

## Us - May 1994

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### TOUGH STUFF

When Drew Barrymore's good, she's very good; when she's a bad girl, she's better

She sits in the trashed corner booth of an empty dining room at the Four Seasons Hotel, smoking marlboros, drinking iced tea and sharing the hotel's cellular phone with three other girls, all in various stages of serious teenage afternoon collapse. There are elbows everywhere, note pads, bags, books, half-eaten food, cigarette butts. One girl, Mel, a dark-haired rock & roller, has her head on the table. Another, Justine, with an English accent has a phone number written on the side of her hand in big, bold handwriting. They all wear schlumpy trousers, they all have butchered hair.

I arrive, and they attack me with friendliness. They invite me over and sit me down and make introductions and say, "Hi! Hi! Hi!" and they're being so effusively nice that I feel as if this must be the good news before the bad. When I pull out a pack of cigarettes, for instance, Barrymore does a little jump of glee in her chair and says, "She smokes!" as if she were a five-year-old and I were a new doll that she discovered could pee ("She pees!"). All the girls are delighted, and those who smoke spark up (as Barrymore would say).

This is not what usually happens when you go to interview a celebrity; they don't show up with their friends. But Barrymore plays by her own rules. Maybe this is because she's 19, maybe it's because she's a Barrymore. Maybe it's because she was a star at 7, a has-been at 13 and the youngest comeback story on record. Her fame now is oversize in proportion to her industry standing: She's turned in her best work so far in what have turned out to be B-list independent films (*Poison Ivy*) and TV movies (*The Amy Fisher Story*, *Guncrazy*).

We're here to talk about Barrymore's new film, *Bad Girls*, an all-female western that could change all that, and Barrymore will get around to it, but first she's entertaining her friends with a story about her father that they've clearly all heard before. He doesn't wear shoes, she says. Hasn't for 20 years.

Mel says, "He wears dress socks for nice occasions," and everyone cracks up. She whines: "Remember we were in Joshua Tree that time, and we went through that period of only wearing socks? He had different kinds of socks."

Justine says to Barrymore, "What did he say about people who wear shoes?"

Barrymore says: "He said that wearing shoes was a sign of unintelligence. That, truly, people who are at one with themselves and intelligent about the ways of the world..."

"...won't get a rock stuck in their foot," Mel interjects. Everyone ignores Mel, because they're into the story, and Barrymore is an expert storyteller.

She sits up straight in her chair, her bobbed, bleached blond hair off her face, her full lips lined perfectly with a brownish pencil. Barrymore may be a teenager, but she has the poise and grace of someone who's been through the wringer and come out the other side not just stronger, but strong. Still, you can feel the ghost of old pain and sadness shadowing her, reminding her, when she needs reminding - and sometimes when she doesn't - of how good life is now. She speaks a bit like a Valley girl (she grew up in L.A.), but behind the "Ohmygod"s and the "It's cool"s and the "totally"s is an authenticity - an honesty and a centeredness and a gentleness -that's rare even in the most authentic and honest and centered adults.

"My father is totally headsick," she says with a familiar Oh-my-God-gag-me-with-a-spoon inflection, "but he's brilliant. He looks like a street person, so people are scared by his appearance, and probably scared of what he has to say, too, because he's so brutal and honest. I love hearing him talk. After a while, you're like, "Dad, you're a little out there, but I respect your views.' " Barrymore sneaks an impish peek at her audience. "You're like, "What are you talking about now?" and the girls all laugh. "No, but..., ..," she says, getting serious again, "...he's brilliant."

What for Barrymore's dad may have been a desire to connect earth and feet, for his daughter became groundedness. What the young actress did not inherit from her father, though, was any sense of what family stability might be like.

Tamra Davis, who directed Barrymore in Guncrazy (and was the first director of Bad Girls, see "They Shoot 'Bad Girls,' Don't They?" on page 74), says that during that shoot, Barrymore started having live-in-boyfriend trouble - she couldn't go home and had nowhere else to go. So, Davis invited Barrymore to stay with her.

"My husband and I are very much in love, and I think it was good for Drew to see what a healthy relationship looked like," Davis explains. "On the weekends she'd sleep really late - nothing could wake her up - and we'd peek in and see her tucked in with all her white pillows and her white comforter, and she looked so sweet. There's something about her: You just want to take care of her. And if she disappeared for a weekend, my husband got really worried. Then she'd show up on a Sunday evening and be all excited to show us a new tattoo."

