

was soft and almost hesitant as he turned his thoughts to the past, and to that last year when he was still just David Cassidy, a private person, rather than David Cassidy, the actor, singer and star.

"She was a student at Rexford, one of my classmates. She lived in South Los Angeles, and I never knew how she got the bread to go to Rexford, because she was not wealthy. And Rexford was fairly expensive," David remembered.

"I think her mother had put money away for her, and her father had, too. She lived with her mother, and she was going to Rexford with a girlfriend of hers who was also from South Los Angeles. Her girlfriend was black, too. They had a long way to come to school every day."

But the girl had somehow made it, at heaven-knows-what sacrifice on the part of her parents. And now there she was, and when David first saw her his heart stopped.

"She was really a beautiful lady," he said slowly. "She just was fantastic-looking. And she was bright! And, you know, she laughed a lot. She was pleasant. She didn't appear to be bitter at all."

He stopped, as if the next words were hard to say. "But she was bitter."

David didn't know that when he first met her. Only later did he learn it, when the bitterness increased until it finally burst its way through the surface of her seemingly sunny personality to reveal the hidden depths of suffering.

"After I met her, it took me about six months, really, to get in that close with her where I felt secure enough to ask her out. And then I went to a party with her. It was an all-black party, and she just made me feel really good."

"Did the other black people at the party accept you?" I asked him.

"Yes, to some extent. I don't think they were that hung up about it," David replied. "It was a time when Bobby Kennedy was out here campaigning, so they were all into that. They were all campaigning and so was she. I wasn't really into campaigning for any of the candidates, but I just wanted to go with her."

"Actually, it was a party, I think, for Bobby Kennedy. He wasn't there at the time. I think he had been earlier."

"There were around 100 people there, and they were all black. So I felt very strange, because usually the situation is reversed. I mean, I'd been in a situation where there were all white people and only one black person."

"I felt a little uncomfortable," he admitted, "but at the same time I felt very comfortable. I mean, the fact that I was the one person there who was white, and yet was accepted, made me feel good."

After that, David dated the girl "for maybe four months," he estimated.

"How did your folks feel about it?" I asked him.

"My parents are 'white liberals,'" he said, adding with a grin, "They always told me, 'Yellow, red and black and white, you're all precious in His sight.' Prejudice was never inbred in me—but I always knew the difference."

"Is that why it took you so long to ask her out?" I wondered.

"Well, only because I didn't know what

her reaction to it would be. Until I was sure that she would allow it, I didn't want to ask her or offend her, or blow my scene with her because we were good friends."

"How did her parents react to you?"

"Well, they were on the same kind of trip I was, you know? I mean, she had never gone out with a white guy before, either. But they weren't against me."

Where did David and the girl go on their dates? "Friends' houses, movies; I saw a lot of films in those days."

He smiled as he remembered something. "I saw *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* with her. Wow! It was a trip. I went with her and Sam Hyman—who's now my roommate—went with his girlfriend."

"Some people," I observed, "feel that *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is a phony movie." (I was referring to the commonly-noted fact that when Hollywood finally showed a white girl in love with a black man he had to be the idealized, super-perfect type so often played by Poitier.) "Did she comment on it?"

"Well, I don't know. I mean—yeah, there was a lot of *shuck* in that movie," he said, using slang that I'd never heard before.

David continued, using the youthful jargon of his contemporaries as he told me what broke up his romance with the black girl. "Eventually I got pretty bum-tripped by her. You see, what really sort of broke us up is the fact that she got involved with a guy who went to Harvard. He was black. He was really bright and very into the college situation and the scene. He was very 'black power' at the time, and just then black power was reaching its height."

"Martin Luther King had just been killed. I remember going down to her house the night he was killed. I can't tell you how paranoid I was!

"It was around Watts. I was white and I was young. I had long hair and was driving in a fairly nice car. I was really paranoid as I drove around, driving down to pick her up. Maybe I'm over dramatizing a bit, but . . ."

But it was clear that David had indeed been frightened that evening, an evening when much of Washington was ablaze with rioting over King's death. And perhaps David had some inkling of what would happen later to his romance.

Yet, as far as the girl herself was concerned, everything seemed fine between them. "When I saw her that night," David recalled, "she didn't blame me for what had happened."

But could Martin Luther King's death have affected her thoughts about David later? "Yes, I think the whole thing . . . this guy from Harvard really brainwashed her."

"And I don't know, I just . . . I was pretty immature at the time, I suppose, and I was paying less attention to her, maybe, because of that, rather than trying to win her back. I just sort of ignored her and I guess that made her turn to him more."

"You mean you felt hurt?" I asked.

"Yeah, right! And so I said, 'Well, she can do *that*, so I can do *this*.' Also, she thought I really dug her girlfriend, the one she used to come to school with, because I was friendly with her too."

Then David confessed, "Maybe I played that up a little more than I should have,

because I wanted to make her a bit jealous."

He paused. "And then she became very, very radical. The thing that really crunched it was something she said in school one day. . . ."

The class was having a discussion about race riots, "because it was really a progressive school, compared to public schools," David recalls. "We were rapping and it turned out it was like my friend Kevin and I were against her in the discussion."

"The discussion was on two levels. I mean, in reality, we were discussing her and me—the situation between us," David explained.

"I asked her, 'What if there was a riot . . . and I was running down the street and you saw five black guys coming after me and I said, 'It's me!' and I ran into your house? What would you do?'"

"She said, 'I'd shoot you!'"

"And I said, 'Okay, got your ticket, baby.'"

That was how it ended for them—suddenly and publicly, with those frightening words of hers. After that, any close relationship between David and the black girl seemed impossible.

And yet, after he had finished telling me the story of his broken romance with the beautiful black girl, David added suddenly: "I'd like to see her now, but I don't know where she is."

So the years haven't dimmed his memories of this girl with whom he was once so close. He can't forget all the good things they shared before the world closed in on them. And if they ever meet again, David hopes they can be friends.

When I first heard that David Cassidy once had a black sweetheart, I knew that I wanted to ask him about it. I thought their romance might make a nice little story about a boy and a girl who were too young to know the difference between black and white, too young to hate.

I learned in talking to David that it wasn't that kind of story at all. It turned out to be much deeper, much truer—and much, much sadder. But I felt it was a story that should be told, and not prettied up or changed in any way. That much at least is owed to the boy who told it and to the girl he told it about.

Some will feel that this story should not have been told at all. Others will insist that it had to be told. I felt that it should be made known, if only because it tells something about what David Cassidy is today and why he wants to help and understand other people. It tells, too, how America has been these past few years for all of us.

Perhaps tomorrow things will be different; but, sadly, this story happened yesterday. □



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