



Candace Davis Martin interviews Michelle L. Silva

Candace Davis-Martin is a senior level executive with over two decades of entertainment and hospitality experience in both national and international markets. Davis currently serves as the Corporate Director of Entertainment for Station Casinos, LLC., responsible for the complete oversight of all entertainment scheduling across the Station Casino enterprise in Las Vegas, Nevada. The two entertainment professionals met in 1998 at the Stardust Hotel & Casino.

Candace: So, wow, you're really doing this! I'm not surprised. Most people probably don't know that you were already creating mini films back in the day---at least with us!

Michelle: True! I think a lot of people don't know many things about my creative past, to be honest.

Candace: I get that. Women are torn in so many directions: wives, mothers, employees, caretakers, housekeepers, cooks, chauffeurs, planners, cheerleaders, financial gurus,...all of it. And, you, especially, already seemed like you had so much on your plate building and managing the law firm, and helping Gracie build her career, not to mention all of the above. So, take us back to the moment this all happened.

Michelle: In July 2020, Gracie received a book, "The Artist's Way," from one of her coaches in NYC. I read the first page, and immediately bought my own copy to read along with Gracie. The book, by Julia Cameron, examines reasons that hold people back from living their most authentic life: excuses, anger, fear, jealousy, resentment, pain, toxic people, to name a few. The 14-week commitment to the exercises totally rattled my being. I had no expectations about any outcomes whatsoever. I simply spent the time devoted to the exercises, and I discovered a lot about myself, or should I say, rediscovered?!

Candace: That's amazing! What are some of the exercises?

Michelle: The exercises are devoted to reawakening your inner self. One of the biggest exercises is journaling every day. I've been journaling since I was about 15-years-old. I

honestly stopped journaling when I got married. I would journal every now and then, and I spent some time creating poetry, but my writing basically stopped.

Candace: I remember when you worked on your manuscript at UNLV.

Michelle: Yes, I've still got the manuscript! I'll have to retype it because portions of it were typed on a Word Processor! I'd like to revisit that manuscript; it was the impetus for my desire to work in film and tv. I had visions of moving to LA and writing for soap operas.

Candace: Tell us about your two short films that will screen in Las Vegas, and in New Orleans.

Michelle: It's a dream come true. I'm so happy at this stage in my life, nearing 54-years-old, creating strong female driven stories that reflect chapters in my life. Not only am I writing them, but also producing them. After I completed the "Artist's Way" book, I sat down to write a story that I thought would showcase the abilities of my daughter as an actress. I wanted it to be a period piece, because she loves history, and those types of auditions from her agents do not come by very frequently, if ever. I literally googled, "How do you write a screenplay?" because I'd never written in that format. It's tricky in that the dialogue justifies center, and the headings are all different. I watched YouTube videos, too. Remarkably, a random FB post caught my attention from a legitimate screenwriter in Baton Rouge. This was absolute synchronicity, something that the book often refers to. The screenwriter was offering her services for a reasonable price. After I got my screenplay to where I thought it was good enough, I emailed her.

Candace: Interesting. So, she read your screenplay and offered feedback?

Michelle: Yes. There were some technical challenges that she helped me fix, but the actual story, she really liked. I felt so happy and confident. As an experienced writer and producer, she also wanted to help me produce my first screenplay, "Flora's Spell." I reached out to a Baton Rouge based Cinematographer and Director that Gracie worked for in the past and asked if he'd be interested in reading my screenplay. He workshopped the screenplay with local filmmakers in Baton Rouge, and the overall feedback was not that great.

Candace: Ohhhh? Like what?

Michelle: Feedback was that we'd all seen a historical piece before. It felt flat. The stakes were not high enough. The Director began questioning the relationship between Flora and the Master and asked what sparked that relationship? What drove me to create a story with such inequality and anger. Why was Flora so hungry? What in my past helped create those characters? That conversation took the sails right out of my body. That conversation jolted me all the way back to 1993, the year I worked in Paris, France as the lead adagio team with my Hungarian dance partner, and the beginning of

an eating disorder that whittled me down to 102 lbs. The Director said, "NOW you're on to something! Go back and incorporate all of those modern details into the story."

Candace: And, so, did you?

Michelle: Not immediately. I was pissed. I liked the way the story was. I didn't touch the screenplay for more than two weeks while I stewed. I felt like giving up.

Candace: Yikes. Share what happened next?

Michelle: I got back to work by adding modern elements into the screenplay that exactly mirrored the elements in period time. For example, we see the Master in period time now appearing as the controlling misguided Ballet Master in modern time. We see Flora hungry for food in period time and Ruthie eliminating food in modern time. Each girl struggles with forms of abuse and hunger. The audience witnesses Flora's abuse vividly in period time, while Ruthie suffers a silent abuse in modern time. Nearly all of the characters appear in both time periods which is so fascinating to me. I think the actors enjoyed it!

Candace: What is the message of Flora's Spell? What will people take away after watching it?

Michelle: Narrative's are not for everyone, but I hope that the audience will see the larger themes in the story of hunger, power, both being exerted over someone and our own inner power, and that good always wins over evil. The magical component is really inner strength and that manifests differently for individuals. Perhaps it's religion, nature, meditation, prayer, higher vibrations from light therapy, crystals, etc. After all of the ups and downs, I am really happy how the screenplay turned out.

Candace: So, when did you write HONEY? Congratulations on all of the awards HONEY is garnering.

Michelle: One week after Flora's Spell wrapped, I started writing HONEY. After such a high, one tends to feel the low. I wasn't depressed, but I felt a sadness in me, probably because all of the hard work was over. I also started thinking of my Mom and how proud she would be. I drive through some pretty run down areas on my way to pick up Gracie after school. Every day I pass a mini-mart which is a convenience store. I imagined my protagonist walking out of the mini-mart on her way to one of the houses nearby, probably to a boys house....and so, I had the beginnings of a story just by that visual. Who was the girl? Why was she crying? Where was she going? I met Frankie on the way to the carpool line, and it honestly all just fell into place after that; I wrote HONEY in one afternoon sitting on my patio.

Candace: Incredible! What chapter in your life reflects HONEY?

Michelle: Well, Frankie carries a lot on her shoulders to be such a young girl, so I drew on the incredibly dark time in my life when I lost not only my Dad to a heart attack, but my Mom one-year later from a mysterious virus. No shit. A virus. It was easy to imagine Frankie's sorrow, and I just knew that Gracie would share her vulnerable emotions very easily with this character. It felt incredibly special. I got to work and assembled my cast and crew and we filmed in three days, edited it in about a month and I started submitting it to film festivals.

Candace: I'm so proud of you! What do you see next?

Michelle: Thank you!!! Gracie has written two screenplays both of which she's workshopped with her writing group and coach in Los Angeles. We are in pre-production for her first short film that she's written and will co-direct, called, "The Trouble with the Pink Shoes." I am definitely creating content that reflects themes that are interesting to me: dancing, eating disorders, death. I like working with young actors, especially because I don't think there are many opportunities for young actors to gain experience, work on a professional set, take direction from a director, go to a live audition, etc. I also hope that my company Entertainment GOES continues to produce other pieces of work in the very near future. I want to continue creating in an artists community. I would love to actually work on a big film set and learn more and grow. I am the happiest I've been in a long time. Thank you for the great interview!