

## Spotlight on Dawson's Creek's

# Nina Repeta

by Michelle Manning

**L**ife is funny sometimes. A series of coincidence, fate, or perhaps divine intervention can effect everything. According to "Dawson's Creek" actress Nina Repeta, she's been acting ever since she was born. Repeta, who started acting in plays at age five, went on to major in drama at Eastern Carolina University. There she met her future husband, Mike, a camera assistant with "Dawson's Creek," and Kevin Williamson, the show's creator.

"It's ironic," she explains. "I had moved to L.A. to work on my acting after working on *Bloodmoon*. When I was working on 'Matlock', director Leo Penn told me 'Nina, you need to go where it's happening.' So, Mike and I headed to L.A. Meanwhile, Kevin sees my photo [on file at the casting office]. I auditioned for and wound up booking 'Dawson's Creek' while I was in L.A. and coming back home to work."

On the hit series Repeta plays Bessie, Joey's older sister who gave birth last season to a child fathered by her live-in black boyfriend. "My family is from Shelby, North Carolina, and I was

unsure of their reaction," admits Repeta, who pondered the role before taking it. The WB-TV series took off, and as she had expected, family reaction was mixed.

"Before the show became so successful, [my mom] would say that I was in 'Matlock' or other shows, but now she's very proud and tells everyone."

"Every actor has their line; for me the line is nudity," says Repeta. "Once I was offered a part where I had to wear a thong bikini. I am not ashamed of my body, but the part didn't add to the picture. I held out and was offered a part playing a girl in her underwear who is raped. I held out because of my morals and ethics and I got a bigger, better role."

As the characters have evolved, Repeta has gained more insight into Bessie's psyche. "Bessie really loves Bodie," she relates. "To her, color is beautiful. She'd have to be in love to have a child with him in this small town. She's madly in love, bold and gutsy."

Repeta explains that, at first, the show's writers considered having the baby be born prior to the onset of Bessie and Bodie's relationship. The father would have been Dawson's older brother. "The network was unsure about the whole bi-racial baby issue. But they totally changed their minds and the actual baby on the show is bi-racial, and Bodie is definitely the father," reveals Repeta. Future plans for the couple are uncertain. "I know that I'm back, but I am unsure about Bodie. During the last episodes, he was always at work or somewhere else."

Many parents and critics have complained about the sexual content of the show. "The whole bi-racial situation between Bessie and Bodie was somewhat overshadowed by the affair between Pacey and his teacher," she believes. "Then this whole story broke about the teacher and her student."

Still, Repeta had her own feelings about the student/teacher affair. "I had mixed emotions," she says. "I kept wondering if by showing it, we were condoning it. But I realized that often parents are blind. Hopefully, the show will stimulate conversations about its issues, and encourage more communication between parents and their children."

Having never been a parent herself, Repeta had to do some serious research to prepare for the birthing scenes. "I read a lot of books, and talked with my friends who had children," she reveals. "I talked to a local Lamaze teacher, and she let me come to the classes." Wearing her fake body suit, Repeta practiced her role.

"There were eight days of shooting and I



Nina Repeta

had contractions the whole time," she says, laughing. "I had to break down the script -- okay here's the first contraction, here's the transition. For a week prior to actually shooting, I was at home practicing all this screaming. My neighbors called to see if everything was all right. I was in labor for two weeks."

"All the guys on the set were telling Mike and I how great I looked pregnant and that I should have a baby," Nina says. "But this was a fake pregnancy, so of course I looked good!"

Having Bodie's baby did not give Repeta the fever to have a child in real life. "I have a baby named Ruby [her mixed breed dog]," she says. "I also train dogs, and she's my sweet baby." Besides, she can't have a real baby right now. "Bessie can't be pregnant every season!"

Being madly in love is not a reach for Repeta, who married her college sweetheart and lives "in a tree house" on the intracoastal waterway. "I love my husband," she gushes. "I can't imagine not being with him. In fact, I told him he should give the interview since he likes to sing my praises so much!"

