

Interview, May 1995

Article by: Ingrid Sischy

Photography: Herb Ritts, Drew Barrymore & friends

INGRID SISCHY: How are you, Drew?

DREW BARRYMORE: I'm good. It's nice to hear your voice.

IS: And yours. I want to start with the fact that this interview is accompanied by pictures taken by you, and by people who are close to you, in a different spirit than when one says, "Oh, pictures need to be done for a magazine." As you can imagine, I'm a big believer in what can happen when professional photographers are assigned to take pictures. There can be fantastic collaborations, and surprises, and a stranger can zap into something about a person that is genuinely true. But in a completely different way there's something riveting about somebody's personal pictures. They're taken because someone said, "This is a moment I want to keep to myself, or for us." So I've always wanted to do what we're doing here with you-which is to invite a subject to do their own photos, or to have their friends take them. I've always thought it would be great to go for something that intimate, personal, knowing. When did you start taking photos of yourself and your life?

DB: I've always been very big on Polaroid pictures. I try to take my camera around with me wherever I go. Or I have it lying around the house and pick it up when I see something.

IS: And you've never lost it? Polaroid cameras and tape recorders-I love them but I always lose them. They're like my umbrellas.

DB: Oh, I've had about ten Polaroid cameras. Are you kidding me?

IS: When did you get your first one?

DB: Ooh, I would say when I was about fourteen. I bought it in a store.

IS: Why do you think you wanted one?

DB: I knew that I wanted to take pictures. They're so important to me. I think it's neat to have my friends and my perspectives captured like this. Not that a professional photographer doesn't have the ability to capture moments that are phenomenal, but someone would have had to follow me around for months and months all over the world to get private moments and situations like the ones I've sent you.

IS: You're one of the few actors who really takes leaps when you pose for photographs. You really understand a photograph is a performance and a collaboration, and you seem to approach the job with the same commitment and lack of brakes that you give a part when you're in a movie. Of course, that makes you beloved by photographers, who often have to deal with people worrying so much about their image that all of that results in the same

contrived old bore. Your willingness to give has allowed you and photographers to create photos that are bigger than just a personal plug. I've watched it from firsthand experience, like when you did those nude photographs that Bruce Weber took of you three summers ago for our July 1992 issue.

DB: 'Cause they were so natural. Talk about being uncontrived—that was one of the freest days I'd had in a long time.

IS: At the time, that so-called new right was just building its steam against all kinds of freedom and culture that we're seeing them fixated on now, and you fearlessly joined us in our desire to say phooey to such ignorant, sick attitudes. And in your usual Drew way, you handled the media commotion that resulted nobly and honestly. Since then, I've seen you in lots of magazines and on lots of covers, so much so that you must be experiencing yourself as a projection of other people's fantasies. I thought it would be a nice intermission to take a picture pause with Drew Barrymore's real life.

DB: It sometimes feels that it's the only way I can get a grasp on normality, although there's this sense of an extra vulnerability, because you're showing something very personal.

IS: You seem so uninvolved with spin control, or that idea of "I won't get this part if I do this." You haven't wasted energy trying to control things that can't or shouldn't be controlled.

DB: I learned at a really young age that you cannot control people or nature and how it evolves. It's an impossible task, and you will drive yourself nuts trying to do it.

IS: Did you try when you were younger?

DB: Yeah. When you're growing up, you try to control the people who are closest to you, usually your family, which is always the hardest thing to deal with. When it comes to the impossibility of controlling others, I think you get your first dose of human reality.

IS: Would you say that early experience of realizing you couldn't control other people made you unable to control your own behavior for a while? And then, when you realized you couldn't control others, you realized you could control yourself and started wanting to live?

DB: Yes. We all have the desire within us to control, and we all have the capacity to lose control. Control is something that we can't get rid of. We can lessen it or make it bigger. I think the point is to exercise control in the positive realm, whether it has to do with yourself or other things. But then there's also the line between change and control. I think you should try to change things rather than control them if you believe so strongly in them.

