

## TRUE DREW

After 23 years as an actress, 24-year-old Drew Barrymore is starting a whole new career as a producer

By Trish Deitch Rohrer

Photographed by Art Streiber

Flossie, a yellow mutt, looks on lovingly as Drew Barrymore struggles to pull off her T-shirt. Templeton, Flossie's brother, is there too, lying outside Barrymore's neatly packed walk-in closet, eyes closed but ears twitching around like radar, clearly not wanting to miss out on any Barrymore-style fun. And he's right to be ready: Barrymore's T-shirt gets stuck halfway over her head (revealing a large blue butterfly tattoo just below her belly button). "Ahhhh!" the actress screams. Watching that blond head caught in a shirt, arms flailing, butterfly weaving frantically in space, Flossie wags her tail. She must be used to jokes like these from Barrymore, the kind a dog could get--full of self-deprecating physical humor.

It's classic Daffy Drew. Yet despite her public profile—a blond gypsy with daisies in her hair and a wild streak in her soul that has inspired her to flash David Letterman on air; get married, then divorced, at 19; and go on assorted binges and crusades—in private, Barrymore is reflective. At 24, she says over dinner, she's just coming out of a "midlife crisis." (The math makes sense if you grasp the concept of "Drew years" as one producer described Barrymore's accelerated youth. "I was born 10 years old," says the actress, who appeared in a commercial at 11 months and became a star at 7 in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*) "I found myself saying, I've been working for 23 years, my whole life," she says, raising her hands like she's holding two pizzas. "What now?" Barrymore actually considered retiring, perhaps even disappearing: She imagined parking her Volvo station wagon on the side of a bridge and leaving the door open—"So even I would wonder," she says. "But then I thought, That's crazy: I can't retire--I've got too much time to go. And I couldn't sit still if I tried."

She looks down at her water glass, now filled only with ice, and interrupts her own story. "I wrote a children's book about ice cubes once," she says cheerfully. She does this-goes off-and it's hard to predict when she'll come back. "Well, it was about one ice cube. I am obsessed with ice cubes. Obsessed." Barrymore gets quiet, but only for a moment. "And I love America, particularly Las Vegas. They are so free with the ice! It's buckets galore! They just shove the ice on you, and I love that." You're sure she's going to stop talking about ice, when she goes deeper into the subject. "Ice is very much like flowers. It just dies at a certain point. But you know what's weird? You can bring it right back to life. Just by freezing it. Ice," she says, shaking her head. "I worship it."

Her shrine to ice, it seems, is the tiki bar she built outside her 1902 house in the hills of L.A. The bar has a thatched roof, its own patch of sand—"in case you wish you were at the beach"—and a professional ice-maker. "It's the thing I'm most proud of at my house," Barrymore says. "And I'm, like," she holds up her hands, Vanna White at door no. 3—"Dah, dah-dah, dah!" she sings. "And here is my ice-maker!" She laughs. "That, and the jukebox Adam Sandler bought me for my birthday with my favorite song Otis Redding's 'That's How Strong My Love Is'—are my most prized possessions."

This kind of spontaneous foray into the silly seems to charge Barrymore's batteries, and she returns, rosy-cheeked and refreshed, to the more serious subject at hand—that midlife crisis.

Realizing the key to overcoming her burnout was more responsibility rather than less, Barrymore turned to the production company, Flower Films Inc., that she'd started in 1997 with her friend Nancy Juvonen. And it was in a script sitting on a shelf that she found a second wind. She dove into the day-to-day details of producing, hands-on, her first feature film, *Never Been Kissed*, in which she also stars. "The work was so," says Barrymore, her remembered malaise lifting from her face like clouds from the sun, "*Much. Fun.* It was so great. It takes up every second of your time and you never get upset for a second. In fact, you're like, 'More, more--more hours in the day!' " *Never Been Kissed* is about a socially graceless 25-year-old reporter who doesn't realize, when she decides to pose as a high-school senior in order to get a story, that geeks (like herself) never change. Barrymore brought to the part a career's worth of experience, as well as everything she felt personally about growing up a geek. "I still walk into a room wanting to work a good show," she says, "and inevitably I trip or do something that blows my cover. I so know what it feels like to feel ugly, awkward, stared at--the freak!"

Though she never went to high school (at 14 she dropped out, after legal emancipation from her mother, actress Jaid Barrymore), Barrymore always felt the odd girl out. This is partly to do with the fact that she "knew loss," as she says, at an early age, when her then abusive father, John Barrymore Jr., left her mother and became, she adds lovingly, "a loon." Drew recalls chasing her mom down the driveway, all through childhood, desperately trying to tell her she loved her, in case one of them died without her mother knowing.

