

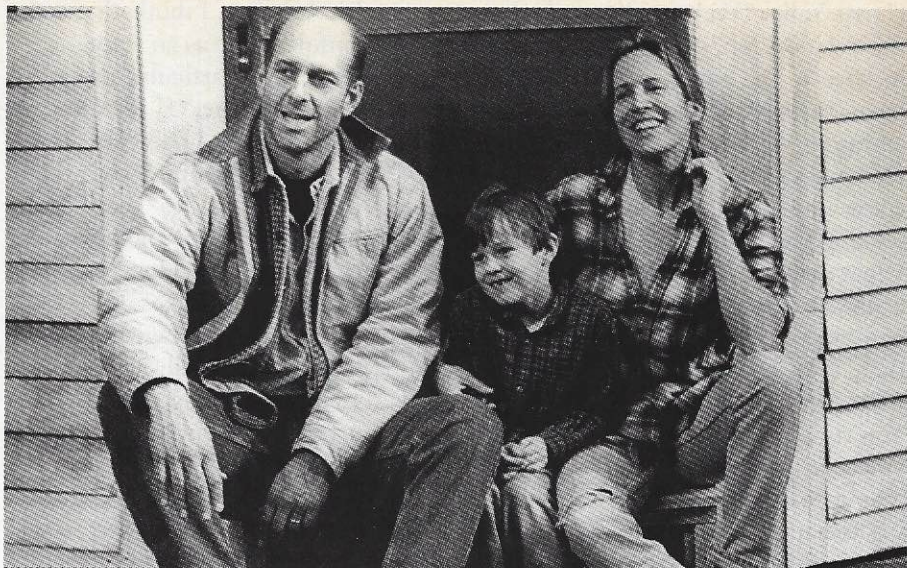
She is a superwoman, capable of extraordinary strength and courage in the face of great adversity. But today, backstage at Theater 3, Dana Reeve is as ordinary as you get.

Curled up in a chair, sans makeup, and sipping lukewarm soup out of a cardboard container, she could easily be your next-door neighbor. Hair pulled back in a ponytail, and dressed down in a plaid work shirt, jeans, and Doc Martens, she is relaxed and chatty. Yes, her husband is Christopher Reeve, the handsome actor who was paralyzed in a riding accident three years ago. Yes, she cares for him — both physically and emotionally — every day of their lives. Yes, she is the mother of an adorable son, Will, who was just three years old at the time of his Dad's fall. And yes, people stop her in the street, take her hand, and offer words of sympathy, even cry.

"I did a lot of growing up these past three years," the 35-year-old actress acknowledges. "But I'm not a saint. I'm doing what any wife who loves her husband would do — I'm standing by him."

Beyond their personal lives, Reeve is also the vice president of the Christopher Reeve Foundation, raising money for research so that her husband and others with spinal cord injuries will one day be able to walk again. "The accident," as she calls it, has been the focus of her life for a long time, and it has threatened to eclipse almost everything else.

"Not many people know I'm an actress and a singer," says Reeve, who's currently co-starring with John Bedford Lloyd in the Directors



With John Bedford Lloyd (l.) and Michael Phelan in *Good Will*.

Company production of *Good Will*, Joan Rater and Tony Phelan's adaptation of a Jane Smiley novella. But she's not bitter, and her face lights up at the chance to talk about theater.

"It's always been my passion," she says. "My outlet." And without a doubt, her gift: Reeve recently sang on a TV special benefiting the foundation and received a thunderous standing ovation. "It took my breath away," she smiles. In the course of an interview, she smiles and laughs often, at ease with herself and excited about acting off-Broadway.

How do you keep what's happened in the past three years in perspective?

You can feel sorry for yourself, you can let it cast a shadow over your life, or you can take from it and learn from it

and grow from it. You can find a greater good in it. Chris and I believe that.

Does he support your career?

Oh, my gosh, yes. He's my biggest fan. He thinks this play is wonderful and that it's a great opportunity for me. He'll be there on my opening night. He'll see the play several times, cheering!

How did you get involved with *Good Will*?

Tony Phelan, who co-wrote it, and I go way back to when I was a non-Equity actress at Williamstown. He sent the script to me and said, "I think you're perfect for the part of Liz, the wife and mother." It was one of the best plays I'd read in a long time, anywhere — Broadway, off-Broadway, regionally. It was haunting, even in that early incarnation. So I did a reading. Actually three readings.

