

SHIRLEY JONES



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mother, Evelyn Ward, who had starred in musical comedies, as had Cassidy. Jack and Shirley had two sons at the time I first knew David, and they now have a third. Then, they all lived in a comfortable home in Bel-Air, a few miles from West Los Angeles, where David lived with his mother and his stepfather, director Elliot Silverstein (*Cat Ballou*). "I go to visit my dad and Shirley on weekends, and they're always very nice to me," David once told me. "But I always feel like a visitor, not a member of the family. It's not their fault. It's just how I feel. After all, I don't live with them. . . ."

Adding to his frustration was the fact that he wanted to be an actor and singer, like his father. But he was not permitted to try his luck in show business by his parents until he finished school.

Fade out. Fade in five years later—the summer of 1970. I walked into a banquet room at the Continental Hyatt House on Sunset Boulevard, where a party was being held to honor the stars of ABC-TV's new series, "The Partridge Family:" Shirley Jones and—David Cassidy.

I had been asked to talk to David for a magazine article, and let me tell you that it's strange, very strange, going in to interview a neighborhood kid who has become a star—and a teenage idol as well.

But if the situation was strange, David was not a stranger. We picked up the threads of the past as if they had never been dropped, except that now we were two adults talking.

Yet everything had changed, including David, and it was all for the better. In five years he had gone from obscurity to stardom, and in his family life the roles had been ironically reversed.

For now he and Shirley Jones were together daily on the set, and he was playing her son—while her real sons were at home, feeling a bit left out because, despite their pleas, their mother wouldn't permit them to appear on the show with her. Yesterday's outsider was very much "in" now—and loving it!

"How did this all come about?" I asked David. I had read various accounts of how he had been cast in "The Partridge Family," but I wanted to hear the full story from Dave himself.

I told him about a conversation I'd had with Shirley Jones at the "Partridge Family" party. "Shirley told me that they took each of you aside separately and asked if you'd mind working with one another. In fact, she told me that they asked you, 'Do you hate your stepmother?' Just what happened?"

"Well, my agent sent me up for the part," David said, "and I went to two interviews and a final reading, and they got down to about two people. At this point they told me, 'We're considering using your stepmother.'

"I said, 'Oh, cool—you know, all right.' But then they asked, 'Actually, when you think about it, how do you feel about working with her?'"

"I said, 'Fine! I get along great with her.' But I really didn't think it would happen that she and I would be on the same show. I was really afraid that her being my stepmother would work against me rather than for me, because they were super-skeptical!

"Of course, you must see more of her now than you ever did," I noted.

"Sure—every day! It's really incredible," he said happily. "We've got a great friendship going, and that's really nice."

"When Shirley first became your stepmother, though, did you feel somewhat resentful of her at first, thinking perhaps, 'Daddy would still be married to my mother if it weren't for her?'"

"Sure!" he admitted instantly. "I'm sure every kid does. But you know, I was expecting to see the wicked stepmother, and when you take a look at her she's a—"

"Fairy godmother?"

"Yeah—super! She really is. And I could find nothing to make up in my mind about her, either. I couldn't even make up the fact that she was horrible, because she was so pleasant and so sweet. It was like, 'Be mean to me, I want to sulk!' I was asking for it."

"Did you ever let her see that?"

Hidden anger?

"No. Actually, the feeling wasn't even there the first time we met. I liked her immediately, really, and there wasn't any way I could make her into what I wanted her to be—somebody I could hate and resent. There was never any real uneasiness in our relationship; it was all in my head. She always liked me."

And now I learned for the first time that the years immediately after I lost touch with Dave had been the most difficult of his life. It wasn't his dad's fault, it wasn't Shirley's—perhaps it wasn't *anyone's* fault. But he came to feel increasingly frustrated.

He wanted very much to be in show business, yet he was forced—literally forced—to stay in high school by the attendance laws, and the fact that his parents insisted on his finishing school before trying for a career.

David began to cut classes and to hang around with a bad crowd. "I had no interest in school—I became lost!" he admitted to me.

Things got so bad that he was transferred to a "continuation school," one of those grim institutions where problem students or those with part-time jobs are put so that they can fulfill the minimum attendance requirements in as short a time per day as possible.

A three month siege of mononucleosis, which confined him to his bed, suddenly cut off all his contact with his friends and gave him a chance to think about the mess he was making of his life. This happened in the 11th grade, and then, the summer before his senior year, he did a play and a musical with the Los Angeles Theatre Company. At last he was able to do what he loved, and it was a restorative. He was no longer hanging around with "the

wrong crowd," and he capped his high school career by transferring to Rexford, a superior private school in Beverly Hills, for his final year. There he studied—*really* studied—and he graduated in 1968.

Two weeks after graduation, David moved to New York and began to mend some family fences.

"For the first time, I was *living* with my father and Shirley, and it was a nice experience," he said happily. "It was too bad it didn't happen a little earlier, though, because at that point I didn't *want* to be with anybody, really."

Yet he *was* living with his father and stepmother, and it was a rewarding experience. "I was a little skeptical of my father at first," he confessed. "But Shirley had just *always* been my friend. It was a little different with my father. I didn't really know how to adjust to him, but it was the best thing for me. It really helped me to grow up out of that adolescent thing."

"Did you ever go to your dad for advice on anything?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No, never—I never really did. He offered it when he felt it was necessary, but I never really asked him."

"Did you take his advice?"

"A certain amount of it. A certain amount I threw away because it wasn't right for me. I suppose that's always the case, you know?"

"What was his reaction to you at this point?"

"Well, we've never really discussed our careers. His career, I know, has had its high point and its low points."

"I know that there's a lot of frustration involved. I think he finds it a little hard to cope with the fact that Shirley found it easy to break into what she did. It was never really rough for her. And it was never really rough for me, either."

"So I guess he finds it kind of hard, because he's been in the business for 30 years, something like that, and he started as a chorus singer and has worked his way up through 30 Broadway shows, which is unbelievable!"

It only took *one* Broadway show to start things rolling for David, and he landed it only a few months after hitting New York. He played the son of Barry Nelson and Dorothy Loudon in a musical comedy called "The Fig Leaves Are Falling." Although it was a fast flop, he was seen by a man from Cinema Center Films who brought him to Hollywood to test for "Hail Hero." In Hollywood he met some people at Universal and was cast in that studio's television show, "Ironside."

This led to guest shots in a whole flock of other shows during the next year or so, including "Marcus Welby, M.D.," "Medical Center," "The FBI," "Mod Squad," "The Survivors" and "Bonanza!"—and finally the pilot for "The Partridge Family."

With "The Partridge Family" a success in the ratings, things look very good at last for David Cassidy, who went from sadness to success in just a few short years. I was there for part of the journey, but I suppose I couldn't really see it. For most of it, after all, was taking place inside his head.

—JAMES GREGORY

See David and Shirley in "The Partridge Family," 8:30 P.M., EST, ABC-TV Net. 101