

# Smith soars in rags-to-riches film

By Kam Williams

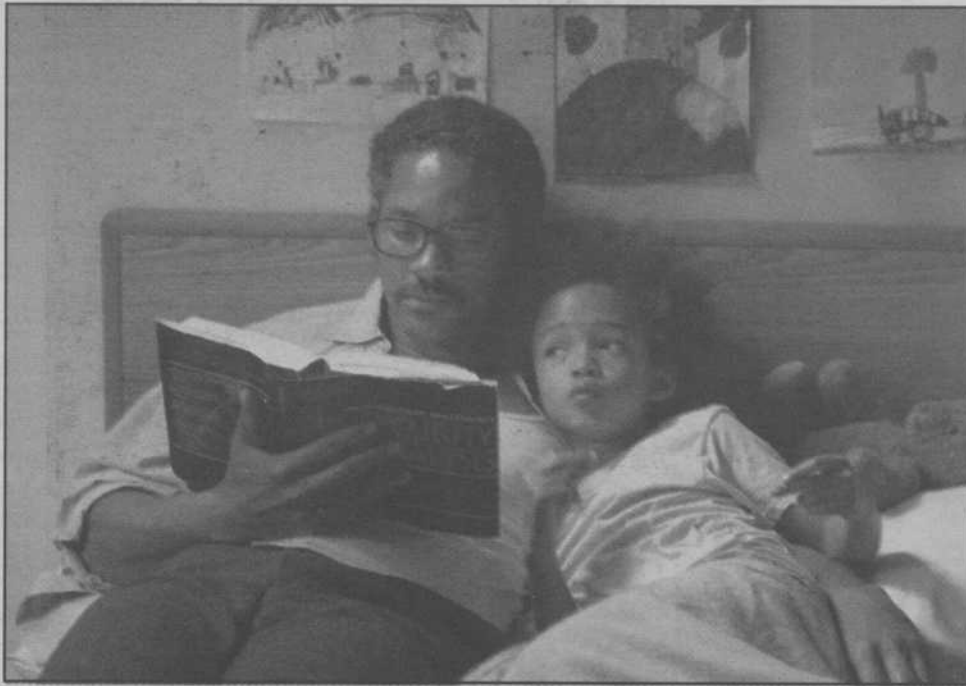
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In 2003, the ABC-TV newsmagazine "20/20" ran a story about an honorably-discharged, Navy veteran who had fallen on such hard times that he ended up homeless and struggling to survive by his wits on the streets of San Francisco.

In the heartbreaking segment, Chris Gardner recounted how, after being abandoned by his wife, evicted from his apartment, having his account frozen by the IRS, and having his car repossessed, he and his 5-year-old son soon bottomed-out with no hope in sight.

The two ended up eating at soup kitchens, sleeping in church shelters and subway stations, and bathing in public bathrooms, until the frustrated father finally figured a way to extract them from their dire circumstances.

But like the hero of your typical Horatio Alger story, Gardner pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, starting out as an intern at a leading stock brokerage firm. He then parlayed that position into his own entrepreneurial venture and, as the founder



"The Pursuit of Happyness" features Will Smith and his son, Jaden, in a heartfelt bio-pic.

of Christopher Gardner International Holdings, built the multi-million-dollar financial services empire, which still bears his name today.

After watching the aforementioned "20/20" episode, actor Mark Clayman approached Gardner about gaining the rights to turn his rags-to-riches tale into a major motion picture. The upshot is a crowd-pleasing production called "The Pursuit of Happyness," one of those

uplifting, overcoming-the-odds "miracle" movies, which seem to be released every year around Christmas time.

This inspirational bio-pic features Will Smith and his son, Jaden Smith, as Chris and Chris Jr., respectively. The real-life father-son duo has no trouble generating screen chemistry, here, being already rather relaxed with each other, quite naturally.

And as it turns out, Jaden

is just as likable and as charismatic as his famous father. Thandie Newton co-stars as Chris' fed-up ex, Linda, and the cast also includes Dan Castellaneta (the voice of

Homer Simpson) as Alan Frakesh, the Dean Witter executive who gives Chris his shot at redemption, as well as Reverend Cecil Williams and Chris Gardner, himself, in cameo appearances.

But make no mistake, this is a Will and Jaden Smith vehicle, their characters' plight contrasting sharply with the array of spectacular Bay Area locales employed as backdrops.

The movie takes its title, complete with misspelling, from the name of the Chinatown daycare center where Chris drops off his little boy each weekday until what little money he has left runs out.

At the point of departure, we find Chris putting in long hours as a door-to-door salesman of an obsolete bone-density machine of not much interest to doctors. Meanwhile, his equally-exhausted spouse

is holding down a trio of minimum-wage, part-time positions, yet the couple still can't seem to make ends meet. Then, in short order, Chris is beset by more tests than Job in the Bible, losing everything near and dear to him, except his son.

Yet, despite being down, he is never embittered by his predicament, even maintaining his sense of humor and quick wit during his Dean Witter interview when Mr. Frakesh asks how he should explain hiring a man not wearing a shirt to superiors: "He must have had on some really nice pants," Chris responds without missing a beat, exhibiting a charm reminiscent of the Fresh Prince of Bel Air.

Expect to laugh as much as you cry during this touching tearjerker.

Excellent (3.5 stars) PG-13 for profanity.

## Syler

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creating that format, and gave him a mandate to make the program more competitive.

According to a statement issued by the network, Syler has conducted one-on-one interviews with First Lady Laura Bush, former President Carter, former Secretary of State Colin Powell, Sen. John McCain and NASA's first female shuttle commander, Eileen Collins, as well as Stephanie Yarber, the first known woman to undergo a successful ovary transplant in the United States, and celebrities.

Syler is an involved member of the National Association of Black Journalists, and has been active in raising awareness about breast cancer since her mother and father both had the disease. After doctors told her that she had a greater than normal chance of de-

veloping breast cancer, Syler kept a video diary of her experience for a story that won the 2004 Gracie Allen Award.

"I've had an extraordinary run here at 'The Early Show,'" said Syler. "I've been able to make a difference in millions of women's lives by talking about everything from breast cancer awareness to hormone replacement therapy, to diet dos and don'ts. I've had the opportunity to trace my ancestral roots, go to space camp with my son and swim with whales in Florida... I'm now on the next chapter in my life literally. My book will be published in March, and I'll be off on a book tour across the U.S., where I very much look forward to meeting in person all the people I've woken up with for the last four years."

Kimberly C. Roberts writes for the Philadelphia Tribune.



## Aretha Franklin's Life Story to tour U.S.

There's only one Aretha Franklin, but the Queen of Soul plans to hold auditions for singers to portray her. A musical based on her 1999 autobiography, "Aretha: From These Roots," will tour nationally, the Detroit Free Press reported Wednesday. The production will tell Franklin's story of growing up in Detroit in the church headed by her father, Rev. C.L. Franklin; of having family friends, such as Sam Cooke and Dinah Washington; of her personal struggles; and of her rise to international stardom. Hits by Franklin, 64, include "Respect," "Chain of Fools" and "Freeway of Love." The Grammy winner is completing an album for release in February.

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