IS: Something that's relevant to this is the fact that you have your own production company now. What's the company called?

DB: Flower Films.

IS: And when did you and Kim [Greitzer, DB's business partner, manager, and publicist] start it?

DB: Officially, we started last year. I first interviewed Kim three-and-a-half years ago, and for the first year she worked as my assistant. We worked together every day and really got to know each other, and it was like this amalgamation of two spirits. We learned that we both wanted the same things in life. We wanted to work hard and we didn't want our sex or our age ever to be held against us. We just wanted to, like, go fucking forth with our dream. And our dream was to have a production company. It's two girlies wanting to make good movies, with people who are passionate, and I never thought that I would be into this side of the business, but I've found myself really into it.

IS: How old is Kim?

DB: She's almost twenty-four. We're very much on the same wavelength in the business sense. We sit down with, like, our iced teas and cigarettes at our desks and we just plow through the day. We do it together, and it's really great. Not every decision has to have the weight of the world on it. Then again, certain decisions do. And that is why Kim and I will probably have ulcers in the next ten years. [laughs] But there's nothing that snakes by us, ya know?

IS: I want to ask you something about *Boys on the Side*, the film you were in earlier this year. What would you say to the people who complained that the women in the film who were involved with men were shown kissing them, yet Whoopi Goldberg's character, who's gay, is never seen doing anything?

DB: I would say they're absolutely right. I had that issue in *Poison Ivy*, when Sarah Gilbert and I had that big kiss and everybody was in an uproar about it. Love should always be displayed if it's really there. I'm going to make a stab in the dark and say that maybe one of [Boys on the Side director] Herb Ross's reasons why he shows the relationship between Whoopi and Amy Aquino's character as passionless is because Whoopi's in love with Mary Louise Parker's character. But damn straight-they should kiss! Kissing is the most beautiful, sensual act that human beings do. It's like, I mean, I could sit and kiss my-[break in tape]

IS: I think you were about to say something about your boyfriend [Hole guitarist Eric Erlandson]. Tell me how you guys met.

DB: I was in Seattle and went to see this band called That Dog play; the lead singer, Anna [Waronker], is a friend of mine, and the band knows Eric. I got sick with food poisoning and ran out of the club. All of a sudden I felt his hand on my shoulder. I jerked back, and it was Eric, and he goes, "Hi." I said, "Excuse me, I don't think that you want to be watching this right now." and I puked on his shoes. It was so embarrassing. He said, "Honestly, this is what everybody in the world does at one point. I'd appreciate it if you'd let me stay with you." And I was like, "Wow. Who are you? You are amazing." So we sat there and talked for

a while and he made me laugh. Humor and intellect are definitely the most attractive combination you can find in a person, I think.

IS: What happened next?

DB: Well, when I said good-bye, I said, "I hope that I can find you again." Two weeks later, [photographer] Ellen von Unwerth gave me the wrong room number of a hotel room. I knocked on the door, and Eric answered it. He was like, "Oh my God, macaroni and cheese," because that's what I'd thrown up that night. I grabbed him and gave him this huge kiss. We didn't see each other again for four or five months, and then I went up to Seattle again and the first week I was there the words, "Have you eaten any macaroni and cheese lately?" were whispered in my ear, and there he was. And we've been together ever since.

IS: Because of Eric, you must have gotten to know Courtney Love [Hole's singer- guitarist] around the time that she was dealing with the aftermath of Kurt Cobain's death. It struck me that she was the victim of a terrible kind of sexism, the same that Yoko Ono had to deal with when John Lennon died.

DB: It's true. There's a certain extent to which you're living your life in a goldfish bowl and seeing all these eyes peering in at you. If you're strong enough, it'll bounce off the surface of your skin. If not, it can pierce right through you and really fucking hurt. I think that the best way of dealing with that is with grace, whether it's just a personal thing or an outward, public thing. Grace entails being able to handle it.

IS: Have you become Courtney's friend?

