

A Partridge in a quandary

At 14, Danny Bonaduce was rich and famous, thanks to 'The Partridge Family'. But it's been a hard role to shake off. Now he's coming to Australia in his latest attempt to escape from Danny Partridge.

By David Hay,
Los Angeles

DANNY BONADUCE may have a top rating radio show and a popular stand-up comedy routine, but for most people he will never be anything other than the grown-up Danny Partridge.

At the time, playing alongside David Cassidy and Susan Dey in 'The Partridge Family', gave Bonaduce a child-star lifestyle he would not have swapped for anything.

But now he sees those glory years as just a burden, not only in show business, but in life.

"Let's get this clear," says Bonaduce. "Being a Hollywood kid is not a profession. If you go around and do every possible talk show — Donahue, Geraldo, Oprah, Johnny Carson, 'The Today Show' — you'd earn maybe \$2500 and all you could say was, 'I've done them all'. If you could make a career out of it, other people would have done it already."

Not that Bonaduce hasn't tried. Doing talk shows, along with bit parts in unreleased kung-fu movies, has been one of the few staples in a chequered career since 'The Partridge Family' was disbanded in 1974.

He was part of what recently became a fixation on American TV talk shows, which began as "Hollywood kids, where are they now?"

After the microscope was turned on many of these ageing child-stars, many were found to be having a hard time of it. Their misfortunes spawned the talk show topic: "Hollywood kids — their troubled lives".

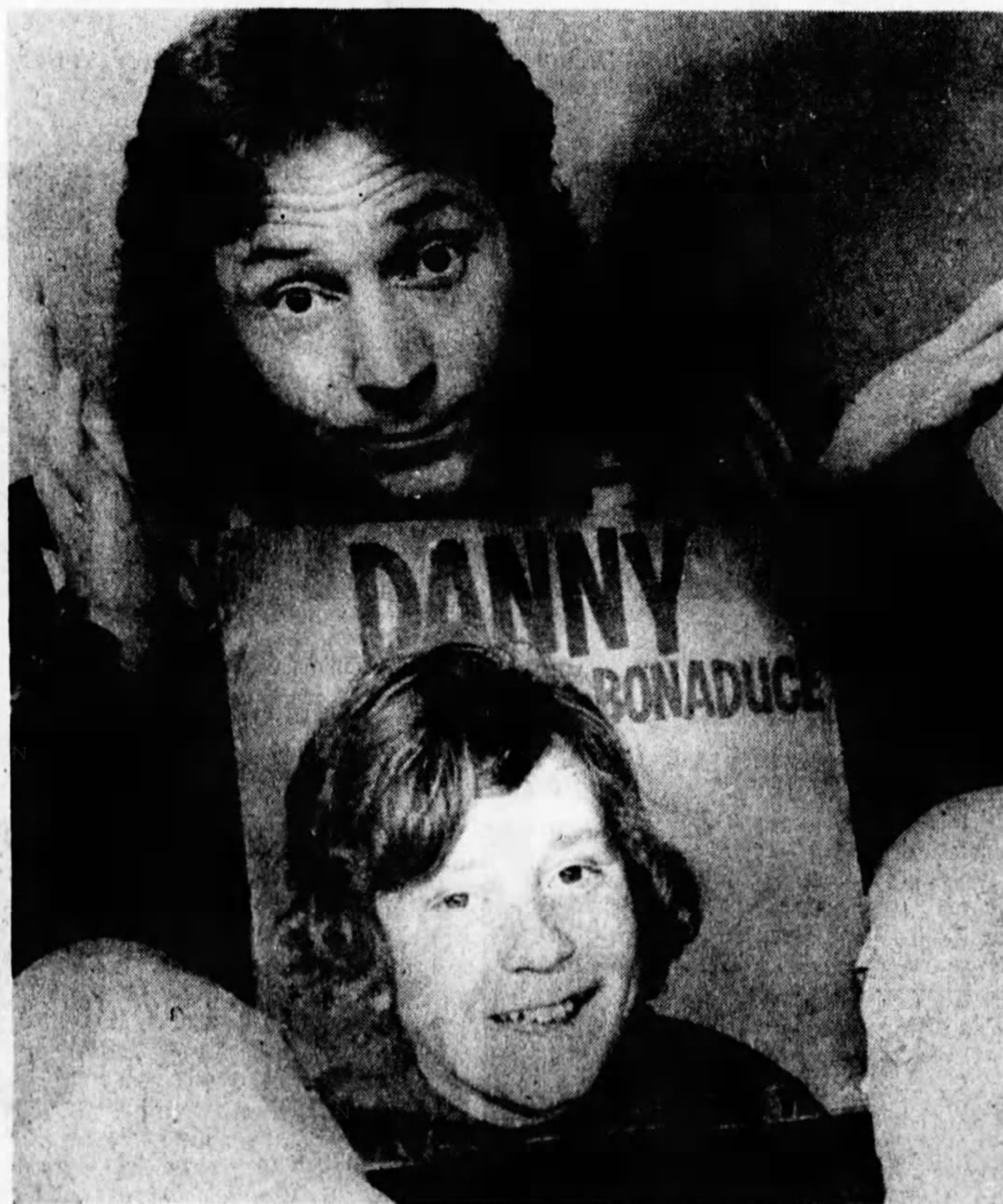
Jay North, the former Dennis the Menace, admitted to being a victim of child abuse. Lauren Chapin, Kitten on 'Father Knows Best', took to selling her body for heroin before she discovered God and was "born again". Corey Feldman, a child actor in Stephen Spielberg's 'The Goonies', was busted for heroin and cocaine. Another Spielberg alumna and Hollywood Kid with generations of show business blood, Drew Barrymore, admitted to being hooked on alcohol and drugs at age 13.