Like her character, Repeta likes things free and simple, and acting is secondary to happiness. "What really makes me happy are sunshine and flowers," she says laughing. "But what really makes you happy is love. Work makes me happy, but it wouldn't mean anything without love."

Another thing that makes Repeta happy is singing. "I had a band from 1990 to 1994. We played jazz, R&B, and the blues," she recalls. "From age five I did at least one play a year until I was 18. Then I began singing."

Still, Repeta was focused on the bigger picture, the next challenge, and how luck influences the future. "I would wrap up my awards and give them to my parents for Christmas," she explains. "They would get mad, but I was always looking at the next step, like a 'been there, done that' kind of feeling."

The struggles to find steady work as an

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actress are difficult "because there are no guarantees. Usually, it's feast or famine. Like right now, I should be out in L.A. 'working it,'" says Repeta. "Sometimes, I would tell Mike that I needed a real job, and he would say, 'No, no, no. What's going to happen if you get an audition and you're working?' He allowed me to be an artist."

Like fellow ECU graduate Sandra Bullock, Repeta had to make choices about her acting career. "Sandra left ECU and had a place in New York City and L.A. She made a decision to be where it was happening, and it's happened for her in a big way." Any regrets? "No way, not a chance," Repeta states emphatically.

Still, Repeta is comfortable with her level of success, although she constantly searches for new roles and opportunities. Her success has been influential in some common -- and some unusual -- ways. "I was at a wrap party at Captain Bill's and people were asking for my autograph," she says. "That's what you need as an actor: a base of people who want to see you again in something else. Like when I was singing, if I could take one person out of their own trials even for a moment, that was what it was all about."

Most importantly, Repeta is using the show's popularity among 13- to 22-year-olds to promote her new cause: organ donation. "I always wondered what my cause would be, the thing that I would take on as a calling," she confesses. "Last Thanksgiving my mother became ill, and they were unable to determine the cause. Finally she was sent to Chapel Hill for a liver transplant."

"I'd never really thought about it, but most people between the ages of 13 and 22 die from

accidents and, sadly, suicide. I began advocating organ donation, speaking at high schools in the Washington area. Since the show is so popular, I use it as a stepping stone to raise awareness.

"It's everybody's personal choice," she states. "I saw one family whose mother received two liver transplants. They were there through the whole ordeal. All five decided not to become donors. I couldn't believe it.

"My mother's got a liver, she's at home, and she's alive," adds Repeta. "Donation gives life -- the science does exist, and kids as young as 12 years old need to be aware that they can make a difference."

What does the future hold for "Dawson's Creek?" Does Repeta have any predictions? "Joey and Dawson -- it has got to happen -- that's pure love!" she predicts. "I've heard a rumor that Jen will go back to her big city ways. But who knows what the writers will do next. Plus, the actors will be returning. They're super, super-talented, but now they will have lost a lot of their anonymity."

And as for Repeta? "Life is how you perceive it," she philosophizes. "I give a lot of

love and I get a lot of love. You have to decide what is important, and what you have got to have. I love my life and what I have. Still, I need to get to the big city and do that whole scene."

After all, who knows what luck and hard work will bring?

*Michelle Manning is a freelance writer who has written several articles for "Reel Carolina" and for other local and regional publications. She will continue to cover "Dawson's Creek," as well as other stories, in upcoming issues of "Reel Carolina."*

## NINA REPETA'S CREDITS

**Episodic:** "Dawson's Creek" (recurring role); "CIS-The Professionals" (episode: First Strike); "Matlock" (episodes: The Heist, The Conspiracy, The Fatal Seduction, The Mark)

**Feature Film:** *Bloodmoon* (co-star); *Radioland Murders* (principal); *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken* (featured); *The Handmaid's Tale* (featured)

**Made-For-Television Movies:** "Ambushed;" "Buried Alive II;" "The Three Lives of Karen;" "My Stepson, My Lover;" "A Step Toward Tomorrow;" "A Kiss So Deadly"

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