DB: No, actually...yes and no. As much as I'm around that scene, I'm very rarely around her. I feel like I relate to this person so much, and yet in other ways we seem so opposite. But then I think that we're the kind of people who don't feel like we need to try and be best friends. We just don't mind each other's presence, and sometimes I respect that as much as I do a friendship.

IS: Now, you've got two new movies coming out, Mad Love and Batman Forever, both co-starring Chris O'Donnell. Batman Forever was directed by your old friend Joel Schumacher.

DB: I've known Joel since I was seven years old, and he's someone that I truly admire in every way-talk about intellect and humor.

IS: And when you went through tough times-

DB: He was there for me always. He's always been a strong, supportive friend to me.

IS: In Batman Forever you play Sugar to Debi Mazar's Spice, right?

DB: Yeah. When we met, it was "Whoa, we're going to do this great and we're going to have fun and look as cool as we can for Joel's movie."

IS: And your character is like a Varga Girl?

DB: Yes. But also, Joel knows how much I love Marilyn Monroe, and I said, "Let's do a tribute to her." Sugar's like this glitter-dipped Marilyn. And it is a tribute. You can only do things like that with an icon like Marilyn; you should never try to copy her, because she can't be copied.

IS: How did the film turn out?

DB: I won't say it's better than the other Batman films 'cause that can be misconstrued as snotty, but I think it's very different from the others. It has a genius screenplay that takes you into this realm of total imagination, and I love the fact that Joel played that up. He really went for the comic-strip idea and the surrealism of that.

IS: Tell me about Mad Love.

DB: It's about a girl who...I think the best way I can describe Casey is that she's a late-blooming little flower. She has a terrible time, and it isn't understood why until it's realized that she's manic-depressive. Her behavior starts to deteriorate in the midst of her experience of love, and she desperately tries to grasp reality as she's falling deeper and deeper into the ether of her mind. I think it's a movie for younger audiences.

IS: Did it mean something to you personally?

DB: Well, as you know, I have been in an institution-I know what it's like, and there aren't many actors my age who can say the same thing. So it was a very cathartic experience for me and something I needed to do.

IS: Do you feel that your life and work are becoming easier because you've had so much experience with it all?

DB: The truth is, I know it can all fucking go away again in a heartbeat. That's why I will always be grateful for every job I get. And about life, what do you do? Do you become a cloistered nun and not live your life because of the fear of what people might think or say? If the press is printing things about you, some of the stuff is total bullshit, but some of it is true, too, and that's better. That's why I believe in being honest with the press. When you read in the New York Post that a friend and I went to our favorite strip club and did an act together, that's true. I did that, and had so much fun doing it [IS laughs] and I don't regret it for a second.

IS: How are you feeling right now?

DB: I've never been happier in my life and more comfortable in my skin, which is the greatest feeling, because before, I'd always been so uncomfortable in it. I've molded myself into the person that I am. I still have a road to travel to be the kind of person I aspire to be. I have the greatest friends, and I'm, like, so in love with my boyfriend. He inspires me and fulfills me. It's what I imagine a great family feels like. When you don't have a family, as so many of us don't, you have to go out there and create your own. When I had my birthday party in February-it was a nice dinner, about fifteen of us- I looked around the table...[breaks off] Excuse me. Oh, my God, I almost started to cry... [resumes] and I said to myself, "I can't believe that I'm so lucky to be surrounded by these people right now. I'm twenty years old today. I've carried myself through the years. I've made mistakes along the way, but they were the kind of mistakes that we all have to make in order to learn." And, thank God, I did learn. If you repeatedly make mistakes and don't learn from them, then that's a rocky path. But if you burn the shit out of yourself and then go, "O.K., that hurt, but I've got it now," then you can go on. I've never looked down on an experience in myself or anyone else. To me, that moment on that day was like a version of my favorite game, Dog Out the Window.

IS: What's that? Is that when you're in a car and you're the dog?

DB: Yes, exactly. It's when you put your head out the window and let the wind rush at you. And that's what it was like-it was a rush. I felt so grateful, because I'd made it. I never knew that I would. But I did. I have so much farther to go, but no other day in my life has given me so much incentive to go farther. [end]