

son of the real-life showbiz family *The Nelsons* on the radio, then watched him do it in 435 episodes over 14 years on television's *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-66).

Plenty of gay men remember the strong and often self-defining and self-revealing crushes they had on TV stars, with Billy Gray of *Father Knows Best* (1954-63), Tony Dow of *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-63), Paul Peterson of *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-66), Luke Halpin of *Flipper* (1964-68), Davy Jones of *The Monkees* (1966-68), Burt Ward of *Batman* (1966-68), and David Cassidy of *The Partridge Family* (1970-74) being particular hotbeds of homosexual infatuation and awakening. Some men do, in fact, trace their earliest clues to orientation by recalling the way they felt about cute male TV stars prior to their own adolescence and sexual maturity.

"I don't mess around, boy!" was little Eric Hilliard "Ricky" Nelson's trademark crack, and as a little boy, his ego was being stroked with all the funniest lines. He had a real charm and lively spirit about him. Growing up under the microscope of fame, as well as under the stress and strain of being a child mandated to work and spend nearly all his living and breathing time with his real (and somehow unreal) family, he started to withdraw. The wiry little kid became what appeared on screen to be an increasingly shy and apathetic teenager.

His line readings went flat, and so did his affect. He might even seem a bit troubled, haunted, or sad in retrospect. Whatever it was, in combination with his supernatural beauty, he began to smolder. Maybe it was that fat lower lip or the way his eyelids blinked in slow motion and never seemed able to completely uncover his gorgeous eyes, giving him a perpetually sleepy look. His face alone would have been enough to inspire devotion, but it came atop that high school athlete's trim frame, already revealing plenty of hair at his open collar when he was just 16. Ricky Nelson was hot hot hot, and then, on April 10, 1957, he cagily wiggled his leg and sang a song and assured himself immortality.

He'd done a gag, but affectionate impression of Elvis on an episode of *The Adventurers*, then cut a record with the help of his enterprising dad, but when Ricky Nelson crooned "I'm Walking" on the "Ricky the Drummer" episode of that April '57 *Ozzie and Harriet* show, a star was re-born. And he was no flash in the pan. He had 27 Top 20 hits over his career, including "A Teenager's Romance," "I'm Walking," "Poor Little Fool," "Lonesome

hotly sought-after teen magazine of yesteryear that I used to own but cannot for the life of me find.

If girls like to see boys with their shirts off, even if it's just the pure pleasure of bare skin exposure, then so do other boys who happen to be gay. I longed for an episode of *The Partridge Family* (1970-74) in which Keith would take off his shirt. That turned out to be such a rarity, but I was always hopeful. The episode (#43, "I Am Curious Partridge") in which Danny starts the rumor that Keith (David Cassidy) has a heart tattooed on his derriere was a particular favorite, especially when some of the guys in his gym class try to sneak a peek while he's showering. Clever Keith—he's wearing a towel.

Before someone caught on and changed him into thicker jeans for the second season, it was always a pleasure to watch the earliest *Partridge* episodes for glimpses of Keith's impressively well-defined bulge. It was about this time that I learned what "dressing to the right" meant. Later, there were the constricting pants worn by Sweathogs on *Welcome Back, Kotter* (1975-79), especially Laurence-Hilton Jacobs, and then John Schneider of *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-85), a show I never had any interest in, and still don't, outside of periodic checks to see if things below Bo Duke's belt are as I remember them.

David Cassidy, under enormous pressure and teenybopper image strain, tried to put a wicked spin on his candy ass image by posing nude and talking about his fans' wet panties for an infamous issue of *Rolling Stone* (5/11/72), but it backfired into scandal. The cover photo by Annie Leibovitz is surprisingly unattractive, a weird effeminization of her subject, making him look like a French actress with unshaved pits lounging on the lawn. The centerfold is much more aesthetically pleasing, though it injudiciously cuts off after a slim border of revealed pubic hair. Reprints of the image in subsequent books show even more bush, but not even a hint of the big cock that led his siblings to nickname him "Donk" (for donkey).

In his 1994 book *C'Mon Get Happy*, Cassidy states at the outset that he's not going to get trashy, but thankfully ignores his own censure. We learn that he was an early bloomer, that "I walked around with a hard-on all day. At 13, all I did was play with myself. That's all I can remember—thinking about getting laid, getting blown." He was fixated on women sucking him off. And he even posed for Gina Lollobrigida's private book of cock photos, surely among the most wanted books in the history of printing.