And they knew you were it.

WOMAN DOES

DANA REEVE STARS IN *GOOD WILL* BY

It wasn't that easy. They told me that someone else was up for the role, and they named this well-known movie actress. So I thought, "Oh, forget it." My heart sank. But then they did come back to me and said I was the best. So that felt good!

How would you describe the play?

In broad, sweeping terms, it's about how dreams can be inadvertently shattered by our own blindness. Specifically, it's about a family that lives intentionally simply in modern times. They live in the '80s, on a farm, with no electricity and no running water. In the beginning, you'd think that sort of life sounds ideal. They make all their clothes. They grow all their own food. Their child is learning all these values. But this wonderful life unravels. They can't survive in normal society. It's a tough role, one of the hardest I've ever had to play.

Can you relate it at all to your own life?

Absolutely. It brings up so much — being a mother of a young child and wanting to protect him, wanting it to all be right and wanting the best for him. And to be in a relationship that has its challenges. It's all in here. It's a beautiful play.

Not many people realize what a talented actress you are.

Thank you very much! Can we get that in print? I'm certainly an experienced actress — not many people know that.

How did you get your start?

I went to Cal Arts for my MFA,

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Reeve (l.) with Barbara McCrane in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, 1996).

JERRY DALIA

and performing was the road I was taking. Williamstown in 1987 was a big summer for me: I got an agent at ICM, and I met Chris.

He saw you singing.

I was belting out "The Music That Makes Me Dance" in a cabaret show, which is the number I did for the TV special recently. It's our song.

But you didn't stay in musical theater.

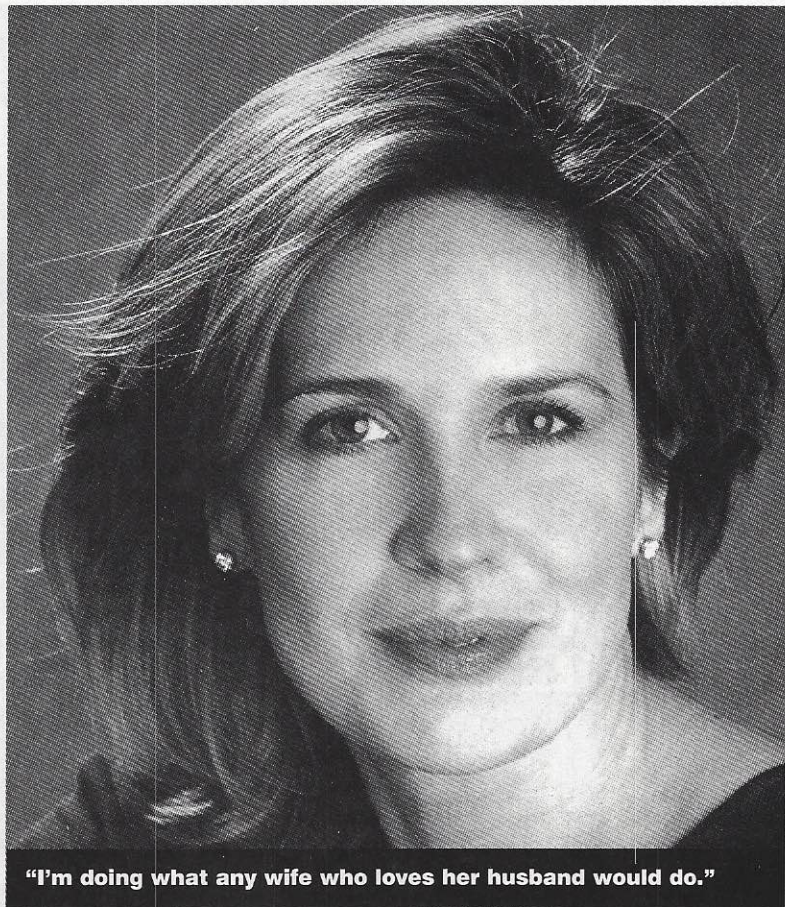
No. I got steered very heavily towards TV, which wasn't what I really wanted to be doing; but at that time in my life, it was right. I got a pilot. I got commercials. I went out to L.A. one year. But I wasn't happy. Theater made me happy. I wound up at Yale Rep, and my whole career did a 360. I worked at Manhattan Theatre Club for a while — I did *Sight Unseen* when I was very pregnant. Until the costume wouldn't fit anymore.

