

Drew Love, Drew Grit

Article by: Chris Heath

Photography: Albert Watson

Drew Barrymore starred in her very own soap opera. The world watched, but she outgrew the part. When Drew Barrymore was six, she didn't have very many friends and she wasn't very happy. Her father was never there, and when he was, he was cruel. At school, the children teased her for having a boy's name. But she had one friend she used to tell her problems to. He never answered but he listened, and he had a sweet smile. He also had wires sticking out of his back. His name was E.T. She knew he wasn't exactly real, but that was O.K. That way he would never betray her secrets.

They made a film together. In the film, E.T. could talk a little, and near the end he gave her some extraterrestrial advice. "Be good," he said. At these words, softhearted audiences the world over sighed. But Drew, she didn't take much notice at all.

E.T. It must be a burden sometimes. Imagine being approached day after day on the street to be congratulated for something you did when you were six. Sometimes friends from out of town want to go on the Universal Studios tour, but for Drew it's a nightmare. "When we get to the E.T. part they always go, 'We've got a special passenger on the bus...' and 'Miss Barrymore-would you do the honor of riding the bicycle?'"

Every time she refuses. "I'm like, 'I don't think so...' I didn't even have to do that in the movie."

Drew Barrymore is now eighteen. It has been a busy twelve years. The notorious ones are summarized in the book she co-authored at fourteen, *Little Girl Lost*, the downward spiral of a child actress chasing happiness and hooked on ways to seem grown-up. The scorecard is given in alluringly large red letters on the jacket: I HAD MY FIRST DRINK AT AGE NINE, BEGAN SMOKING MARIJUANA AT TEN, AND AT TWELVE TOOK UP COCAINE.

By the time the book came out she had dried out, but her career had dried up. Some casting directors even laughed at her for having the nerve to audition. But then, slowly, things began to turn around. She got prettier. She got parts. Some didn't work-the science fiction fiasco *Doppelganger* she won't even discuss beyond saying, "You'd stick needles in your eyes rather than watch that." But as the cartoon-evil nemesis of a family in *Poison Ivy* she was beguiling, and then as a trailer-trash teenager who falls in love with a trigger-happy ex-con in *Guncrazy* she was wonderful. On television she was creepily unlike herself in the speedily made docudrama *The Amy Fisher Story*. In all three roles Drew exhibited a new persona: the willfully sexy, alluring teenage misfit. When she announced that it was her intention to play *Lolita*, it seemed perfect. Suddenly anything was possible. She could act after all. She could be famous for what she is, not just infamous for what she was. And maybe she could be happy.

We first meet at a coffee shop a couple of minutes from her house. She brings along her assistant, Kim, and the best friend with whom she lives, Justine. Justine has known Drew for six years. She calls Drew "Lulu." She made up the name one day because she wanted to get Drew's attention but she knew that if she shouted "Drew!" everyone would stare. Drew gets stared at a lot. "The thing I hate the most is being stared at like I'm from another planet. It happens every day." Drew smokes, eats potato pancakes. "Between nine and twelve I was really fat," she recalls. She and her friends even experimented with being bulimic for a couple of days, but the vomiting seemed really silly so Drew gave it up. Now she eats what she wants and fluctuates between 103 and 107 pounds. Her hair hangs just below her ears; she cut it all off after seeing Patsy Kensit in *Twenty-one*. Most of the time she is disconcertingly pretty, although occasionally, just for a moment, the face of a plain, almost dumpy teenager peers through. She dresses in loose trousers or jeans and T-shirts, and her charm and sexiness are far more subtle than the vampy voluptuousness she shows on-screen. She can talk with a tone and confidence that belie her years, but for all her past exploits, she maintains an apparently uncalculated innocence. As a social seduction, it works a treat. "She wants you to like her," points out her Guncrazy director and friend Tamra Davis, as though Drew allows no other option. "And you like her." With Drew Barrymore there are plenty of sweet smiles, engaged eye contact, and each time you part, the biggest hug you can get from such a small person. It is the perfect combination: She makes you want to look after her, but leaves you in no doubt that she could look after herself just fine.

Justine and Kim and Drew chat about teenagers. I listen.

"A freedom to make your own mistakes as a child is the best thing a parent can give," opines Kim.

Drew nods. "Everybody has to touch the stove," she says, "to see how hot it is."

Says the person with the burns, I mutter, and before the words are even floating above the table, I wish I hadn't.

For a second there is silence. Then, laughter.

"Yeah," sighs Drew, smiling. "I was never one of those people who could just hear about it. I always had to touch."