Barrymore tells a story about how her father, after he left her mother, used to come over to their house and steal the key. She and her mother, actress Jaid Barrymore, would come home, she says, and they'd find 20 things missing. Then, a week later, they'd come home again, and the 20 things would be back. The trouble was, you couldn't get the key back with them.

One day, she says, her maternal grandfather, a stained-glass maker, was in from Pennsylvania, and he had a date to see Barrymore's father. "My dad didn't drive," she says, "but he had a car that evening." The girls, including Barrymore, laugh. "And so we were really scared to let my

grandfather go out with him. We were like, 'Oh my God - I mean, a night out with my father, we're not going to see those two people again? I remember them screeching out of the driveway...' - here, she pulls back on the wheel and makes a loud screeching noise - "and I remember my grandfather's head flying back. But as it flew back, he was laughing. So it was like, 'OK, cool.' He comes back four hours later, totally drunk, and he's got the key."

THIS IS WHAT BARRYMORE CARRIES WITH her: \$2.50 for cigarettes, her credit cards and her keys. This is what she's allergic to: garlic ("Does the word blowfish mean anything to you?"), coffee ("I become Spiderwoman"), perfume ("I break out in hives") and bee stings. This is how she was conceived: on a dark, rainy night, beautifully ("I can dig that"). This is what she believes in: God and fate. This is what she doesn't believe in: wishes and luck. She collects old lunch boxes.

THE FIRST TIME BARRYMORE ACTED WAS IN a TV commercial at the age of 11 months. She says she remembers the experience, and it's the point at which she knew she wanted to act. What she didn't know then was that she was the youngest of several generations of Hollywood royalty. "My grandfather John has his feet and hands in Mann's Chinese Theatre," she says. "Ethel, Dolores, Lionel and John - they all have stars. Dolores has a star on Vine Street.

"John is watching over me. I feel him in a big way. George Cukor told me the most about my grandfather. That's when I realized how much I liked him, and who my family was. I was seven. They were having a tribute to my family in New York, because they made the Barrymore stamp."

As Barrymore is talking, a pizza arrives. Mel takes a bite. "This is full of garlic," she says.

Barrymore, incensed, says, "I said, 'No garlic.' "

Mel says, "Don't yell at me."

"S—," says Barrymore.

Barrymore's assistant, Kim, says, "I'll get the waiter," and disappears.

"Are you positive there's garlic in there?" Barrymore says.

Mel hands a slice to Justine and says, "Taste that."

Justine does. "Yeah," she says.

Barrymore says, "S---, s---, s---." The waiter comes over then, and in her most polite voice, Barrymore says, "Why don't we just keep this so they can eat it, and let's just get another one with no garlic on it. Thank you so much."

The waiter rushes away, and Barrymore and her friends, unlike any other teenagers in the world, don't roll their eyes and don't say another word about it.

'BAD GIRLS,' WHICH ALSO STARS MADELEINE Stowe, Mary Stuart Masterson and Andie MacDowell, is about four prostitutes-turned-gunslingers who set off in search of the man who stole the money they were counting on to retire. After Tamra Davis was fired, and Jonathan Kaplan (Unlawful Entry) was brought in, Kaplan sent the four actresses to cowboy camp to learn to shoot and ride. When Kaplan heard that Mary Stuart Masterson handled the horse-drawn wagon well, he made her the character who drove the wagon. When he learned that Barrymore was the strongest in terms of doing stunts, he designated her the trick rider.

It came time, then, for Barrymore's character to jump a fence, shoot a gun and then go under an arch - all on horseback - and the stunt people told Kaplan that it was too hard, that Barrymore shouldn't be allowed to do it. Barrymore insisted. "She's very courageous," says Kaplan. She wanted to do that stunt, even though, if she didn't duck in time or the horse decided to shy, she would have slammed her head into this arch. So she did it. In fact, she did it several times - jumped this fence, shot this gun and then rode under this arch. It's all her, and it's amazing.