She didn't have friends her own age growing up-her friends were the adults she met on movie sets-and so she adopted an avocado tree in the backyard of the modest duplex where she lived with her mother until she was 8. "I think it explains why I was a heavy child," she says. "I ate so many avocados, like five a day. I sat outside with a spoon and a saltshaker, and I was in purgatory when the avocados weren't ripe. I had a cheap swing set, and I would swing and eat the avocados. I hugged that tree every day."

When Barrymore became a child movie star, kids at school shied away from her even more resolutely. "No one ever got close to me," she says, "because I was always in and out of school. I just sort of sat there, dying for someone to come up to me." Barrymore laughs; nowadays, barely five minutes go by without someone approaching her, something she handles graciously. ("You totally rock my world OK?" a thin woman yells to her during dinner, jumping in front of the table. Barrymore, not wasting a moment wondering what's happening, matches her enthusiasm and exclaims, "Thank you! All right!") She gets serious about geekiness. "You think, Will I ever become the swan? Will I ever feel good about myself?"

She has come to believe that life's hardships can be beneficial. "I battle with myself in my head, but each year I get better," she says. She believes pain has made her more empathetic. She wants to help other people "heal" too, and looks upon the movies she makes as medicine. "As an actor I'll want to continue to do darker characters," she says. "But the only movies I want to produce for people are fun, caper, funny, romance movies- all the good stuff in life."

"Drew has a more sincere instinct for giving than anyone of our generation I've met in this business," says Barrymore's friend Edward Norton, who worked with her on Woody Allen's *Everyone Says I Love You*. "She has forged this terrific positivity toward life, and a spiritual density and grace, out of nothing."

Well, not out of nothing. Barrymore learned a couple of important things from her estranged family (she has spoken to her mother only twice in the last eight years, and she sees her father infrequently, and has never spent Christmas with him). She feels her grandfather, actor John Barrymore--who died at 60 of "too much excess"-- is watching over her, and that the gift for acting he passed down helps keep her sane. Her mother taught her about worthy investments, like real estate and first editions; Barrymore's library, lined with her "sacred" books, is her favorite room. And she learned from her father how not to behave. "My dad," she says, rolling her eyes affectionately. "He's so great, but he's wild. I didn't want to be like him, the way he was always struggling and never had a place to live. I want to know where I'm going: That stability is important to me."

Barrymore has more stability than most 24-year-olds. She's got a home she could raise a family in, on two-and-a-half acres, with a yoga studio designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, a guest cottage, a swimming pool, a chicken coop, a beehive and three dogs. She's got an office in L.A. decorated like a funky coffeehouse, with board games on the shelves, bowls of candy everywhere, and a snifter of brightly packaged condoms in the reception area--Barrymore, a spokeswoman for the Female Health Foundation, talks to women college students about STDs.

But despite her unusual maturity, Barrymore finds herself mired at times in typical mid-20s confusion. She wishes to remain private on the subject of her relationship with longtime boyfriend Luke Wilson. Her house remains more or less unfurnished; there are few pictures on the walls ("I guess I'm not ready to commit," she says, and shrugs shyly). And though there's a lifetime store of comedy in her heart, contentment is in shorter supply. "I've always said that one night, I'm going to find myself in some field somewhere. I'm standing on grass, and it's raining, and I'm with the person I love, and I know I'm at the very point I've been dreaming of getting to." Barrymore, now fully dressed and sitting outside under her fruit trees with the dogs, looks out at nothing, and then seems to remember what she sometimes forgets--that her life is very rich, right here and right now. "Life just happens in moments," she says. She looks up. "I believe that."

The phone rings, and Barrymore tears inside, running down the halls and up the stairs like a kid through a castle--you can hear her on the wood floors, the gleeful, bare-footed "it" in a game of hide-and-seek. When she's finished with the call--it's business, and she loves business--she slams the phone down hard (the dogs stand up and wag their tails), screams in delight, and stampedes back through the house and outside, headed for the Next Great Moment.

#### **Photo captions & headlines:**

- "Alright, OK," says Barrymore to her dogs, "I'll give you love, I'll give you *lovvve!*"
- "My fruit trees are the things that make me happiest at my house, naturally speaking."
- "I love shelves built into walls because you can display what you have on them in such a beautiful ritualistic way."

- Barrymore sits pretty on the patio outside her front door in L.A. Although she has lived "mostly out of suitcases," one constant in her wardrobe has been a Cartier diamond necklace, a present from an industry executive.
- Barrymore found her mutts Templeton (back to camera) and his sister Flossie (center) at a flea market; Highla (right) on N. Highland Avenue. Opposite: "Do I have a customer?" she asks, spreading feed around a chicken coop housing 10 hens and two roosters.
- Barrymore bought the property because it is unusually lush for L.A. The yoga studio, with its reflective glass panels and canti-levered door, was designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright; beyond it the roof of the tiki bar.
- Barrymore in her favorite part of the house, the library-cum-rec room, where she hangs out with friends. She writes "D. Barrymore" inside a book's cover only after she has read it, and buys books from every museum she visits to show her kids someday.