

A LETTER FROM DAVID
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couldn't talk. He understood, and silently he took me home.

I THOUGHT I'D HATE HER!

I knew her name was Shirley. I also knew I hated her. I don't think anyone could have made up their mind as tightly as I made up mine. I was going to hate her!

I'd seen pictures of her and one night, my father took me to see a play she was in. From our seats, I kept staring at her and hoping she'd trip or forget her lines or the stage would drop out from under her and she'd disappear forever.

Finally, the applause began and my father led me backstage to her dressing room. I guess I should say he dragged me backstage because that's almost what he had to do. I wanted to run and hide. I didn't want to talk to her at all!

Then her dressing room door opened and there she was, smiling at me. I loved her instantly.

Well, maybe it's too easy to say that I loved her instantly. I did feel a great deal differently about her. Maybe I should have said that I liked her instantly. Love always takes a bit longer.

Anyway, through Shirley's wonderful understanding and a few good things getting into my thick head, we began to have a really fun relationship.

First, I quit comparing her with my mother. I decided that people are different and no one should come out of the same mold. Besides, my parents had been unhappy together and if Shirley was just like my mother, the same thing would happen again—divorce—and I

certainly didn't want that. So I started looking at Shirley as a different person, her very own sort of woman.

Then I started letting Shirley like me. If she smiled at me or said something nice, I didn't say to myself, "Wow! This lady is out to do me in." I said instead, "Hey, she said something nice. She must really like me if she says that!"

But best of all, I soon had stepbrothers. To this day, I love them fiercely, just as if they were my full brothers. When Shaun and Patrick were born, I just couldn't wait for them to grow big enough to play ball and stuff.

So to Cathy and all of you who are facing problems with new stepparents, let me give you just a few things to hold onto to help with your problem:

1. Be cool. Uptightness breeds uptightness. Be easy-going and they'll return the favor, especially when you're first getting to know them.

2. Don't expect them to be perfect. Let them have a few bad habits without resentment—after all, you're not perfect either.

3. Don't push too far. Don't try to get away with things that your real parents would object to. That's not fair.

4. Try to open up. Tell them about your hopes, your dreams, your teachers, friends, hobbies, clothes, everything. Ask them to help you solve a problem—that'll work wonders.

Family love is such a wonderful thing to have. Don't turn your back on it!

David

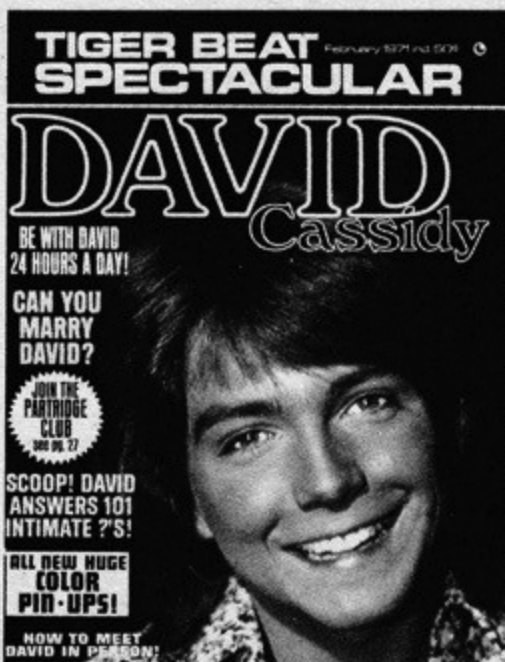
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