

EXCLUSIVE: Tina Lifford Shares How Her Divine Human Journey Prepared Her for ‘Queen Sugar’

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Tina Lifford, the brilliant actress who brings the fabulous Aunt Violet aka Aunt Vi into our homes in the critically acclaimed series *Queen Sugar*, spoke exclusively with *Hollywood's Black Renaissance* about her passion for acting, the role that manifestation played in her life, the brilliance of Ava DuVernay and Oprah Winfrey, and what it is like to work with an all-female directorial team.

Lifford believes her human journey is “divine” and her family’s culture of unconditional love helped prepare her for the role of Aunt Vi. Growing up in Evanston, a northwest suburb outside of Chicago, Tina constantly reenacted plays – including all of the characters.

When she was about twenty-five, she realized that acting was a true passion of hers and thought, “If you do not try this acting thing, you will be forty and unhappy.” That day she used her lunch break to search for auditions. Bill Duke, her former acting teacher, never doubted Lifford’s acting ability and inspired her to quit her job as a publicist and pursue acting as a full-time career.

This bold and courageous move led Tina on a beautiful journey that allowed her to book a series of roles including the critically acclaimed Fox Network series *South Central*, *Parenthood*, and *Hostage*.

While standing in her kitchen in 2015, Lifford recalls thinking, “God, I don’t get it. I thought I would have met Oprah by now.” In her journal, she wrote out the details of what she wanted her life to look like. “I want to be a standout in an incredible ensemble where I am third or fourth on the call sheet.” She continued, “I didn’t want the responsibility of being number one because you have to be on set all the time, and you have to be in all the scenes. I wanted to contribute while enjoying the process. I captured on paper what it would feel like to live my dream.”

“I had to sit down and really ask myself the question, ‘what do I want?’ and I gave myself the permission to be honest

about that. A lot of times we talk about the things that our heart truly wants, yet we wind up going in a different direction because we are afraid that we might not get what we want.”

Lifford’s talent, passion, and manifestation eventually lead to landing her current role as Aunt Vi on OWN’s hit series *Queen Sugar*. “Aunt Vi is a woman who loves hard. This is a woman who puts family first. She is a woman we all know, but she is not a woman that we have seen on television before.” She continues, “Aunt Vi is a window into an archetypal experience, an experience that I know is common to African American culture. She is a powerful character without all the ‘neck-shaking,’ and it is a beautiful thing to witness.”

Lifford believes her years of practicing manifestation prepared her for being cast in *Queen Sugar*. She credits the show’s visionaries, Ava DuVernay and Oprah Winfrey, for producing a powerful show that promotes black women characters and talent. “Oprah found the book, and it was Ava’s vision and relentless passion that came up with these characters.” She continues, “There’s no question that Ava loves black people and honors black culture to the fullest. Part of her [Ava’s] brilliant vision is her passion for setting the context that allows us to reclaim who we are at the core. Hiring an all-female directorial staff is an extension of that. Duvernay is opening doors so the people who hire [network/studio execs etc.], can no longer say, ‘we are unable to find female directors who have a certain level of experience.’ Each of these women joined our family with cinematic experience, and they leave with even more experience because each episode is shot like an hour-long film. Excuses by decision makers can no longer be made.”

Lifford describes the experience of being directed by a woman as “not rushed.” *Queen Sugar*’s all-female directorial team creates a culture where “We spend time developing those quiet moments, and we take time for conversation in a way that is natural to women. We experience pain and uncertainty, and we explore fear, vulnerability, and insecurity in a way that is honest and true to who we are as humans.”

[Queen Sugar](#) is a contemporary drama set in Louisiana. It chronicles the lives and loves of the estranged Bordelon siblings. Be sure to tune into the two-night season premier June 20th and 21st on OWN!

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