan Napier (Alfred

the butler in *Batman*), and author/actor Charles Dickens as his great-great-great-grandfather. With a family cast list like that in his life, he definitely had an advantage over other acting candidates. Plus he was cute as a button. He had one audition for the role with the producers and director, and he was in. Brian seamlessly took on the role as drummer in the family band, and another TV child actor icon was born. However, the job wasn't as much fun as he had hoped. I believe he had a more enjoyable time when he appeared in an episode of *Family Affair* and got to play with the elephant we had brought to the set for one taping. Brian left showbiz and began a faster career track as a race car driver. I did an interview with him at his home in Sebastopol in 2009. He told me his mother wasn't thrilled that he left show business for race car driving, even though she had always directed him away from the entertainment world with the dictum that he was only acting to save money for college. Brian embraced the tamer life of teaching school for a while. He is now a husband and a stepfather. His newest endeavor is working in the heady tasting room of a vineyard—he lives in the intoxicating wine country of Northern California. Brian still treads the boards of the local stage occasionally and plays a guitar, but his heart is in the relative anonymity of smelling the wafting waves of fermenting grapes in NorCal.