

**UP CLOSE & PERSONAL**  
**BY LISA ST. HILL**  
**TARAJI P. HENSON \* STAR BLAZING**

**How do you feel about the media obsession with gossip, the invasion of privacy on celebrities and the fascination with Internet sites such as You Tube, which seems to expose the worst of our American generation and the entertainment industry?**

I try to stay focused and away from the Internet. I only use it for research and I don't go on the blog sites, because someone is always going to say something negative about me but there is always a positive and I can't please everybody. If you look for negativity you'll find it. My career is "living out loud"-I'm so vulnerable-you expose yourself to the world-it can be an ugly monster. (The entertainment industry)



**So with that Taraji, if your future self could come back and tell you one thing to your present self what would it be?**

Wow! No one has ever asked me that before! I would say don't change a thing. I'm happy. I don't know what perfect is, but I'm happy if that's what perfect is! Sometimes you have to fight the turmoil-reject the bad spirit, it's not hard. You have to listen to that "God voice"; you know when you're battling the light and dark sides. You have to dust off the bad angel! I usually have these moments in the Whole Foods produce aisle!

**Is this how you fight temptation and pressure? The pressure to be look, sound or be a certain way that tends to create images that are all the same?**

The Press! You can't put that much power in someone's hands. I have to feel good and look good and that ain't gonna happen at 99 pounds! It's just not me. I make sure that I'm not above 125 pounds; I have to feel good in my clothes. Notice how I use the affirmative-ME! Women have to do that for themselves! When I have different roles

And I have to look different I work out with a routine and a different exercise.

Billy Blank's sister has a great Cardio Boot camp that I go to. In one hour I am drenched after that class. I do treadmill, floor work for my shoulders, backs and abs; I'm in constant motion. I also use leg weights. When I need to indulge my body I go to

**Belle Visage.** I also go to a spot called the **Cardio Bar.** They have a ballet bar so I can take care of my legs and butt at least 3 times a week. This way I can eat what I want but within moderation. I like to eat seafood and if I want a scoop of mashed potatoes I'll have it! If I see a pie I'll have a piece of that too! You have to keep your body moving, and your body needs roughage. It's all about healthy eating. Running up hills, you have to up your speed all around your body from top to bottom.

**So with that said, who are rooting for in the game?**

I love Tasha Jones—she has a great spirit and is very humble.

Also I love Usain Bolt from Jamaica—he is amazing. Also Michael Phelps, because right after he won he went to his mama for a hug! His mama raised him right!

**What I admire about you is that you're a chameleon-effortlessly. Where do you draw your inspiration from and what advice would you give women on seeking and maintaining inspiration and passion in all areas of their lives?**

Thank you so much for saying that! My experience is bittersweet partly, because when I do a role and it's great—they tend to stick me into a box and I have to fight against it and what I've done as an artist; it is a constant fight. The creative persons do not make all the decisions; this tends to be the studio executives who are not creative thinkers. So I'm considered just at times "the edgy girl". There was a time when I was not considered funny or not pretty enough.

**I can't believe that! In "Talk to me" you combined everything from being funny to compassionate to strong and beautiful!**

Yes it's true. They forgot about my performance in "Baby Boy" and think I started in "Hustle & Flow"; but I'm a trained artist and it's like playing an instrument like Miles Davis or Alicia Keys. I practice with my instrument and it gives me confidence like someone like an Alicia when she sits down at the piano and hits those keys! You know how she is! She's in her element. I'm a spiritual person and not fearful to expose myself freely as an artist. At the end of the day, you just have to do it, jump in with both feet and pull back and forget it. Fear blocks you; you can't give in, you must be uninhibited.

Connect with it and be passionate about your craft whatever it is.

**You've had an opportunity to work with talented Male Actors & Directors, like Fincher, Perry, Tyrese, Terence and the man himself Don. What did you learn from and with them as an artist? What was your best experience?**

Oh Tyrese! He and I are the best of friends; we were both new to the game and we developed a special connection because of that, we will be the best of friends forever. He was humble on the set and wanted to learn. Now Terence, he's the man! That relationship got me prepared for the Don Cheadle's and the Brad Pitt's of the game, because he was the first Actor who had been around. That was a beautiful experience. {Hustle & Flow}

That was all the preparation work for working with great leading Actors.

On Baby Boy with John, he became my big brother and I became the little engine that could! My momma should've named me the little engine that could!