We walk back to Drew's flat. She has a house, but she can't live there "because it's where me and my ex-boyfriend lived, and it's too painful." He was actor Jamie Walters. After three weeks they moved in together. One day he proposed, and-screaming and hugging-she accepted. A while later he gave her the ring and she cried. They got along so well. It was perfect. Until...until they didn't get along so well. The trial separation. Both of them too proud to try and make it work when the other wanted to. Drew finally called it off. That was few months ago. She says she still loves him. When I ask her- later, in another conversation, his name nowhere in the air-what's the first thing she thinks of when she wakes up, she quietly mutters, "Jamie...just his name."

Drew apologizes for the state of the apartment-"I'm really anal-retentive, but I'm anally unorganized; everything has its place, but it's the wrong place"-but it's fairly tidy. Soon she and Justine are moving to a new house. Since she stopped living with her mother three years ago Drew has moved about fifteen times.

But wherever they are, they stay in. Drew has done her going out. "We paint...read...do arts and crafts," explains Drew. They played "dress up" the other night. In a box on her bedroom floor is the present Steven Spielberg sent for her eighteenth birthday: an Armani suit. "I cried," she says. In her bedroom are: clothes, a sunflower bedspread, a framed photo of Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, a photo of herself half hidden by a framed fragment of quilt. Somewhere beside the bed, though she doesn't show it to me, is the gun Jamie gave her, a .357. At the foot of her bed is a little photo gallery. Mostly they are friends, and she introduces them as though they were there. She passes over some without comment. There's an old photo of a man. Maybe it's her father.

The one real thing her father has ever given her is in the closet. It's an old white shirt made out of soft, thick Indian cotton, which he casually tossed her way one day. Once in a while she sleeps in it. Every night Drew has a bath. Often she kneels beside her bed and prays. (If God ever answered? "I'd probably shit in my pants and have a heart attack," she says.)

Drew is wearing a T-shirt Justine painted the other day. It shows stick drawings of the two of them, smiling, and underneath is written I LOVE YOU LULU WITH ALL MY HEART. Justine launches into a sweet, unsolicited testimony about what a great friend Drew is. She proudly relates the time Drew hit somebody for her. "All of a sudden, Little Lulu is there and I see her fist." Drew's punch cut his face open, and he ran to the bathroom. He was an actor; he was worried about his looks.

Drew treasures her friends. "I'm so lucky," she gushes, launching into a speech she will make perhaps ten times in the days we are together. "My friends are my family. I adore them so much."

What she leaves unsaid is that if her friends are her family, it may be because that's more than her family ever managed to be.

Drew had enough family history to choke on before she was born. The Barrymore family was famous for two things. The first was being one of the great acting dynasties. The second was a web of self-destructive addictive personalities. The Barrymores had been actors in England since the nineteenth century; the interrelated Drew family, which was to give Drew her name, likewise. John Barrymore, Drew's grandfather, found success in Hollywood in the '30s, in films like *Grand Hotel* and *Dinner at Eight*, but died destitute after four wives and too many drinks.

It looked for a while as if his only son, John Barrymore Jr., would escape the family woes. He had fine looks and some talent, building a modest reputation in films like *The Sundowners* and

While the City Sleeps. By the time he met Drew's mother he had another reputation as well: two failed marriages, trouble with the law for drunk driving, hit- and-run driving, domestic violence, and drug possession. The first time Drew's father attacked her she was still in the womb. He kicked her mother in the stomach badly enough for her to end up in the hospital.

Drew's first memory of her father is from when she was three. He roared into the kitchen, threw her mother to the ground, hurled Drew into a wall, and stormed out with a bottle of tequila in his hand. Drew blamed herself for what happened around her. If her father talked to her it was often just to bellow instructions to read specific verses from the Bible. What she really wanted was for her dad to play Barbie with her. But he never did. As for her success in films, he ignored it.

"Half of him," says Drew now, "was a shithead. But I was always so desperate as a child to have his acceptance because I couldn't have it. I always wanted him to be proud of me." She pauses. "I still do, I think."

One day when she was seven she'd had enough. She hurled a chair at him. "Fuck you," she said. "I hate you. Just leave us alone." She took his cigarettes and wrote messages down on them: "You are an asshole!" "You are a prick!" "I hope you die soon!" Then next time she saw him was when she was fourteen.

The next day we meet. Drew sports another homemade T-shirt covered with daisies, her favorite flower. She has a daisy tattoo near her left hip. Originally it was a rose, but she didn't like it so she had it changed. Drew also has a cross on her ankle and little cherubs on her back. One cherub holds a cross bearing her mother's name; another that of her former paramour: James.

Her car, a black Bronco with a daisy sticker on the rear, is being washed around the corner. It is so dirty they have to put it through twice. "I love my car so much," Drew gushes. "I care so much about this car. I pet it. I talk to it all the time."

We climb in. Are you a good driver? I ask.

She smiles. "No."

Do you crash?

"All the time."

She puts on a reggae tape Jamie made her. Her favorite record is, she says, The Trinity Sessions by the Cowboy Junkies; she finds it a useful multipurpose selection, good for when you're happy and good for when you're not. For the latter she also favors Kate Bush's "This Woman's Work."

