

Man, Like Wow!

Tommy Sands' TV debut hit young girl with an overnight smash.

THE NIGHT of January 30, 1957, will burn in my memory forever. It was the night Tommy Sands made his debut as America's newest singing sensation in "The Singin' Idol" on Kraft Television Theatre.

I was only 10 years old, growing up in Trenton, Georgia, but my parents let me stay up for the entire show. It was about an Elvis Presley-like rock-and-roll star. Elvis himself had been the first choice for the role, but was unavailable. Tommy was chosen for his clean image and his bundles of talent.

Tommy's acting was good, but it was nothing like his singing rendition of Teenage Crush, which became a million-selling record.

I read everything I could about my new fantasy boyfriend. He liked barbecued chicken, strawberry milk shakes and boxing.

Later that year, Tommy recorded a song called Man, Like Wow! He was a man's man and a young girl's dream all rolled into one person, plus he was an overnight success!

Tommy was also all about the hair thing, the king of the comb-over. His shiny black hair made him a natural for a hair-care product promotion. I begged my mom to buy Halo shampoo because Tommy was in the ads and commercials stating, "A Halo girl has that look-again look."

In 1961, Tommy even sported blond hair in the movie Love in a Goldfish Bowl. He was married for 5 years to Nancy Sinatra, the original big-hair girl.

Every day, after school, I watched American Bandstand. Like so many kids of the era, I'd imagine I was dancing with Tommy by taking hold of my grandmother's front-door knob and flinging myself out onto the porch and back into the living room.

One day, I was so deep into my "dancing with Tommy trance" that I didn't see the neighborhood cosmetics lady appear. I made a beeline to the kitchen to alert Nana that she was here.

The TV was turned off while Nana ordered cosmetics with such names as To a Wild Rose and Persian Wood. I did catch the last 20 minutes of Bandstand and ended my day doing the stroll with Tommy.

I've often wondered what people will say about the 1950s era 100 years from now. If there's a phrase that would sum up everything, I believe a song title from Tommy would do the trick: "Man, like wow!"
—Linda Ezell, Nashville, Tennessee