The list goes on: 'Different Strokes' star Todd Bridges spent nine months in jail after he had shot a man and then cut his throat, behavior attributed to his previous cocaine habit.

The "troubled after-life syndrome" was a subject that the former Danny Partridge was also an authority on.

In his most recent brush with the law two years ago, Bonaduce was charged with assaulting a transvestite prostitute in Arizona. He got off on probation, although "I had to pay him \$4500 just to have his nose fixed which seems a hellava lot to me".

Prior to this altercation, Bonaduce had been arrested twice on drug charges. In 1985, he was pulled over in West Hollywood for running a red light, and then arrested for possessing



Come on, get happy: "I spent my childhood," says Danny Bonaduce, "on jet planes and with mayors. I missed out on football but I flew on the Concorde."

four grams of cocaine. As part of his probation, he entered a drug treatment program. The effects of the latter had worn off by 1990 when he was again arrested, this time in Daytona, Florida, for allegedly purchasing \$20 worth of crack.

Bonaduce has now cleaned up his act. He works as an early morning DJ on the Philadelphia radio station, WEGX, claiming the highest ratings on the East Coast. Much of his comic patter has gone over so well that Bonaduce is now on the stand-up comedy club circuit, which will bring him to Melbourne's Comedy Club for five nights early from 5 May. But it's been a long haul since the break-up of 'The Partridge Family'.

IN 1974, Danny Bonaduce was 14. He was sitting on \$350,000 he had made from 'The Partridge Family' and he was high on a certain amount of fame. Among his former teenage pals was Michael Jackson.

"I spent my childhood on jet planes and with mayors," he says. "I didn't play baseball, but I did ride on an elephant. I missed out on football but I flew on the Concorde. I totally lucked out."

After the top-10 rating family broke up, Bonaduce looked for work on other sit-coms. But casting agents began saying, "You're not funny any more and you're not cute any more."

Bonaduce moved back into his mother's house in suburban Los Angeles. Girls, most of whom were stuck on Danny Partridge, would come to see him, much to the displeasure of Bonaduce's mother.

"We had 21-year-old girls hanging around our house all night," Betty Bonaduce later told 'People' magazine. "I was the witch who wouldn't let them in."

Betty Bonaduce's witch routine wasn't entirely successful. "My window opened right on to the street," recalls Bonaduce.

"They'd open their shirts and have notes written on their bodies — 'DANNY, WE LOVE YOU'. I put my autograph on a lot of flesh."

Bonaduce eventually married a Japanese woman, Setsuko Hattori, whom he had met in a restaurant. They married so she could get a green card to work in the US, but, taking a leaf out of the Peter Weir film, Bonaduce let the woman move in and set up house with

him. They divorced several years ago.

