DAVID CASSIDY

continued from page 32

buddy and roommate, Sam Hyman. Sam rushes to the driver's seat of the automobile parked outside the backstage exit and David sprints into the back seat, then pulls a blanket over him and slumps to the floor. "David! Wait! Your pills!" one of his aides cries, running after the revved-up car. "Catch!" the aide yells, throwing the small bottle of antihistamines through the half-opened car window. David clutches them, then retreats under the blanket. His eyes are closed tight, his heart is pounding. "Someday, this will all be over," he says to himself, as the vehicle rumbles down streets he cannot see, back to the confines of the hotel. "This will all be over and I'll be on my desert island. The sky will be blue, the sun will be shining. I'll be at peace, I'll be free . . ."

Twenty-two-year old David Cassidy is no longer merely a television star (as Keith Partridge on the popular *Partridge Family* series), but the undisputed idol of millions of young teenage girls around the country. Fans make it impossible for him to be seen in public. He is besieged for autographs until "I feel like screaming to those people, 'Please! Stop! My hand is falling off.'" Young girls send him thousands of letters a week. They camped on the doorstep of his beautifully rustic Laurel Canyon house in such numbers that he was forced to move. They even hid in the elevators and anterooms of the hospital in which he was operated on last year. ("I didn't know whether to hire round-the-clock nurses or round-the-clock Pinkerton guards," his manager, Ruth Aarons, laments.) David never wanted the madness, the power, the ranks of hysterical followers he's fallen heir to.

He is basically a shy, gentle boy—as fragile and sensitive as his lean, lithe body and delicate features indicate. Unlike other entertainment superstars, who live from party to party, who travel with huge entourages of adoring women, David's private life is withdrawn, almost spartan. A friend, photographer Henry Diltz, says: "Whenever I go over to see him, he opens the door and he's alone. He leads a bachelor sort of existence. I've watched him eat dinner—a can of peaches, a piece of bread. He could have his house full of girls, but he's a quiet sort of guy."

■ Nursing a glass of milk in his hotel room, David says softly: "I wish that anyone who has ever envied someone in my situation—the Beatles, or Presley, or anyone—I wish they could be where I am, could jump into my white suit for just one day. It's such a rush . . . I wake up in the morning feeling drained. I've got to sing when I'm hoarse. I work on a punch-card schedule. I've had them with a gun at my head, almost, saying: 'Record! We gotta get the album out by Christmas.'"

Clearly, the pain of David's hectic new life has taken its toll. But the subtler agony of the life he led before he became a television and concert idol has also taken its toll. The feeling of being torn in half—of being devoured, yet, ultimately, abandoned—is nothing new to David. First, there was the hurt and confusion he suffered from his parents' divorce, then the pressure of a life divided between two sets of parents. This combined crisis led him to a short-lived career as a bicycle thief; suspension from high school; a brief fling in San Francisco's Haight Ashbury, where other young confused teenagers fled in the summer of '67; and long sessions with a psychiatrist. Then, the moment David thought he had found the peace he sought—when he was becoming successful as a serious actor and had found comfort in his Laurel Canyon home—the new pressures descended multifold. With the imminent purchase of an isolated island in the Pacific, David looks forward to the strifelessness he has always desired yet has never found. "Yes, I'm in the process of buying an island," he affirms. "I like to be alone sometimes and now I find it difficult to do so. It'd be nice to live there, to eat fruit off the trees, to be free . . ."

David's woes began early when he was only 6, his parents—actor Jack Cassidy and actress Evelyn Wood—divorced. An only child, he felt pulled between loyalties to the only two people he loved. With the news that his father would soon take a new bride—the beautiful young singer-actress, Shirley Jones—the pain was compounded. David didn't meet his stepmother-to-be until after he'd seen her on the screen. He remembers: "Dad and I walked into a dark movie theater, and there in blazing color on the screen was this huge head of a beautiful lady with her mouth open wide, singing, 'Oooooooooklahoma. . . .' It was so weird, so jolting. I didn't like or understand the whole scene. I didn't know who this lady was, but I made up my mind I didn't like her!"

Meeting Shirley proved, of course, to be quite a different thing. They became immediate friends. "She was such a *real* human being, such a *nice* person," he recalls. Still, the shock of the broken home settled quietly in the back of David's mind. Today, David can articulate that feeling: "I had a lot of rejection from my father when I was young. I wouldn't hear from him for a year at a time. A little boy shouldn't be shunned like that." This was devastating enough. But on top of it, there was new adjustment, new insecurity when David and his mother moved from New Jersey to Hollywood: "Mom didn't really have much money, and it was very hard for us to get by in L.A. We found a house, but she couldn't get a job for a while. It was a completely different place. When you leave New York to come out here, it's like starting from scratch. You don't know anybody. The doors are very hard to knock down."