"Talk to me" was actually supposed to Don Terence and me, but he fell out of the project, But Don... what can I say? Don is the master. He is the true chameleon and that's what attracted me to him. The energy he has is incredible. He's not afraid of anything and we both think alike so on set we would come up with the same ideas at the same time! I was blown away because we had a great connection and it made the work even better. He is amazing artistically.

**Watching "Talk to me" you reminded me so much of Meryl Streep because you have that rare gift of being the character. Many Actors who've been around for years can't pull that off- they bring the same persona to every single role, but you've got. IT!**

Oh my God thank you! I can't believe you said that because Meryl Streep is my favorite Actress! My heroes are her and Bette Davis! As an artist I want to leave a legacy like that you know? To create classics and be talked about in history lessons. As if years from now they discovered a secret city and found archives of our art I want to be found in classic pieces.

**What do you do to pamper yourself? Please share some tips for the viewers on how you keep your skin and your hair so healthy looking?**

I shop! That is my indulgence. I like to play dress up and feel good. I like manicures and pedicures. I'm a great bargain shopper and I don't do Rodeo Drive! My things though are shoes! I love the Jessica Simpson collection; those are cute shoes. I have a mixture of things. I like to shop for my house because I spend a lot of time at home; things like: furniture, new bedding. I got a pair of Chloe shoes for my birthday last year!

I'm stylish but low maintenance when it comes to my skin and hair care. I use **Cetaphil** in the morning and on light days when I'm not shooting and wearing heavy makeup.

I also like the **Kate Sommerville** beauty products, when I need something stronger. I also go the spa for purifying and get an exfoliating cleanser, a good one is from the **Paul Scerri** line. He has a PH balancing cream for night and an anti-aging night cream, which puts moisture back into your skin. You don't want to clog your pores by putting too much stuff on your face, unless you have acne then a ten step approach is what you may need, but keep it simple. My favorite hair care, I'm all about **Kerastase**, It feels like silk on your hair. I have no chemicals in my hair just a simple press and curl, my scalp can be sometimes dry so I have **Valerie Herrell**; who is a great hairstylist tend to my hair with highlights or clipping the ends. She also does the hair of Holly Robinson-Peete, Essence Atkins and Rachel True from "Half & Half" I also like to mix products. If I need a treatment I use **Phytolage** masque nutrient cream for ultra dry hair; it helps to protect your hair from the heat and the environment; As well as the detangling shampoo from **Biolage**. Makes your hair feel like milk. You just comb it out and sit under a dryer for ten minutes.

**How do you feel about the entire Oscar buzz surrounding your role in the movie? "Benjamin Buttons" with Brad Pitt?**

You know honestly, I just receive it and let it go. I say thank you to people who go on about it, but I don't think about it, because it's all so political you know? You can't give it too much power. I'm passionate about my work and realize that there is an upside as well as a downside to everything. My manager tells me often, 'keep your feet on the ground'; so I have to stay in the now. I feel more good about being on Oprah with Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett that was amazing! Years ago I visualized it being with the A-list crowd before I was even with them! I thought of myself as a big shot. You have to feel yourself in that place, see yourself in that space, and visualize it. At the end of the day I'm a mother first. I have a 14 year-old son. I make sure to attend all his games and be there for him when he needs me. He's a great kid, and very bright. When I was offered to do a role that might have taken me away for a period of time God worked things out where I couldn't do the show and I was able to attend all of his school activities. God made the choice for me. He's been accepted into a new private school in L.A. and I'm so proud of him. Every morning I wake up I thank God for another day. I have a very close connection to my son.

**Yes! I can agree with you on that! Boys are very protective of their moms.**

Girl don't I know it! Single moms tend to over nurture their boys and you have to remember that one day he's going to be a young man. You're raising a young man. He always carries the bags for me and is respectful, so one day I hope he will find himself a good woman so I don't have to keep doing all his laundry!

**I recently interviewed your friend Rockmond Dunbar and asked him what life lessons did he learn from women growing up**

**So I'm going to ask you what life lessons did you learn from important men in your life?**

Oh that's a good one Lisa! My advice came from my dad who passed away, but is still with me. He said always ask a man, "What is your agenda?" The times I didn't ask, I should've. I feel him pulling strings and lining up the stars for me. I realize that all of this is not about me; it's not about any of us. We are all just passing through this existence.

**Yes! That reminds me of a favorite quote of mine: We are not human beings having a Spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.**

**{[Teilhard de Chardin](#)}**

Yes! I love that quote! That is one of my all time favorites too!

**Thank you so much Taraji for chatting with Jolie and all the best to you!**

Thank you!