

adrienne wilkinson

claim to fame: she's the daughter



When you talk with actress Adrienne Wilkinson, you get the distinct sense that you're talking to an Ozarker. She's committed to her craft, she's down to earth and she's hard working. What's more, she admits an affinity for cashew chicken.

If you didn't know, you might not pick up on the fact that she's a Hollywood up-and-comer, who has made a variety of TV appearances and is currently working on her own production company. You'd certainly never guess that she's also seen in full medieval costume in 160 countries playing Lucy Lawless' daughter on the cult hit *Xena: Warrior Princess*.

All the Hollywood accomplishments are hidden under a relaxed demeanor and a relentless sense of optimism. It's that attitude that led Wilkinson to head for L.A. only a few days after graduating from Kickapoo in 1995.

Before long, she landed a gig on the TV show *Sweet Valley High*. She made the rounds in TV, appearing on *Saved By The Bell: The New Class* and a few other shows, before she caught a break in 2000. She was among a huge group of actors who read for the part on *Xena*. At the time, no one knew they were reading for the part of Xena's daughter. Wilkinson felt like she was a long shot because she bore a resemblance to Lawless. That turned out to be exactly what the producers wanted, and from the first reading, she seemed to be the perfect fit. Wilkinson says working on *Xena* was one of the times her Midwestern work ethic has paid off. She says there's something about being straightforward and no-nonsense about work that can make you stand out in some Hollywood circles.

"I hear most often, 'You're so easy to please,'" she says. "The Midwest is a place where people get it, we can take care of ourselves and if we're given a job, we do it." Even though the show ended a few seasons ago, she says she never fails to be surprised at the following it has. "The entire *Xena* experi-

ence, it's like the gift that keeps on giving," she says. International distribution means there are countries all over the world seeing the show for the first time. "It's a strange phenomenon," she observes. "My family gets a kick out of it," she says.

Wilkinson keeps close ties with family and friends here in 417-land, making it back home several times each year to go to the lake and just relax. "Where I'm from has an effect on every part of my life," Wilkinson says. "There's something about growing up there that makes you less stressed and maybe a little more compassionate. You acknowledge that you need to work hard and you expect to work hard." —Randy Berger

jay kenneth johnson

claim to fame: starring role on Fox's *North Shore*

When I caught up with actor Jay Kenneth Johnson, it was early on a Thursday morning, just before he was heading off to work. Since he left Springfield for Los Angeles in 1999, he's won more than a few fans starring Philip Kiriakis on *Days of Our Lives*. On this particular morning, though, he was off to work on his current project, a starring role in Fox's prime-time drama *North Shore*. Filming on the Hawaiian island of Oahu means a nice change of scenery from L.A.

"Since I came out here, I've been rapelling, surfing, deep sea fishing, and I've been living in a great place with a great view," he says. "I never thought six years ago in Springfield I'd be here for the summer." Six years ago, Johnson was planning on finishing school at SMSU and getting a job. In his spare time, he was playing in a band (which he still lists as a back-burner dream) and taking acting classes. He had been in some high school productions, but he knew that making it onto the screen, big or small, would mean relocating to L.A. Now, on location in Hawaii, Johnson says the typical day is 12 hours or longer, spent doing scenes outdoors or at a local studio. "When you see it on TV, it's amazing how much work goes into even two minutes of television," he says.

Johnson says he tries to make it back to 417-land a few times

each year to visit family and go camping, but this year has simply been too busy. "I miss my family the most; it'd be nice if I could see them more often," he says. "It could be worse, though," he adds, reflecting again on the view from his apartment.

With all the exposure, Johnson finds himself getting recognized on the street more and more. *Days of Our Lives* has a rabid following and Johnson says it's common for fans to approach him. It's a major adjustment.

"How are you supposed to get used to that? How are you supposed to handle that?" he asks with a laugh. "Just with a smile, I guess." —Randy Berger

