

Ex-teen idol David Cassidy is back

By DAN LEWIS

ATLANTA — At the unexpected sight of David Cassidy emerging into the hotel lobby, several teen-aged girls began

squealing. Cassidy was startled by the recognition and noticeably uncomfortable in the midst of the mini-hysteria.

Cassidy has resurfaced after four years of seclusion. He plays an under-

cover policeman in NBC's Thursday night series, "David Cassidy — Man Undercover."

This new series isn't looking for the very young audience. And while Cassidy says it would be nice if his old fans turn to his new series, he hopes he doesn't become "the hottest T-shirt item."

"I've gone through it," he says ruefully. "You really get sucked into that audience. This new series is not designed, sketched or directed, or fixed for kids," he adds emphatically.

For 4½ years, David was a superstar to the young. From one of the kids on "The Partridge Family," he quickly rocketed to an international pop hero for screaming young girls. His records quickly sold in the millions.

The adulation and the hysteria, however, were not music to his ears. As a result of his extraordinary popularity, David was forced into an agonizingly compressed existence. On tour, he was a prisoner in a hotel room wherever he went.

"It was frightening," David recalls. "You stood there on stage, and 30,000 little girls were screaming, trying to get to you.

One little girl died of what they claimed was a heart attack at my final concert. The press blamed me."

He was a young man with great success, but not time for himself.

"I was working seven days a week. A television series, recording at night, concerts on the weekends. Press interviews during lunch and photo sessions during breaks," Cassidy reflects. "I resented it all because it denied me relationships, friends and a social life. I was a BIG star, yet I kind of felt dwarfed."

When it reached the point where it became "hell to do one more show," Cassidy quit ... walked away from it all.

"I needed to thaw out," he says, revealing also that for the next 2½ years, he traveled widely, bought property and spent time in Hawaii. He also got married to actress Kay Lenz.

David didn't mean to become the singing idol of the young.

"I was an actor. That's all I ever wanted to be. It was never presented to me that I would be a teenybopper star. It just took that bizarre turn. I had to get out. It wasn't calculated. I just walked away."

About six months ago, Cassidy made it known that he was ready to come back to work — as an actor. He was perhaps as startled as anyone when, among the offers, was a starring role as an undercover cop on a segment of "Police Story."

It was his comeback role. The ratings were good, the reviews embracing. There was no thought initially that it would lead to a series. NBC realized its many assets as an early-season replacement for a floundering show.

As the series star, Cassidy has a lot to do. For a while, that presented a potential problem. He was in virtually every scene of the early-filmed episodes.

He wants his involvement trimmed a bit "for the sake of my marriage, my life and career," he says.

The Cassidy clan is an unusual family. The teen-idol mantle has been transferred to David's half-brother Shaun, star of "The Hardy Boy Mysteries" on ABC.

David smiles when he talks about Shaun. He's happy for him, and he's also knowing, and he has advice for Shaun.

"I hope he chooses to do the same thing I did ... pull

out when another day is another hell."

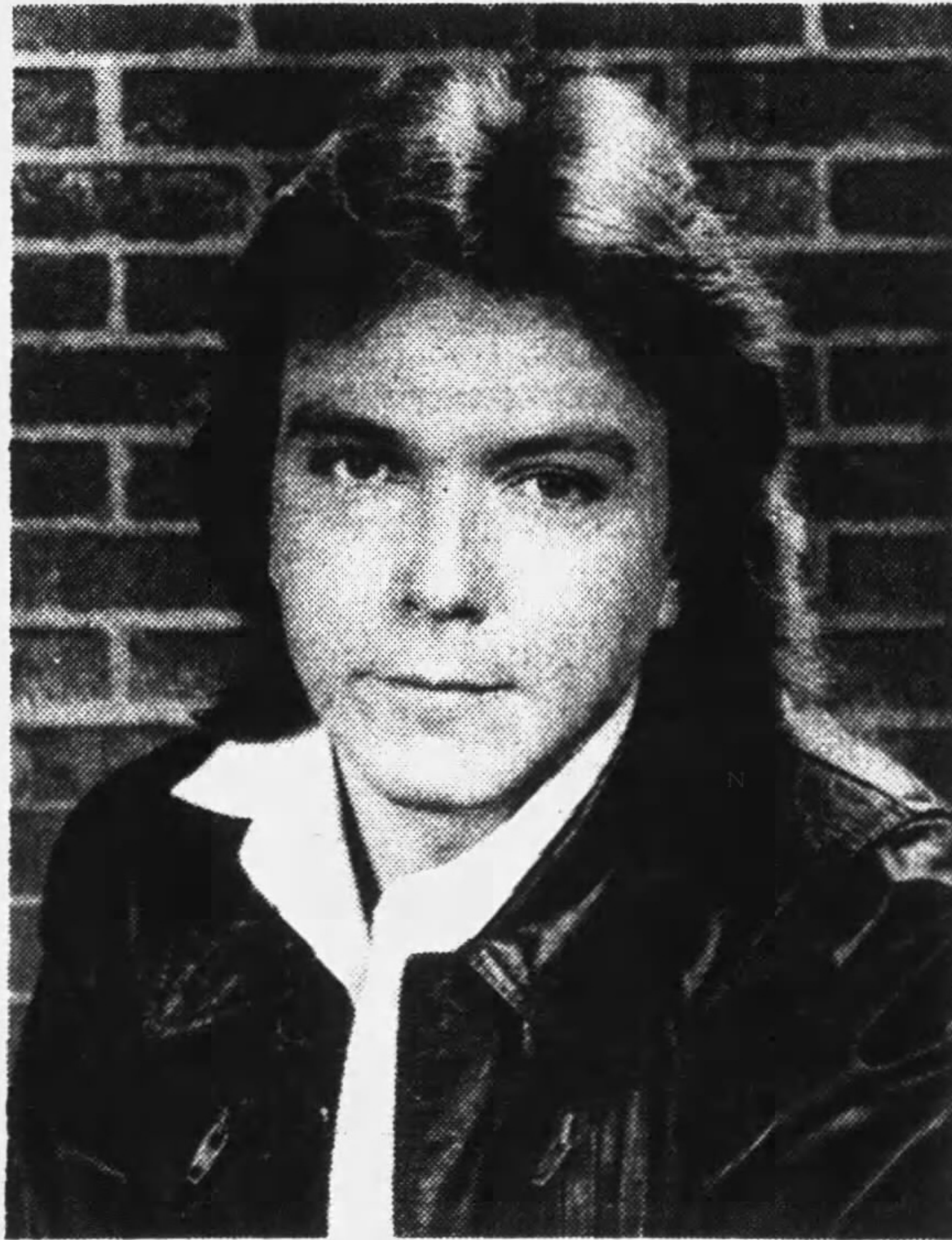
David sees Shaun's career in a different perspective, however.

"I never intended for it to happen to me. I think Shaun had designs on it. It was difficult for Shaun through junior and senior high school, living as my younger brother. I think he had the 'older brother syndrome.' He always looked up to me because of my success, which made me look larger than life to him until he was old enough to see it differently.

"I'm happy for him, but Shaun knows that I'm the only person who can understand what he's going through because I had it for 4½ years. He knows that I know the changes that will happen to him. No way you come out of this as the same person."

David feels his nightmare is over now, but Shaun's are mounting. And there could very well be another Cassidy in the future. That would be 16-year-old Patrick, whom David describes as a "tremendous athlete" and could go either way — into sports or show business.

"He's a border line," David observes, "but I'm afraid he'll get sucked into show business."



After four years in seclusion, David Cassidy is starring in the NBC Thursday night series, "David Cassidy — Man Undercover."