We pick Justine up and head out to Sherman Oaks Castle to play mini-golf. Drew insists on playing second. Two is her lucky number: She was born on February 22 and whenever she notices that the time is 2:22 she makes a wish. (Today she missed it).

Drew often launches into a litany of the world's simple, natural joys. Like mini-golf. The first few times she played she felt guilty. She used to feel she wasn't allowed to have fun like that. Recently she and Justine had "one night of complete happiness," running around naked on the beach at night, rocking back and forth on a deserted swing. On the way home they stopped at McDonald's.

After mini—golf we sit outside and munch cinnamon churros. I say something rude about the piped-in music-Richard Marx-and Justine adds sarcastically, "the kind of man who wears beige snakeskin boots."

"Those saved my life once," Drew says. She was in a pizza parlor with her friends when one of the more popular boys from high school came in. He asked her out She was going to say yes, but as they talked, her eyes panned down his body: White T-shirt. White jeans. Beige snakeskin boots. No way she was going out with a guy who wore beige snakeskin boots. She declined. She thought nothing of it until she saw the boy a few months later. On television. With his brother. Charged with the murder of their parents. The Menendez brothers.

Still, she attracts all sorts. The last time she went to Magic Mountain, Daffy Duck followed her around, begging for a date.

Drew speaks to her father every so often, but she has to track him down first. He doesn't have a telephone. He doesn't live anywhere. He just trips around. He has one bag that is old and tatty. He had a bicycle but he crashed it. "Our family is crazy, and I know his childhood was very hard, but at one point in his life he had something to go with, and he fucked it up, and I can't understand people like that." She pauses. "Maybe people think that I tried to do that, but I wasn't trying to ruin myself. I never wanted to hurt what I had."

Drew Barrymore keeps her father away from the rest of her life. The only person Drew has ever let meet him was Jamie. That day, Drew and her father had their first proper fight. He was telling Drew a story about how her grandfather wanted his ashes scattered in a certain place, and the rest of the family didn't, but he carried out his father's wishes...telling this stupid story for the 150th time, and she finally cracked.

"You know what?" she said. "I think that's fucking great, but I don't want to be cremated. I want to be buried underneath an avocado tree." It's an idea she adapted from Adrian Lyne's Foxes, but just because it came from the movies it's not that she doesn't mean it. "And I want the roots to grow right through me. I want my friends to eat avocados and see how I'm tasting this year."

"You do, huh?" he said, without interest. "Well, I hope that happens for you."

And Drew started crying and walked out of the room. Her father seemed taken aback for a moment, then he started quoting the Bible again and Drew left.

Nearly everything Drew Barrymore says about her father is terrible, but there is a way she says it ... and it makes you think that, for all the folly it might be, and for all the heartbreak that would follow, if her father turned up tomorrow on her doorstep and told her that he loved her, then she just might-for that one moment, anyway-be the happiest little girl in the world.

Drew Barrymore first acted when she was eleven months old. She costarred with a dog in a Gaines Burger Puppy Choice commercial. When she was two her mother retired her, but at four she insisted she be allowed to act again. Her mother, an actress, had been through the mill, auditioning for hundreds of films, getting only bit parts. She thought it would all be too hard for Drew. Which is why Drew wanted to do it. The first film she auditioned for was Ken Russell's *Altered States*. She won the role.

She was a natural actress, eager to please, undaunted by the hard work. And it was better than real life. "I knew that my mom was struggling and that we were so poor. And school and other kids, that was weird. But then there was this other area-acting- which was really safe, where there was no pain."

School didn't work. At home her mother provided an alternative education that Drew remembers as "cool" but which can hardly have helped her to fit in with other kids. Her bedtime stories were by Dostoyevsky and Henry Miller, and her lullaby music was from Janis Joplin and the Doors. All the other kids listened to Sesame Street. Not Drew. "Big bird scared me. Whoo, he scared me so bad. This big bird talking."

But you were happy to be in a movie with a grotesque, stretchy-necked monster? "Which movie was that?" she asks.

"It's called E.T."

"Oh, O.K. I know. I was very confused as a child. I was always supposed to act older and professional and responsible, so I had not a fucking clue what age I was."

I ask her when she became an adult. She recalls one incident, walking out on her mother when she was thirteen: "Something changed inside me-my childhood took the stairs and I took the elevator down to the lobby." But eventually she concludes that she really grew up only this year. She seems proud of the undramatic virtues of her current life: living without a man, without a crisis, with a career, with friends, with a fair degree of happiness.

And with a chicken hat. A hat that, when you wear it, makes you look like a chicken. Drew wears it when she needs perking up. When she wears it out for a day, she ends up laughing her ass off. And if people stare at her like she's from another planet, this is one she can deal with it. This she can understand.