"Drew reminds me of Jodie Foster," Kaplan, who directed Foster in *The Accused*, continues. "When you're a child actor, you grow up precocious because you're around adults all the time. Jodie was like that, and Drew is, too. She's very real - there's none of this phony-baloney business. She sees herself like the guys who do the lights. She sees herself as just another worker on a film."

IT'S ANOTHER DAY, AND, SO DREW CAN SMOKE, we are at the bar of what may have once been a swanky Hollywood Boulevard restaurant. John Barrymore's star shines in the sidewalk outside the front door. His movie posters hide the walls inside. Mel is here, too, and again, she's got her head on the bar. This time she's actually sleeping. Barrymore is back on her family.

"See, my grandfather John [who died in 1942] was a hero to me," Barrymore says. She's got two barrettes - three plastic daisies each - about an inch away from her center part on both sides. She's wearing light blue bell-bottoms, an embroidered Indian shirt and no bra. All of Barrymore's clothes appear to have been stolen from the hampers and floors of another generation.

"But he lived a pretty crazy life. He was notorious: He was somewhat of a womanizer and an alcoholic and a drug addict. Yet there was another side to him that was genius - incredibly intelligent and talented beyond belief, and handsome and fun and beautiful, and people loved

him, and he was great to be around, and exciting. So this role-model thing is confusing to me - there's good and bad to everyone, you know?"

This is a theme that runs through Barrymore's talk, this wrestling with acceptance of everyone's imperfections and inconsistencies, especially her own.

"I know I'm not perfect," she says. "I'm far from it. But I try really hard. And most of my life I've felt really guilty. I always beat myself up: 'Am I a good person? Did I do anything bad today? Did I hurt anyone today? Did I hurt myself today?' I'd ask myself all these crazy questions at night that would make me almost not be able to sleep on a nightly basis. I'm very, very hard on myself, and I know that that's what keeps me disciplined.

"The kind of schools I went to," she continues, turning and turning the two friendship rings - one from Mel, one from Justine - that she wears on the middle finger of her right hand, "were like 20 kids, rainbows over the basketball hoops - they didn't even have nets - no one had played for 20 years. And the only rule was, you had to smoke pot in your car, not in the classroom."

Mel lifts her head and says something incoherent. "She's drooling," Barrymore notes.

Barrymore, living on her own, dropped out of school at the end of her 14th year. "Everything I've learned has been self-taught," she says. "Things I've learned through living. I like continuing to teach myself - I'm the biggest bookworm."

Barrymore reads with a dictionary beside her. When she's trying to write and she's stuck, she sometimes makes a list of words - "plain words," she calls them. "Any word that comes into your mind, no matter how relevant or irrelevant it seems to be." At night, she reads a little, writes a little and then falls asleep. "It totally gives me peace," she says.

Barrymore is drinking iced tea again, and suddenly she drops her glass so that glass and tea take off across the wood surface in front of her. She gets totally flustered then, and her hands go to her cheeks, like Munch's *The Scream*. It takes a while for her to regroup, to let go of her embarrassment. A new level of vulnerability reveals itself, and once exposed, it never quite goes away. If Barrymore seemed as poised as a 40-year-old before, in addition, she now seems as sensitive as a child who could still use a comforting hug from Mama. Her face reflects this: One minute she looks all grown-up - the sexy starlet you see in her Guess? ads - and the next minute there's the soft face of someone still growing into womanhood.

**BARRYMORE'S LIFE CHANGED IN THE LAST FEW months of 1993.** She went to Bracketville, Tex., to shoot *Bad Girls* and stayed there five long months.

"It was a very difficult shoot, but I got through it. My whole life, even if lived on my own, I lived with a roommate or a boyfriend. This was five months where I was completely on my own. I lived in this town with no restaurant, no mailman, you couldn't get a magazine, nothing. For the

first couple of weeks, I cried. I was like, 'F---, I miss my friends so much.' They were millions of miles away. And I just sort of sat on the couch and watched television all day, and after about three weeks, I realized that that wasn't going to work. I had to get into the swing of things. And I got to know who I was as a person - things were revealed to me about myself that I wasn't too keen on. I really felt like they had to be put in the front line as things to change about myself. And I did. I overcame the things that I had to overcome. It got to be OK to be on my own."

One thing Barrymore resolved to fix was her bah-humbug attitude toward Christmas. So when she got home from Texas, she says, she and Mel and Justine and their friend Pilar cooked a huge turkey and had the guys take Polaroids of it and them.

