

BIG City Life

With New Year's resolutions upon us, *Gabrielle Lane* joins Hollywood actor Billy Zane for breakfast to find out how he is helping disadvantaged young people to build better futures in 2014, in partnership with British mentor, David C.M. Carter

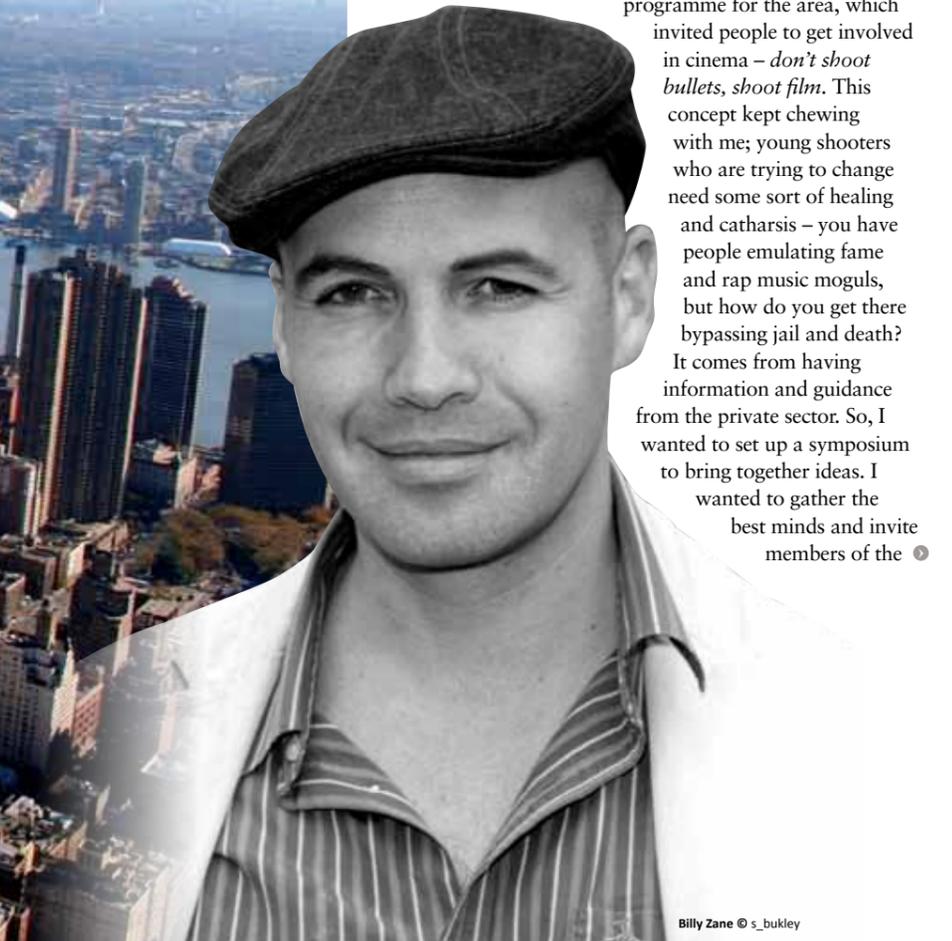
It's not often that you get invited to have breakfast with a Hollywood actor and an internationally-renowned mentor, out of the blue. Rarer still, is the occasion that your interviewees talk sociological strategies, personal empowerment and even US fiscal policy as they are tucking into their croissants and coffee.

Sat with Billy Zane and David C.M. Carter at The Arts Club, the conversation is decidedly highbrow for a Tuesday morning, although both men are in good spirits. Zane is in town for the first UK exhibition of his artwork and the breakfast provides the pair with a welcome opportunity to catch up and share their vision for The Breakthrough Project, which will see some business mentoring and guidance inspiring young people and tackling anti-social issues.

Following an introduction at an "entrepreneurs weekly gathering" in LA – where Carter mistook Billy Zane for a science-type who looked like the actor – a friendship developed which the latter describes as a meeting of minds: "We connected on a philanthropic benchmark with a less pretentious title – make a difference," he explains. It was later, when visiting the police commissioner of Chicago in 2011 that he realised that both men could draw together other individuals from their networks, initially to address the area's gun crime rates.

