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Gregg McBride
screen dreamer

Writer Gregg McBride hated high school. That's why he goes back again and again in his scripts—to turn the negative world of teenage torture into a more positive place, where the full-figured girl always gets the guy. By Rona Berg

PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEVEN LAM

Robert Fulghum may have learned everything he really needed to know in kindergarten, but for screenwriter Gregg McBride, it's all about high school. This 28-year-old believes so strongly in the lessons he learned there that he's made it a part of his life to return via his screenplays and literally rewrite some of those wrongs. McBride, who once weighed 450 pounds and faced serious teenage ridicule, now considers it his goal to showcase the full-figured girl as both the heroine and the object of desire, and to get the world of entertainment to accept this concept as completely natural.

"I like writing about that time in life because I believe high school is a microcosm of society," he says. "In high school, people tell it like it is, and I can have my characters say things that a twenty-five- or thirty-five-year-old would think but never say."

McBride's first victory in changing mind-sets can be seen on the most unlikely of venues—MTV, home of the pretty and popular. It's the last place anyone would expect an education, least of all on *Undressed*, the network's series on dating, where, let's face it, the point is titillation.

But in McBride's four-part story, titled "Sweetheart's Dance," the viewer is thrown a curveball. As a prank, Cassidy, the reigning "Miss Popularity," convinces her all-star boyfriend, Max, to take the full-figured Bonnie, butt of many jokes, to the prom. Not only is the rigid high-school social hierarchy thrown into total chaos, but when Max actually becomes romantically interested in Bonnie, all hell breaks loose. The audience is forced to rethink any preconceived ideas it might have about size defining sexiness. This is radical—not just for MTV but for show business in general.

"It's ironic, because people tend to applaud you as some sort of innovator, but all I'm really doing is holding a mirror up to society,"

says McBride. "The issue may be weight, but it could just as easily be race or your height."

McBride came to his point of view the hard way: He was a globetrotting Air Force brat who often felt out of place. As a teen, he wanted to be an actor, but it wasn't easy because of his size. "People treat you like you have a disease," he says. "And I had a giant chip on my shoulder."

Although McBride lost 250 pounds six years ago through a doctor-supervised program of diet and exercise, in some ways the weight will never go away. "I know what it feels like to think the whole world is judging you," he says, "and even if it's not, to fear it." And so he puts those feelings to use in his writing. His feature film script *Big Girls Don't Cry* (which he's currently trying to sell) follows three full-figured girls who teach the prom queen of Beverly Hills High a lesson—and send a message about different standards of beauty reverberating throughout the school.

McBride didn't always intend to be a messenger to Hollywood. After he moved to L.A. in 1997, he freelanced in advertising while pursuing agents for his screenplays, but got nowhere. So he decided to pursue producers instead. It worked. In 1998 he sold *Epicenter*—a B-grade action flick that just finished filming. More recently, he worked on *Urban Law*, a thriller that Whoopi Goldberg is attached to. And McBride is now a consulting producer on *Strip Mall*, a new television series set to air on Comedy Central late this summer.

"I am one of the most commercial writers you could meet," says McBride, whose growing résumé includes a fair share of action thrillers. "I want to entertain, but at the same time, why not make a difference? If I can do something to help people feel good about themselves, and challenge prevailing thoughts and preconceived notions, that's worthwhile." ■