The guys?

"Boys," says Barrymore, in her weariest voice and it's clear she doesn't intend to elaborate too much. "I don't understand love. I travel too much to sustain a relationship, and anyway I want to be on my own for a while."

Back at the Four Seasons, after the girls had all discussed how deplorable and impossible dating is, Mel dropped a bomb: "I'm getting married next week," she said, and Justine quickly said: "She's not. Don't believe anything out of Melissa's mouth."

Barrymore said, "Mel, you've got to shut up."

But Mel said, "I'm getting married," and the other girls looked away annoyed. Someone said, "I wouldn't say anything further than that."

When I tried to push it, I was frozen out. The subject was clearly closed for good.

THIS IS ONE WAY JUSTINE CHARACTERIZES Barrymore: "I have to tell the story about the bee sting," she says. "It would only happen to Drew - everybody else would be f---ed. She rear-ends some guy because a bee is in her car. She rear-ends the guy! That would be me, and he'd sue me from here until there. With her, it's OK." (It'd be hard to be a close girlfriend of Barrymore's and not find yourself, in your worse moments, jealous of her endless talent for endearing herself to people.)

This is one thing Mel says about Barrymore: "She is the Grinch."

This is how Justine paints her time with her two best friends: "This is our life: Hang out, be mellow, cut hair."

ONE TIME BARRYMORE DROVE TO THE Grand Canyon with Mel, to have a spiritual experience. When they got back, she consulted a psychic, and the psychic told her that Mel,

instead of having a spiritual experience, saw the Grand Canyon as a bottomless pit. Barrymore was incredibly hurt and angry that her friend hadn't told her this.

Mel, who says she didn't see the Grand Canyon as a bottomless pit, says, "You could have asked me," and Barrymore sits there sulking, remembering her friend's imaginary betrayal.

It can't be easy being Drew Barrymore. She comes from a crazy family, she's been working literally all her life, she's had to overcome a drug problem at a very early age and a lot of damaging press because of it. It's a good bet that she's been building her own raft in the middle of the ocean since the day she was born.

Mel gets up from the bar and goes off to sleep in Barrymore's car. Without her friends around, Barrymore seems quieter, anxious, undefended. She tells this story: "I remember one day when I was, like, 13, my mother and I had gotten into a huge fight, and I walked out the door. I don't remember what we'd said to each other, but I remember crying really hard out in the hallway. I took the elevator downstairs then, but I felt like a part of me took the stairs. Then the two parts connected when I got down to the main floor. And as I walked out the door, I felt different - and I mean, really different. It was almost like I took the elevator and my childhood took the stairs. It was the craziest feeling I'd ever felt."

Barrymore looks edgily at the glassy-eyed man who's taken Mel's seat at the bar.

"I think that's when I started not being analytical in life, and I started trying to take the pressures off myself. It's been a constant struggle, but it's gotten easier over the years. But I think in that one moment I realized, I'm on my own, and I have to take care of myself. It was crazy, being that young and experiencing an overwhelming feeling like that."

Despite the fact that she's tried to take the pressures off, Barrymore's not happy unless she's working. And working, for her, is always a struggle.

"Nothing comes easy in this life," she says. "I've pretty much figured that one out." She laughs derisively at herself. "It's a pretty lame realization, actually. But I seem to do better in situations that are rough than situations that are easy."

"In terms of my work, the most important thing for me is that every word that comes out of my mouth be real. As far as my talent is concerned, I can become other people. That's what I work on: getting to know the character down to every last detail. Being chameleonesque is the funnest part about the latitude you have in this career."

Right now, she's getting to know Holly, her character in director Herbert Ross' *Boys on the Side*, co-starring Whoopi Goldberg. For the role - a girl Barrymore characterizes as "silly, goofy, strong and weak" - Barrymore has decided to carry a lunch box as a purse and not wear a watch. If Holly wore a watch, though, Barrymore says, it would be one that her old boyfriend got from a Happy Meal.

"You can use your schizophrenia to be creative," Barrymore says. She raises her shoulders up to her ears and laughs like the little girl that she is. Then she looks me straight in the eye like someone with nothing to hide and everything to offer.

"How cool is that?" she says.