"I was doing quite a bit of work with a local studio and headlines kept coming out about how many people were being shot in the neighbourhood," says

Zane. "There was an exciting outreach programme for the area, which invited people to get involved in cinema – *don't shoot bullets, shoot film*. This concept kept chewing with me; young shooters who are trying to change need some sort of healing and catharsis – you have people emulating fame and rap music moguls, but how do you get there bypassing jail and death? It comes from having information and guidance from the private sector. So, I wanted to set up a symposium to bring together ideas. I wanted to gather the best minds and invite members of the



Billy Zane © s_bukley

- community who had been affected by it. I immediately called David, who I absolutely wanted on that panel.”

With a 20-year background in finance and as an entrepreneur and 17 years of experience in mentoring CEOs of multi-national companies, businesspeople and celebrities, David C.M. Carter has amassed a wealth of experience and contacts while helping clients to improve their personal and professional lives. One of Carter’s suggestions was to export a programme masterminded by the Tsu’Chu Biz Foundation, which is flourishing in the UK. “Instead of giving people from disadvantaged backgrounds a fish, it teaches them how to fish,” he explains. “A lot of these people have great ideas but don’t know how to set up their own business. So basically this programme, which Susan Kaye and her partner [former professional footballer] Tony Woodcock run, helps them to become entrepreneurs. It has created hundreds of micro-businesses that now employ thousands of people; these kids are coming up with great ideas that they are really passionate about. And it pays the bills. [The programme] has had a major impact on their local communities because it has stopped the violent atmosphere in the neighbourhood. When Billy started telling me about his idea, I thought one thing I could do is give some money to export the Tsu’Chu Biz Foundation programme and see if it works in Chicago.”

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In fact, David C.M. Carter is donating 100 per cent of the profits from his debut self-improvement tome *Breakthrough* to the project. Sales in the UK will benefit Tsu’Chu Biz based in London, while profits arising in the USA will be used in American cities. If all goes well, the two men are hoping that the scheme can be used as a template around the world, with the opportunity for corporate firms to sponsor projects in their own areas.

The concept of making a difference is at the core of David C.M. Carter’s mentoring work, underpinned by the belief that it is one’s positive legacy which will enable you to find fulfilment. For the past four years he has chaired The Rocket Club, a private members’ business forum for current and former clients which looks at ways to make money while having a positive impact on society. “Ten years ago it was all about ‘greed is good’,” he sighs. “But I think people have really started to assess their values and purpose and to reflect on their lives. They want to leave something behind. A strange and almost unnatural law has also been revealed to the business community; a huge part of attracting status is donating to other causes, it is a magnet for success.”

He reveals a compelling example: “One of my clients runs a global platinum mining company in South Africa and when he took over 28 per cent of its workforce had HIV or AIDS. So, over the course of the four years that he ran that business, they put in antiretroviral wellness clinics for the workers and their families, as well as crèches, health and safety clinics and an employee optional share program. Absenteeism went to zero per cent. This company cared about its employees, everyone in this entire community benefitted from it and productivity went up.”

Zane nods thoughtfully. “Even if you started with greed maybe being the motivation; you can’t help feeling good about yourself when realising you have changed the whole community.” With no mention of the film *Titanic*, in which Zane most notably starred, I seize the opportunity to ask if fame has made him more personally inclined to help others. The answer, surprisingly, is no.

“I don’t know how effective that soapbox is at the end of the day,” he shrugs. “It is such a narrow focus to excel in something that makes you famous. Isn’t it enough to entertain? I try not to focus on [fame], if anything I think it would give a negative backlash; I think it is now seen as self-promotion.”

“Many celebrities talk a great game, but Billy actually rolls up his sleeves and does something and makes a difference,” comes the glowing praise from Carter on the other side of the table.

Zane continues: “Making a difference doesn’t have to be synonymous with fame. A friend of mine’s father died and it was only discovered at his funeral how his death had affected hundreds of families. He had been supporting thousands of families in India and no one ever knew it. That is true heroism, when you make a difference without making headlines.” A perfect blockbuster quote, if ever there was one. ■

Breakthrough by David C.M. Carter is published in Great Britain by Piatkus
Further information on The Breakthrough Project is available at breakthroughwisdom.org