

(LEFT) Keith Black at his day job, a teacher at Sheepshead Bay High School. (RIGHT) Filming at Ugoson's Pharmacy in Mill Basin, from left: Mickey Rooney, Dick Cavett, Celeste Holm, and Jan Rooney

Math teacher calculates the odds of making it in the movies

By Meredith Deliso

Keith Black is living proof that dreams can happen.

The 38-year-old Brooklyn native made papers previously for his 2004 film short, "Get the Script to Woody Allen," which won the Long Island International Film Expo for best short film that year.

Now, Black, not at all unlike his idol, Woody Allen, is at it again with "Driving Me Crazy," a road comedy he shot this summer and is currently editing at his Mill Basin apartment when he gets out of his day job – a math teacher at Sheepshead Bay High School.

"I was always fascinated by movies," says the former accountant turned teacher. "I never thought I could be a movie star. I'm just a guy who believes in himself and tries very hard."

Black got into entertainment as a hobby, working with comedy coach Steve Marshall to develop his comedy persona.

From that relationship came "Get the Script to Woody Allen," a \$3,000 short which showed

at the Sundance Film Festival, the Venice Film Festival and won the Long Island International Film Expos, and was sold to several television channels.

Black's next Hollywood effort, his first feature film, he hopes will go on to be the next "Little Miss Sunshine," directed by Marshall and written by Black and screenwriter Mark Troy.

"Every day after school I would get my lesson plans done and we would work for a few hours," said Black.

Shot over his summer break at locations in Mill Basin, including Black's house and Ugoson's Pharmacy on E. 51st Street between Utica Avenue and Avenue N, as well as Yonkers and Long Beach, L.I., "Driving Me Crazy" tells the story of Eliot Brown, a neurotic pharmacist who falls in love with a woman on the West Coast over the Internet. Because of his fear of flying, he drives out to meet her with her younger sister, who essentially drives Eliot crazy on the ensuing trip.

For a low budget film by a relatively unknown filmmaker, Black attracted some Hollywood heavyweights for his feature film debut, even at \$100 a day. Maxine Bahns of "She's the One" and "The Brothers McMullen" plays the love interest and the Oscar-nominated actress Renee Taylor plays the mother of Black's character. Her husband, the Oscar-nominated Joe Bologna, also plays her husband in the film.

"I couldn't believe it," said Black. "Here I was with the greatest Hollywood icon ever, standing in a little pharmacy on Avenue N."

Another idol, Mickey Rooney, appeared as a customer in the pharmacy.

"At lunchtime he told me old Hollywood stories," said Black.

Oscar winner Celeste Holm, former talk show host Dick Cavett, and the Emmy-nominated Louise Lasser also were involved in "Driving Me Crazy."

"How many math teachers with glasses and a pot belly get to star with award-winning

icons?" said Black on his opportunity.

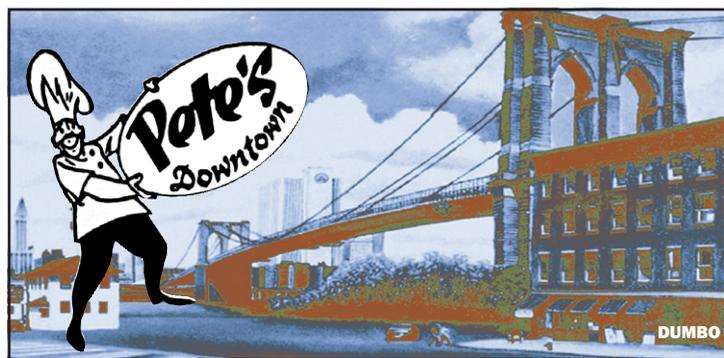
What's his secret? Hard work and time management, something he hopes his students Sheepshead Bay High School can be inspired by.

"Once you manage your time and get that done, the skies the limit," he said.

He wants 100 percent of his regent's class to pass their end-of-the-year test.

"Anything you give your mind to, you can achieve," he tells them.

Black looks to take his quirky feature film, which he is currently in the process of editing at his home, to Sundance, as well as other film festivals. If it does become next "Little Miss Sunshine," the teacher has no plans of quitting his day job. He's working on getting his next film projects lined up, but "I'm always going to want to keep my feet entrenched in education," he said. "I've had so many role models – teacher or coaches – that have helped me. One of the biggest gifts you can give is to give back to the community."



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