

hosted a radio show; when did screenwriting come into play?

I started out writing movie scripts about nine years ago; with the hopes of making it in the movie business. I decided to go to the West Coast so I came back to New York and went to Puffy's house and told him I was not leaving without a job. I told him about my plans to go to the West Coast to get into the movie business. He said he was about to do the same thing with Bad Boy Films and he was working with William Morris Agency but nothing was really happening. We talked about doing something together, the plan was to set up Bad Boy Films and I was going to run it out on the West Coast. I flew back to LA with the help of Puffy. Probably after a month in LA, Puffy and myself actually formalized some things and he set up Baby Boy Films with me as President. The plan was to just do it short-term for like four months and he would fund the company until something got off the ground. What ended up happening was four months into the job, Biggie got killed and 48 hours later Bad Boy Films on the West Coast was shut down. Puffy had no desire to focus on that of course or be in LA. So I was out of a job after four months, then I had to decide what I was going to do whether or not I was going to stay on the West Coast on my own without Puff's name or go back to the East Coast.

So what was your decision and looking back was it a wise choice?

I decided to stay and the only thing I had in my power was a computer, which he paid for. At this time I'm trying to figure out a way where I can break into

the industry. I ended up buying a book on screenwriting and read it that weekend. From that book I understood the formula to screenwriting. I then went to Blockbuster and rented all my favorite movies but now I was watching them looking for these things I learned in the book, so I can understand how it works. Once I did that, I started writing, in a year's time I wrote three screenplays. But, nothing happened, none of them sold, it didn't get me an agent and it didn't get me a manager. But, the fourth one was a script that was called *Seven Days*, which was re-titled *Brown Sugar*. The script sold within seven days at a time when I had just \$300 left to my name. I had not worked in a whole year, I was about to get evicted, it was clear I was going to have to move back to the East Coast when my script sold for \$225,000 to 20th Century Fox.

Your rise to success was not always easy; what are some of the tribulations you experienced?

It was not easy as one will want to believe, as time went on it became a learning experience. I went through my bout of being homeless in my early twenties. I went to Puffy's house and told him I was not leaving without a job, he gave me money to get back to LA with a job as President of Bad Boy Films. Before that, I was sleeping on a friend's sofa in Southern California. After Bad Boy Films was shut down, all I had was a computer, screenwriting book and a blockbuster card with an eviction notice posted on the door.

Tell me about your latest project "Just

Wright"?

The movie "*Just Wright*" stars Queen Latifah; she plays the star character. If I had to describe it, I would have to say it is Cinderella set into the world of the NBA. Queen Latifah plays an overweight woman who is a physical therapist and basketball junkie. She loves the Knicks and her dream is to be a trainer in the NBA. Eventually she ends up getting a job as a therapist with an injured player who happens to be star player for the Knicks. When she becomes his full-time live in therapist to nurse him back to health before the playoffs, they fall in love.

What advice would you give to a novice screenwriter trying to get into the industry?

If you understand the formula of movie making, understand what the marketplace wants and what the studio system wants, you can be successful as a writer. I'm a perfect example; I never took to class to be a writer, I read books to learn. Alonzo Brown who co-wrote *Honey*, was a rapper as a member of Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde with Andre Harrell. The guy who wrote *Set It Off*, which is a classic, is a lawyer from Philly. He decided after he became a lawyer that he wanted to be a screenwriter. When you make the decision, whatever you put your mind to you can do it. I wrote three screenplays before *Brown Sugar* and *Brown Sugar* was the one that changed my life. Imagine if I had quit on the third script. ◀◀