

# Interview

## Quince Garcia

QUINCE GARCIA IS A FILM MAKER NOW, WITH HIS OWN PRODUCTION COMPANY – ROADWORKS MEDIA. BUT HIS LIFE WAS VERY DIFFERENT WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER. HUGH STODDART MET HIM IN HIS PRODUCTION OFFICE IN SOUTH LONDON.



**QUINCE:** I grew up in Camberwell, South London, I went to school there – to a Catholic school. My family have been there a long time, it's where my dad came from too.

**HUGH:** *You reached a time in your life when you were arrested and then you were sent to prison. How did that happen? How was it you got drawn into crime?*

**Q:** I used to play football, it was a massive part of my life, and I got this injury, a torn cartilage, and suddenly football stopped, I couldn't do it and that really bruised my confidence. I couldn't see what would happen, I couldn't see what I might do in the future. And I wanted things. My family, you know, were associated with all kinds of shenanigans... and that seemed to be the only option for me, too. Before, I did work for a bit: I went on a training scheme, studying and working at the same time, in business administration – I did that for about a year. But then I thought 'I can't do this.' I was earning about £150 a week; this was in the late 1990s. I used to hang around this estate in Camberwell, I had a friend there from

school... And this estate, it was full of these young guys and they'd just be hanging around and smoking, and they'd be stealing, breaking into fruit machines, and so they had money. There was weed, you know, but I found out there was no one selling Class A.

**H:** *You saw a gap in the market.*

**Q:** Yes. That was the time for me to strike, and I struck. I soon had this phone line...

**H:** *Mobile phones were a crucial part of how you operated?*

**Q:** They were quite a new thing then, a new way of dealing.

**H:** *And I suppose the police didn't have the technology then to trace where calls were being made from, to find locations.*

**Q:** And I was always on the move. It was quite slow when I started out but – I remember when it was, a Friday – I was on my bike and my phone just started going crazy. I used to take a week to sell a quarter of

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crack but on that Friday I got rid of a quarter in a single day.

**H:** *Crack was quite a new thing, too.*

**Q:** Yes. The money blinded me. But after a while there was this big time dealer in Peckham and he wanted to meet me and he gave me a phone so I had his as well as mine, and so though my phone would get rid of a quarter in a day, his would get rid of an ounce a day.

**H:** *You were getting into the big time.*

**Q:** I was treating it like a business. I was serious about it. I was about 18 then and I got up early, the phone'd be on by 9.30, I was so on point, you know.

**H:** *You weren't using yourself?*

**Q:** No, no, I never touched anything. I was teetotal too at that age. Football had a part to play too – I was always fit.

**H:** *So when did all that end?*

**Q:** I fell out with some guys on the estate. They were getting envious. I left there – I felt threatened. I thought 'I don't want to do this any more. It's finished.' I went back to work. My girlfriend at that time, she'd had a baby; I wanted to chill out... But then I met this guy I knew, he'd just come out of prison – about 2001 this was – and he was selling. He invited me in, to join his line. Now his phone was selling like two ounces of heroin and an ounce of crack a day – all in like little dots, you know. The phone never stopped all day. That went on for about a year. Then I met this guy from Brixton and I'd had a dispute with him and I just saw him in the street and I jumped out my car and we had a fight... And as I driving off he threw a hammer and it smashed a window.

**H:** *And the police stopped you?*

**Q:** Yes. It wasn't my car; it belonged to this other guy, he was on the line with me but he was wary of me – he'd been told to be by other people. It all went back to the falling out I'd had on the estate in Camberwell. I gave the police his number, to confirm it was his car. They phoned him and then he's on to me 'Why you getting the police to phone me?' And we have this big dispute and he was scared the police was on to him... He comes out with this famous line, which I'll always remember – 'You've messed up my career!' I started laughing and he chinned me. It was crazy – all he'd had to do was tell the police it was his car and it would've been okay. But he was on crack-cocaine himself, it

made him paranoid; and then even the friend who'd brought me in – he went against me. That's not how I was brought up – you know, you'd be loyal, friends were friends. Word got about I was a grass. 'Grass' to me is like you go into the police station and it's 'I've got something to tell you, officer. This guy, he lives at this house...' You know? I wasn't a grass.

