

According to his mother, he never indulged in baby talk like 'goo-goo' or 'da-da', the sort of things all babies are supposed to gurgle when they first try to talk.

There's a story in the Cassidy family that David stunned them all at the age of two and a half by saying a word most grown-ups find hard to pronounce.

One of his aunts had asked him: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And what do you think the boy genius replied? "A pediatrician!" meaning a baby doctor. He must have heard his mother use the word — but how did he ever get his tongue round it at that age?

Here's one of the very personal memories of David's mother when he was only three months old:

"Jack and I were kidding in the living room one afternoon, laughing our heads off about something. All at once we heard a little 'hee-hee-hee' coming from David's room. We ran in and there was David, propped up on his pillow, imitating our laughter.

"Naturally after that Smiling Sam was re-named Laughing Sam."

Another thing. As David opened his mouth, his mother noticed a little cut in his upper gum and something peeping through — his first tooth!

EYE TROUBLE!

When David was thirteen months old his red hair started to change colour. In the next two months it changed to a light blond.

When he was nearly three he started to sing himself to sleep in a little voice that his mother describes as tender but firm, bright and resonant. Mind you, he also used it to wake the family up every morning, so no-one suggested a recording contract on the strength of early promise!

About this time David's mother became seriously concerned about his sight. She had noticed that his eyes seemed to bother him a little. They went in and out of focus 'improperly' and he seemed to have difficulty in controlling his vision.

She tried to console herself that all kids have these problems to a certain degree, but, as it turned out, she had good reason to worry. When she took David to an eye specialist he said: "I'll fit David with glasses which I hope will strengthen his undeveloped eye muscles. But if, in a year's time, I don't see the sort of improvement one would expect — well, we'll have to operate."

The word sent a shiver through Evelyn Cassidy. It really scared her. Several months went by and David's eyes still seemed as bad as ever.

Then one day a funny but fortunate thing happened. Evelyn was collecting her son from Sunday School when she met a Dr. Graham, another eye specialist who happened to be a member of the congregation.

"What on earth kind of glasses is that child wearing?" asked Dr. Graham.

He gently removed them and handed them to David's mother. "Take a look," he said.

Evelyn did so — and was horrified. She could see nothing through the right lens but a blur. The doctor folded the glasses and put them away in his pocket.

"You must never let David wear these again," he warned her. "We'll get his eyes to work without this terrifying process."

Next day the three of them sat in Dr. Graham's office. David and his mother listened intently as the doctor explained his theories about the boy's sight.

"David may need glasses one day for continuous reading, but right now he needs lots and lots of eye exercises. We'll practice physical therapy for an indefinite period. If there's nothing medically wrong with David's eyes, he should be cured in a year or so. As for an operation, it's out of the question."

He paused for a moment.

"But if David's sight hasn't shown a permanent improvement by the time he is ten, then we may have to think about operating."

When David and his mother moved to California, Evelyn still hoped for a miracle. She always dreamed that David would wake up one morning and that all his eye troubles would be over.

But it didn't happen like that. Instead she found herself consulting yet another doctor about David's sight. She did so because of an incident at home when David seemed very depressed. Evelyn asked him what was wrong.

"Nothing, Mom," he mumbled, looking down at his supper. Then suddenly he blurted out: "Yes there is something wrong. They're taking pictures at school tomorrow and I don't want them to take my picture because my eyes look crooked."

His mother felt a pang in her heart because of his sensitivity about his eyes. A day or two later she and David were in the consulting room of yet another eye specialist, a Doctor Cogan, a more brilliant man than either of the doctors they had seen previously and an eye surgeon of international fame.

Dr. Cogan did all the tests to discover the actual degree of muscle weakness in the eyes. For a time he insisted on seeing David twice a week. Finally he had a heart to heart chat with Evelyn in which he laid all his cards on the table.

"If I could operate and see what's causing the malfunction of these muscles, I know I could straighten out the trouble," he said. "The question is, would you agree to the operation?"

Evelyn thought for a moment, then she said: "Yes, Dr. Cogan. But I think

David should come in and be consulted."

So David was ushered into the room. As Evelyn remembers it, he stood there with his California crew-cut, a skinny, big-eyed kid putting a brave face on things in spite of his inner fear.



David with crew cut.

Dr. Cogan came to the point. "David, I feel it's time to operate on your eyes. We've done everything we can but they're not getting any better. How do you feel about this?"

Evelyn saw her son's jaw muscles tighten and his lips pursing up the way they still do today when he doesn't know quite what to say or do.

"All right," he nodded. "If that's it, that's it." She could have wept for his courage at that moment.

Next day David had his operation at Beverly Hill Hospital, probably the most important single event in his life.

It lasted five incredible hours. Evelyn spent them drinking innumerable cups of coffee in the cafe across the street, phoning up constantly to see if David was out of the operating theatre yet.

At last the nurses told her to come over to the hospital. Dr. Cogan was waiting for her. He told her in detail what he had found.

It seems that since David was born a vein in his right eye had been looped round the main eye muscle. There were other minor complications requiring surgery on both eyes, but Dr. Cogan patted Evelyn's shoulder and reassured her that David would be alright.

"He won't wake up for five or six hours. Go home and rest, then you can come back and be with him when he recovers consciousness."