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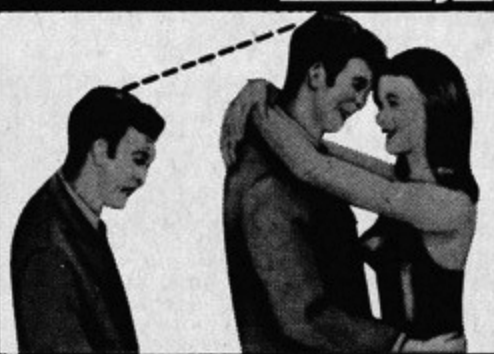
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"At first we thought I had an ulcer. The doctors didn't find anything else. So for three years I had this pain. It wasn't that bad until a couple of weekends ago. I was at home (home in this case wasn't David's own West Hollywood apartment but rather Jack and Shirley's Beverly Hills' house). I was in the backyard when I had an attack. It was the worst I'd ever had. I went black, I couldn't breathe for a while, well, I breathed but it was hard and every breath made the pain worse, so I stayed there and rested three days. I couldn't have gone back to work Monday, so it's good it was a holiday.

"I went to the doctor again, and they gave me more tests. I drank that bromide solution, ugh!!!!!!" David made a face, describing his reaction to the taste of the stuff. "You drink this liquid and then they photograph you with X-rays. Anyway, they found it wasn't an ulcer at all but a gall stone. That's a growth in the gall bladder. My stone was still new, so it was small, but they have to remove it."

Though such an operation is common to older people, it's quite rare for someone as young as David, and therefore it became quite a major surgery.

"The gall bladder doesn't perform much of a function, my doctor told me. Thousands of people are walking around today without it," David explained.

In David's case, there was no choice whether or not to remove the organ which collects bile from the liver and kidneys. If they did not remove it, it would certainly prove fatal in a very short time.

"I thought about that, sure. It's a wierd feeling to know there's something inside you which could do you in—so we planned surgery. There was no rush just then, because the stone was small and the doctor said it could wait until the end of the summer."

One of the reasons David wanted to delay the operation was because of work. During the week, he was starring in the series and weekends he travelled around the country making concert appearances. He wanted to fulfill these commitments before taking two months off. (Doctors had told him two months would be a minimum recuperation time.)

"So we planned it for the end of summer," David continued, "but this past weekend I was in New Jersey doing a concert date and I got sick again. I had another attack and if you can believe it, it was worse than the one before! I managed somehow to get on the plane home. I'd called Dad and he picked me up at the airport.

"He took me back home for the night. He'd already called the doctor when I'd told him about the latest attack and the doctor had called Mt. Sinai and reserved a room. They weren't going to wait until the end of the summer."

David smiled. "They *couldn't* wait. I was too sick. I feel really lousy now. Does it show?"

"No," I replied, amazed at his apparent calm, and I offered to leave so he could rest.

"No, stay a few minutes more. I'm so tired of the quiet here! The nurses have been great but it's so sterile and I'm about to climb the walls.

"I'm afraid of the operation. Boy, am I

afraid! I know it will turn out all right, but I don't like to be put out, put to sleep. I know tomorrow morning'll come and a nurse will come in and give me a shot and ten minutes later I'll be dead to the world. I have to do it, but it still scares me.

"I'm expecting a lot of pain afterwards, too. The doctor told me to expect it. He said for several days I'll have to lie very still and not move or turn because I'll have stitches in me."

Everything had happened so fast that David couldn't be sure of anything. "When I thought it would be at the end of the summer at least I had time to anticipate it. But maybe it's better this way, they got me here so fast I don't know what was happening!

"I feel badly about the show, they have to close down now until I'm able to work again. In the past, when I had a little attack on the set, and that happened a few times, believe me, they would shoot around me—but for eight weeks? Forget it!"

The entire cast and crew of the Partridge series has been laid off. Since the show had seven segments completed, they will be able to begin the new season, but may have to show reruns later on.

"The only other time I remember being hurt," David remembered, "was when I sliced the tip of my finger with a knife and we couldn't get the bleeding to stop so they rushed me to the doctors to stitch it up. But that was nothing compared to this!"

There was nothing David could do but sit and wait until noon the following day, the time he would be wheeled unconscious into the operating room.

"I've never been really religious but I've been praying a lot today. I've asked God to let everything work out all right. With His help, I can make it."

The hospital had been flooded with inquiries about David's condition. His fans were so concerned that the hospital had to set up a special "public relations" office to handle the questions.

"People are really great," David said sincerely. "I keep thinking, there's no reason to be scared if all these great people are in my corner." Soon David could look forward to good health. The disease that had gripped and exploited him for the past three years would be over. David could not remember one day during those years when he was really feeling his best. Even before the gall stone was diagnosed, he would, each day, at one time or another, be plagued by it.

"I feel they're getting a demon out of me," David added. "And I won't be sorry to see it go. Finally I'll get up in the morning without wondering where it's going to get me next, where it's going to hurt again, when I'm going to have another attack and not be able to breathe!"

David appeared to be uncomfortable again. Though the hospital had him on medication, he seemed to be in considerable pain. He rang for the nurse. I promised him my prayers, reassured him, and left.

The rest of the day, according to hospital spokesmen, was uncomfortable for him. And finally the next day, at approximately 12:15 p.m., he was given an