**H:** *So it all started to unravel?*

**Q:** I left them and started on my own again, my own little line, my own few customers... for a couple of years. Then I had problems with a relationship I was in, there was a lot of tension, and I had a child with her, too. I'm selling drugs, and I'm thinking about my children and thinking 'I don't want to do this for the rest of my life.' I was thinking 'I'm going to go to college. I'm going to do something.' I started reading more, and I started writing, I started writing film scripts about all the situations that had been going on. I wrote loads of things, scripts, stories, about events from childhood too – it was a massive release. The more you write, the more you're starting to confront your demons, aren't you? You're exploring things. I was cutting down on selling by then, hardly doing any. But then I took my girlfriend to work one day, and I had some cocaine in my pocket and it fell out. Her boss called the police and I was arrested. And seriously, when I went into the police station, my feeling was 'This could be the making of me; this might be my ticket out.' I knew I'd go to prison and that would get me away from everyone and everything.

**H:** *You went to court and you were sentenced – for how long?*

**Q:** Two and a half years. I did about a year of that. I'd been in prison twice before – short sentences for driving offences when I'd been stopped and didn't have a licence and so on – but this time, when I came out, I said 'This is it.' I remember I went to probation and I said to the officer 'I want to get educated. I want to go to university and I want to start my own production company.' And she put down her pen and she said 'Don't you think you're living in a bit of a dream world?' And I asked her if she shouldn't be encouraging people not discouraging them.

**H:** *But you did it anyway.*

**Q:** I went to the University of East London. The family couldn't understand it – I was the first person to go to university and my dad said 'It's all a big con, you don't need to do that' – he was dead against it.

## Interview

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**H:** *What did you gain from university?*

**Q:** Self-understanding. Awareness.

**H:** *How would you explain your state of mind before? When you were selling drugs?*

**Q:** I was just thinking about that immediate aim – of surviving, of getting money. I went through a massive turnaround in prison, in terms of language, how I used language. I began to recognise how aggressive and frustrated I really was. When I was a child I used to read a lot, my mum used to buy encyclopaedias – instead of like the priest coming round, it was the man selling encyclopaedias! And at university I gained back that interest, that wanting to learn, that I'd had then.

**H:** *How did you finance yourself?*

**Q:** I got support from the university; I lived off the loan. I was dedicated. It was time out to play, you know? I studied Animation and Moving Image. I used to make short films before I went to uni: I had a little camera, I'd edit on my computer. My life has changed now; I've nearly finished my degree; I've got my office for my company.

**H:** *What's next for you?*

**Q:** I want to set up a scheme to offer training in film making for kids from disadvantaged backgrounds, to help them make films. I know from when I was younger how hard it is: I was sending off my scripts to production companies and I didn't even get a reply. I did get recognition from one guy, though: he read my script and he thought 'Wow, this is great stuff' – he was really positive and encouraging.

**H:** *An important moment.*

**Q:** That wasn't long before I went to prison.

**H:** *So that helped you get to that feeling you had when you were arrested – 'This is it. Time to change.'*

**Q:** Definitely.

**H:** *So I guess it can be said that sometimes prison has a value, that it can shock people out of a situation that deep down they don't want to be in.*

**Q:** Yes. And now I want to offer something that wasn't out there while I was growing up. I want my company to be seen as a champion, to offer something to kids who feel they have no place in society, who feel they can't interact. I want it to be a place where they can express themselves.



**H:** *And there's your own films.*

**Q:** I also want to achieve them, to manage to turn scripts I've written into films. I don't want to write a scene because that's what the audience are going to be excited by; I want to portray real moments in time, ones that help change... I think a lot about that – that there are moments that are special, significant. What I mean to say is that if you are in a moment, sometimes, you can see what it affects. You can see there's a choice, that there are consequences. I'm a devil for stories. I want to tell stories, ones that show how there's always a chance to come from a negative situation to a positive one. That's what I want my films to reflect. I want my company to exemplify that there are always choices.