But knock down doors mother and son finally did: Evelyn was remarried—to film director Elliott Silverstein. David adored Silverstein ("He's so brilliant, so alive and agitated!"), but this love for his stepfather proved another quandry. David was now enmeshed in another tug-of-war between divided loyalties.

David looks back at it now and spares his parents blame for the loneliness and confusion he felt. "Show business can be hard on a kid, but that's the nature of the business. It has to do with the pace and attitude of the people, the whole scene. A lot of the bad things that happened in my life didn't *have* to happen. They could have been prevented if my parents hadn't been in show business. My parents were victims of circumstance."

So, too, was David. The wounds he tried to hide from himself blossomed into all manner of antic rebellion. At 14, he became a self-styled bicycle thief. "I had a bike shop in my garage. I'd be walking home from school and I'd see a bike sitting there, and I'd rip it off and ride it home. I'd paint it or do something neat to it. I ended up returning a lot of them, but I sure must have caused those people a lot of grief."

Then, at age 16, in the famous Summer of Love of 1967, David hightailed it to San Francisco's Haight Ashbury. When he returned from the disorienting experience, he consulted a psychiatrist. This professional help—and a bout with mononucleosis that bedded him down in solitaire for 90 days—pulled him together. "I spent three months in the house. No socializing, just thinking. I found out I cared a lot about myself. I wanted to achieve something, to do something with my life."

That "something" was show business. David, who secretly had "never wanted to be anything else but an actor," set out in pursuit of his goal.

■ In New York, he won a co-starring role in the Broadway prooduction of *The Fig Leaves Are Falling*. His success as a serious actor seemed assured but, on the advice of his agent, he returned to California to do television. Ruth Aarons remembers: "I told him he could either stay in New York and try to make it as an actor, or he could come to California and be a star." The words were undeniably attractive, and the dazzled young David temporarily forgot the pressures he knew stardom would bring—he made the move.

More confusion ensued. Elliott Silverstein, the stepfather he'd come to love, was being divorced by his mother. ("I still miss the guy," David says now, a full three years later.) His classes at Los Angeles City College were becoming tedious, yet his father pressured him to continue. Finally, in exasperation, David gave up. "It was a farce. I honestly went there with the motivation of learning. I made the effort, but it just didn't work out."

Television, however, *did* work out. First there were guest shots on several series—*Adam 12, Bonanza, Medical Center, Mod Squad*. With his appearance on *Marcus Welby, M.D.*, David became a face that agents, producers and thousands of teenage girls couldn't put out of their minds. With his role as Keith in *The Partridge Family*, David was launched as a television superstar and the successor to Bobby Sherman as number-one heart throb.

At first, it was delightful: David had hit the peak of success, but, happily, his personal life wasn't altered. He lived in a beautiful, earthy canyon home with buddy Sam Hyman and two dogs, "Sam" and "Shish." "I don't go in for the parties, the restaurants," he'd tell interviewers, with relaxed cheer. "I just stay up here and live."

In the space of a year and a half, all this has changed. David's recording, interview, concert and filming schedule have him strangleheld into a breakneck routine. With thousands of screaming teenage girls in his pursuit, the word "privacy" is a memory that's lost its meaning in his life. David loves his fans and is enormously grateful for the success they have given him, but, he says, "I need peace. I need to breathe. I want to relax, to be healthy, to be my own man."

It is the night after David's concert at New York's Madison Square Garden. Members of his company—manager, P.R. man, roommate, road manager, photographer—are piled in a limousine, seeking the local action. Pressed by the window in the back seat is a wan, weary David: his sinuses still clogged, his throat still sore. Quietly, he is trembling. One of the guys orders the chauffeur to drive to one of the city's famous discotheques. "Ah, Henry, please! Let's just go back to the hotel," David murmurs. But the car speeds through the rain-slicked streets on its course. Out of the window David sees skyscraper after skyscraper, then the darting neon of Times Square. His eyes squint intensely; the buildings and the neon and the throngs of people blur from sight. His eyes close, he slumps into the light reverie of exhaustion, and his mind summons visions of palm trees, naked land, deep blue sea: images that will form the dream of his sleep and, some day soon, the fabric of his reality. ■

by Sally Biskin