



## Nina Repeta: Carolina Girl

by Constance Nelson

The first thing you notice about actress Nina Repeta is her genuine smile. An authentic Carolina girl — and proud of it — Nina was raised in Shelby, educated in Greenville (ECU), and is a long-time resident of Wilmington. A brief move to Los Angeles led her back home with a success story. While in L.A. she was cast in The WB's popular series *Dawson's Creek* by fellow ECU alumnus Kevin Williamson, the show's creator. Now entering her fourth season as Bessie Potter (Joey's sister) on the show, Nina also has appeared in episodes of *Matlock* as well as in TV movies, commercials, and independent films. Her most recent credit is as the store clerk who sells the longed-for doll in the new made-in-North Carolina holiday feature film, *The Angel Doll* (see story, page 62). Although quite humble about it, she currently reigns as the N.C. Queen Azalea LIII. With an artistic bent for acting, singing and songwriting, this charming Southern belle has an undeniable and disarming edge.

*TF: Describe the irony surrounding your move to Los Angeles.*

**Nina Repeta:** We went out to L.A. because my husband Mike was doing a TV series that got canned. There are no guarantees in this business. We were there for about six months when we ran out of money. One day when I returned from the grocery store, he had everything packed up, the dog had her health certificate, and we were getting on the red eye to Wilmington. At this point I had already auditioned for *Dawson's Creek* three different times. The irony is that I got cast in L.A. for a show that shoots in Wilmington, North Carolina.

*TF: What were your impressions of the City of Angels?*

**NR:** L.A. is one of the most populated cities in the world yet I've never seen more lonely people. I missed the things that I grew up with like opening the front door and taking a long walk. L.A. is so full of concrete that my poor dog Ruby wore the pads off her puppy dog feet. A Los Angeles person's idea of going to the beach is not getting sandy and not getting near the water. It's like you're on yet another freeway, just like the freeway you took to get there.

*TF: Did you ever consider a career in music?*

**NR:** I feel very sacred about my music. In 1991 I decided to give up acting after my North Carolina agent sent me out on 51 auditions and I did not book a single thing. We joked that I was in his non-profit file. I did the Wilmington shuffle of working musicians. I had like four bands going and we all played with other bands, mostly small town gigs with bands that do cover tunes. Recently I've experienced a whole new birth musically. At a Relay For Life cancer benefit in my hometown of Shelby, I sang and recorded with a band called 'Tater. One of the members with whom I went to high school had a Mercury record deal "gone bad" and came back home. The other guy was like a heavy metal. They both went back to their roots of bluegrass. We wrote 10 songs at our first rehearsal. Who would think that I would find some musicians I want to work with in Shelby?

*TF: What was your reaction when you were asked to be the 2000 Azalea Festival Queen?*

**NR:** I thought my friend Denise was playing an April Fool's on me because they (the festival committee) always bring in a TV or movie star from L.A. or New York. But you know what? Everybody in L.A. is from somewhere like Wilmington or West Virginia, and they're just trying to reinvent themselves or escape their roots. I could never deny my roots; I fully embrace them.

*TF: What, for you, was most significant about being crowned Queen Azalea?*

**NR:** Ten years ago, Henry Rehder's house and garden was featured in *Southern Living*. At that time I was working with a painting company in Wilmington and I glazed the windows and painted the outside of his greenhouse for the photo shoot. And then years later, I'm at this same man's house doing the queen's portrait.

*TF: So just 10 years ago you painted houses, sang in a band, and did local commercials for...*

**NR:** Rippy Auto Park. Do you want to hear something funny? I was in San Diego, California at a restaurant before *Dawson's Creek*. Mike is trying to convince his friend that I'm a working actress, and he's like, "yeah, right." The hostess looks at us and says, "Hey you're the Rippy girl." Imagine that in San Diego.

*TF: What role do you play in *The Angel Doll*?*

**NR:** A cameo role. I play the clerk who sells the doll to the boy who is buying it for his sister. Only it's not an angel doll yet. The movie's a wonderful period piece. My hair and makeup was so true to the period and I looked so much like

my mother that I put a towel over the mirror because it was messing with my head to see myself look like that.

*TF: Do you think *The Angel Doll* will be a hit?*

**NR:** I believe this story has the potential to be a great Christmas classic. The *Angel Doll* has that kind of essence about it — where you can be moved by it year after year and see new things. It was a low-budget film but the people that worked on it were the best of the best, and everyone was happy to be there. When everything is flowing smoothly, the wheel turns without any bumps in the road, and that's how my shoot on *The Angel Doll* was — sheer joy. Right from the start, there was something very blessed about it.

*TF: What childhood holiday memories do you cherish?*

**NR:** I remember being carted to the McAdenville lights year after year. I could hear everyone in the car oohing and aahing, and I was always whining because I was the youngest and couldn't see out the windows. My mother was better at putting toys together than my father, because when daddy put a kitchenette together, he would screw the back of it in wrong and the door wouldn't work and I'd start crying. You know, just a normal family Christmas! My mother and I had a tradition of pulling homemade butter mints. And we would always go out on my grandmother's land and get a basket of pine knots. We'd walk through the forest in search of fallen pine trees, find the knots, and hammer them out with an axe. My mother says they make the house smell good. I could never sleep on Christmas Eve. When the fire was going downstairs, my daddy would take my blanket and get it really hot by the fire and then he'd wrap my feet in it. Another fond memory is going with him to work at the Optimist Club Christmas tree lot in Shelby. All the trees would come in around Thanksgiving and they would sell them on the lot in an old Lay's potato chip van that had been converted. I remember how good those trees smelled.

*TF: How do you celebrate Christmas now?*

**NR:** When Mike and I first got married we would try to see both families. Then one year we broke that tradition and we went to Hawaii for 16 days. Each Christmas since we've gone somewhere warm. Last year we went to Tampa to visit a friend. I don't know what's in store this Christmas, but my passport is ready!

*TF: What role does cooking play in your household?*

**NR:** I love to cook. Part of being a Southern woman was learning how to make my mama's chicken pie from the crust all the way through, which she learned from her mama and her mama and her mama. A Southern woman sometimes gets that need to feed. My own creation is Nina's Grit Bowl Breakfast. You just follow the recipe for grits, then you add a slice of cheese, some garlic powder, cayenne pepper and salt. Put the grits in a bowl then top it off with a fried egg or a flipped egg over easy. Then crumble bacon around the edges. It's the best thing. I feel like making some right now!

*TF: What causes do you support?*

**NR:** The Relay for Life last June was very important to me because I lost my father to cancer very quickly. In fact, his death stands as the most enlightening experience of my life because he did not lose his dignity. My mother, who is an organ transplant survivor, was ill for a very long time before she got a liver. We're so grateful that she's survived now for two-and-a-half years. Shelby is a very small town, but this fundraiser managed to raise \$192,000. It was held at the Cleveland County Fairgrounds, the largest county fair in North Carolina, where my grandmother was voted "The Prettiest Girl" back in 19-forever-something.