By 21, Danny had spent all the money made from 'The Partridge Family'. Although his self-confessed "confused kid" did get some bit parts — on 'Moonlighting', 'Spenser For Hire' and in some B-movies — he knew he was heading into the netherworld of show business "has-beens" when he started to get up for appearances at supermarket openings — these could be worth up to \$500 — and for shows on cruise ships.

Things got so bad that Bonaduce found himself confronting rumors he had died.

"One widely circulated story was that I was killed in Vietnam fighting valiantly alongside Beaver Cleaver," Bonaduce recalled last year in a mock biographical article he penned for 'Esquire'.

'We had 21-year-old girls hanging around our house all night,' Betty Bonaduce said. 'I was the witch who wouldn't let them in.'

"Another time, I was driving to school when a special bulletin interrupted my favorite song on the radio. The announcer said, 'The world of show business has suffered another devastating blow... Danny Bonaduce was found dead in his car after a mysterious auto accident.' I was flattered."

In the late 1980s, Bonaduce resurfaced in Philadelphia as a late night DJ on WEGX. The sign-on for his show was 'The Partridge Family' theme song, 'Come On, Get Happy'.

"After about three weeks on the air, I shook off 'The Partridge Family' thing," he says, allowing the new, still smart but sober Danny Bonaduce to take over.

His blend of ad-lib comedy and music has made him a success again. "A good 50 per cent of the material we do on the show is off-the-cuff just like in my stand-up act," he says. "I now make a very nice living."

Much of the material for his new routines come from his interaction with audiences. "I start off looking at them and saying 'OK. Come on now. What have you heard about me?'" Americans seem to have heard more than enough as the response is usually overwhelming, and somewhat rowdy. "Almost always I have to calm them down after that," he says.

The audience participation angle works well because Bonaduce has been through the mill and is not scared of anything. Other than performance anxiety. "That comes from not doing pre-arranged material," he confesses. "But people enjoy the act a lot more because they know it's the first time I'm saying something."

Don't worry, Danny Partridge doesn't avoid talking about his own family and the decade when growing

up as a Partridge seemed well, almost hip.

"I do a whole thing about the 1970s," he says. "And the 1970s are very hot now all of a sudden. In New York and in LA there are these Seventies clubs. Places where you can go and listen to all that music and not look stupid because you're wearing bell-bottoms."

"I try and not dwell on some of the '70s. Like those days I'd wake up in the morning and not know where I was and only that I felt like vomiting."

"But don't for one minute think all that was so great," he admonishes his listeners. "Being a Hollywood Kid was mostly a hindrance. It cost me \$150,000 in legal fees. I was automatically a severe threat to any policeman. And I became the butt of jokes all across the country."

And who really cared about Danny Bonaduce's troubles? Bill Cosby and

many big name celebrities came to Pee Wee Herman's side when he ran afoul of the law earlier last year. But, complains Bonaduce, "I couldn't get Erik Estrada to rally to my aid. Johnny Quest wouldn't rally. Neither Nanny nor the Professor returned my calls."

He sometimes mentions his new-found sobriety. "When people find out that I'm sober, they feel free to drink more. They know I'm around in my new role as the designated driver for the whole country."

Two years ago, Bonaduce got his first taste of going on the road with his comedy act when he opened on the road for — yes, you guessed it, former brother, David Cassidy.

"It lets you know where your career is at when you're doing the opening act for him, right?" he quips. "No, seriously, people really like him."

Their tour, operating in small auditoriums housing audiences of around 5000, lasted eight months. They went all across America and into Canada, which Bonaduce calls "America Lite".

Bonaduce's brushes with the law have meant few opportunities to leave the US. His trip to Australia is the first time he has been able to take his act overseas since the passing of his television alter ego.

Although Bonaduce laughs a lot about his former family, in real life they remain no closer than the Manson family. Susan Dey is a star on 'LA Law' and David Cassidy continues as a crooner, while the others have drifted into obscurity.

As for Bonaduce, this DJ and stand-up comic is in danger of becoming so successful that another go-round on the TV talk show circuit appears imminent. This time the topic is: "Hollywood Kids — The Recovery".