Drew likes to write. When she was nine she told Vanity Fair that she was writing a screenplay. These days, before going to sleep-she suffers from insomnia-she reads scripts or books, or she writes. Amongst the things Drew writes are poems. A lot of them are Anais Nin-inspired eroticism. "It's sort of embarrassing. They're really dirty, actually." One, "You and Me," she wrote over a painted American flag and hung on the wall, without telling anyone it was her poem. People would get really uncomfortable when they read it. She took it down after a boyfriend read it and freaked, thinking it detailed her true experience.

Drew Barrymore lost her virginity just before she was fourteen. After her first spell in rehab for her other precocious experiments. She laughs. "You'd imagine that I would have lost my virginity at ten, but men were really scary to me when I was growing up because I was so afraid that they were going to be like my father." It happened out in the desert. This guy was aggressively pursuing her, and one night she went over to his place. And things just started happening. She wondered whether she should go with it, and then she realized she already was. She was so scared she kept her eyes closed. She only saw the guy once after that, much later, and they just looked at each other. That "yeah...I know" stare.

She didn't have sex again for another year. It wasn't bad...but she thought it would be the most incredible experience of her entire life, and that after that everything would change. All her friends told her it would be this moment of catharsis, but later she decided they'd all been bullshitting.

These days Drew is not so close to her mother. Drew testifies to their friendship, but they don't speak often. Back then, they did, so Drew told her about her latest adventure. Sex. Drew's mother never smoked, but when Drew told her, she reached for one of Drew's cigarettes and lit up. "I need to take this in for a while," she said, "and I'll get back to you." She has smoked ever since.

Drew smokes-Camels, lots of them-but her other too-much-too-soon consumptions seem more or less forgotten. She doesn't go to AA anymore. She flips in and out of therapy, a few months on, a few months off. She's off now, "but I can feel it coming."

This casual attitude may run against the typical twelve-step-orthodoxy, but it seems to suit her. She is refreshingly free of that celebrity specialty: the survivor mentality. Mostly she's getting on with a life based on what she does do, not what she doesn't. There is a pleasing counterpoint to all of this in her career. For many actors, rehab scales down the scope of their roles. They're not going to go through all that pain only to juggle with their emotions in the day job. In Drew's case it seems almost precisely the opposite. When she was actually the raging coke-fiend-party-nymphette, her roles were sullen and innocent. But the new Drew, the one she dragged through the years, plays with the wildness. In Guncrazy, she drinks and she kills, all with a nervous, lip-biting teenage swagger. She's good at it.

Drew has no films awaiting release. Her recent work has created an opportunity and she wants to take advantage of it, make the right choice. Her agent says they'd like something that isn't driven by Drew's sexiness-maybe a western, or Drew as a professional woman. While I am in Los Angeles she goes to meet a well-known director. The last time she auditioned for him, she left in tears. "I hate auditions. They humiliate you big time." The next day, after her meeting, she is still bristling: "At the end he turned to his two casting directors and said, 'She's nervous-isn't that cute?' I said, 'I'm not nervous, I'm just polite.'"

Justine appears. She is going out. They exchange goodbyes.

"I love you," Justine tells Drew.

"I love you," Drew replies. Justine goes.

Drew laughs. "I know," she says. "We're like an old married couple. We really are. I wish I could find a boyfriend like Justine, and she wishes she could find a boyfriend like me."

Maybe, I say, you should decide you're gay.

"We've both thought about it," answers Drew, "but there's something a man can give you that a woman can't." She giggles at her unintentional innuendo. "That didn't come out right. No, it's not even an option. We love love with me...the whole idea, the concept, and the feeling."

We have one last breakfast date. Drew is late. She has just been interviewed by Entertainment Tonight. She is furious. The Amy Fisher Story is about to be released on video. "The uncensored version that couldn't be shown on TV!" the box says. Drew has a stack of reviews at home. "You should see Drew Barrymore go!" they say.

The problem is, Drew Barrymore didn't actually "go" at all. She only filmed one love scene, ten seconds long, in which both participants were fully clothed. The other scenes use a body double. "America thinking that I'm letting this man go down on me makes me want to vomit. I wish these people would get hit over the head with a two-by-four fifty-five times until they understand that what they did was wrong. I'm not like that, but they've made me look like an asshole."

Another thing that Drew also repeats so often that it becomes like a mantra is that she is a nice person. She has a horror of being judged otherwise. A recent unfavorable profile in GQ battered Drew badly and she is still consumed by the unfairness of it all. She says one of the bits that really hurt was the suggestion that she "sashayed with attitude" around her house (she misremembers: the actual reference was to "that prim, prissy walk of hers"). "Please!" she exclaims. "I don't sashay."

I thought you sashayed rather well, I tease.

She pouts theatrically. "I shimmied for you, darling."