Then you took some time off.

I didn't work at all

for a year after Chris' accident. But to be honest, even before that, I was slowing down. I wasn't getting the kind of work, the kind of quality I wanted. I wanted to challenge myself, to engage my mind and my creativity.

You actually went back to school to study psych?



"I'm doing what any wife who loves her husband would do."

KEN REGAN

I did. I was thinking of working towards a doctorate in psychology. But I missed performing too much.

You did Williamstown again this summer.

Yes, I did *Johnny on a Spot* with James Naughton. It was perfect, because it let me be home with my family. The theater is five minutes from our house. And it was so much fun — a '30s comedy that we got up in two weeks. I find that, once I get my feet wet in theater, I'm hooked. The more I do it, the more I want to do it.

What was your first play after the accident?

I did the Guare-MacDermot musical version of *Two Gentleman of Verona* for the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, and now I'm a newly inducted member of their Board. I think they do wonderful productions.

What would be your ideal next job?

A Broadway musical. I would make my mom so proud, because while I was doing all this serious Chekhov and Shakespeare, all she wanted was to see me do *Gypsy*. Sing out, Louise!

You recently recorded the title song of Chris' HBO movie

In the Gloaming.

It's this impromptu, a cappella folk singing. On the second take, Chris was like, "Okay. That's it. Got it." I don't think Streisand has anything to worry about! But I'm taking lessons.

You'd prefer a musical over a drama at this point?

I think so. I think it's the next step for me. Singing feeds me. My life is so *real* — it's intense and it's daily drama on a very profound level, so what I look for, I suppose, is something very opposite. After this heavy drama, I'll be ready for something lighter.

An escape?

Not necessarily an escape, because I

wouldn't trade my life or who I am for anything. I think I just like the joy of singing. It's a therapy for me, and it's now a goal. I continue to audition for musicals. But I'm limited, because I can't go out of town for a long period of time. So I have to go into a show that's up and running or get cast in New York in a new musical. And the parts are few — I couldn't exactly be a chorus girl at 35!

What musicals did you grow up on?

I was always singing in high school: *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Fiddler on the Roof*. Everyone in my family — my parents, my two sisters — has a beautiful voice. And we loved to listen to show tunes. I know lots of Ethel Merman.

It's six o'clock on Saturday night, and you're just going into tech rehearsals.

Yes. It'll be a late night.

Is it hard on you to leave Chris at home? And your little boy?

Right now it's extremely hard, but I think once it's just performances and not rehearsals it will be better. We live in Westchester, so going back and forth is an hour on each end. I drop Will off at school, and then I don't see him till the next morning. It's hard on Chris, too. He is more emotionally needy of family than he's ever been. He was always someone who was very independent, very into his own thing. Now he's home much more, and he's confined much more. He doesn't have the

leisure activities he used to have. And he misses being on the stage.

Would you encourage your son if he wanted to go into show business?

I love theater so much, but it's such a hard road, and you come across such a wide variety of people, many of whom don't have the values that I want him to latch on to. It's a tough call. If he could be like Kenneth Branagh — or like Chris, for that matter — and use his mind and his craft in the most artistic way, then I'd say, "Do it."

Is it ever frustrating for you to be known as Mrs. Christopher Reeve?

I am proud to be Mrs. Christopher Reeve. But it's odd — I've become more well-known since the accident, but well-known for being a wife. So when people hear I'm in a play, doing work, they think, "Oh, isn't that nice? It's so nice she has something to keep herself busy." But the visibility has in some ways helped me. There is a sense that I have to prove myself, but at the same time, I don't. If more people come see this play because Mrs. Christopher Reeve is in it, all the better. Let them come; let them make their own decisions. Someone said to me, and I've held on to it, "The work is there, your talent is there, and now if more doors open, great." And that's the way I look at it. I've always been a believer in looking on the bright side. ■

SHERYL BERK is entertainment editor at *McCall's*.

In Search of a Cure

The Christopher Reeve Foundation raises funds for medical research leading to the development of effective treatments and ultimately a cure for spinal cord injury paralysis. CRF serves as a source of information and a voice for all people with disabilities. To give a tax-deductible contribution or learn more about the work of CRF, write to P.O. Box 277, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150. The toll-free number is 888-711-HOPE; the website address is www.apacure.com.



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