

# ‘When you see friends the years melt away’

She may be an award-winning actress and official National Treasure, but Julie Walters is about as un-starry as you can get. Jo Dunbar chats to her about friendships, evenings in the local pub and why she loves GH recipes!

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH JOHN SWANNELL

**D**ESPITE HER MANY accolades and successes, Julie Walters is a breath of fresh air. She is friendly and down-to-earth at our Good Housekeeping photo shoot, and swears she’d rather spend time at home with her husband, Grant Roffey, and 21-year-old daughter, Maisie, than on the red carpet. In fact, the longer we chat, the clearer it becomes that the 61-year-old actress is really an ordinary woman who just happens to have an extraordinary job. As the last Potter film – Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows Part Two – is released, Julie told us about her role as Molly Weasley in the series, life on the family farm and long lunches.

## How do you feel about the Harry Potter series coming to an end?

I felt really sad when filming ended. I said, ‘I don’t want it to be the last day, I’ve been coming here for 10 years!’ As Helena [Bonham Carter] said, what was brilliant was that the films gave a sort of structure to a life that normally hasn’t got any. As an actor you usually don’t know when you’re going to be working, but every year it would be: ‘I wonder when my Potter days are?’ I didn’t do a huge amount – I’d pop in and out and stay in a little hotel in

St Albans. It’s just been part of my life for so long and it was lovely.

## Which do you prefer being part of: a huge blockbuster or a small-scale production?

It depends on the project... I’ve done both. But there’s nothing like Potter, and I can’t see there will ever be anything like it again, either. The fact that the characters grow older every year gives a feeling that there’s a life going on – you can see why the fans go mad.

## Are there any other roles you’re still itching to play?

I’ve never been itching to play anything – it’s very much to do with who’s involved. I’m older now, so I can pick and choose a bit more. I’ve been offered theatre and I think: ‘Well, I’d love to do that, but I’m not going to.’ Acting is hard work and it’s often away from home, so it’s got to be right. I live on a farm, I’ve got a greenhouse and I want to grow things, and there’s lots of other little bits and pieces I’m involved in that make life very full and busy, so I’m not thinking: ‘I must have an acting job.’

## You’ve had huge success with films like Mamma Mia!, Calendar Girls and Billy Elliot. Have you thought about making the move to Hollywood?

I was over there after I made Educating Rita and had an agent in LA. They didn’t come

up with anything, but it didn’t matter – I love the writing over here. I find my own culture fascinating because it’s what I grew up with. I’m not saying I wouldn’t do an American film, though, if something great was offered to me.

## We don’t see you on the red carpet much. Do you dislike the fame side of your job?

I get invited to premieres and first nights, but I tend not to go. I’ve gone to the odd one, and obviously I go to my own, but generally I don’t want to go just to be photographed. Because then I think: ‘What am I going to wear?’ And you have to be careful what you say – people dart out of the crowd with a microphone and ask all sorts of things unconnected to what you are doing. ‘So what do you think of David Cameron?’ or ‘Have you been watching Dancing On Ice?’ Sometimes you see a headline because you’ve made some off-the-cuff remark. Those dos are a bit like hard work. The Potter premieres were unbelievable – the screaming crowds of people. You just think: ‘Oh my God.’ The weather wasn’t good before the most recent one – it was in November and people had all camped there for three days in Leicester Square. I’d never do that in a million years!

## Would you prefer to be at home?

I’d rather see a film on an ordinary night at an ordinary [CONTINUED OVER PAGE]

HAIR AND MAKE-UP: CHRIS BAKER. JULIE WEARS DRESS: HOBBS. NECKLACE: PEBBLE. CUFF: ASPINAL OF LONDON. SHOES: LK BENNETT. STEP LADDER: DESIGN HOUSE STOCKHOLM AT SKANDIUM

Julie Walters:  
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And honest... or as  
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‘My closest friends know everything about me’



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cinema. Then I can enjoy the buzz of it and take Grant – he loves it because he's a farmer and doesn't have anything to do with that sort of thing. And it means I can hold on to him when I'm wearing my bloody high-heeled shoes as well!

**For many actors, being famous seems to mean being obsessed with style. Does this bother you?**

Not in life. I'm really scruffy at home – tracksuit bottoms and combats, that sort of thing. You can't wear anything posh because it's so muddy – the dog walks past and everything is covered in mud. I even turned up at the BAFTAs with mud on my dress. I'm not very good at all that, really. A lot of people borrow things, but it's depressing going into somewhere and they bring you something so narrow that you have to say: 'It doesn't fit.' I said to my friend, 'Help me get something to wear for the bloody BAFTAs!' So we went to Harvey Nichols and saw a personal shopper. I got something, but what did I do at the BAFTA party? We had shepherd's pie and it went straight down the front of me. So I was saying hello to everyone with this brown, very obvious stain!

**What are you like as a friend?**

I hope I'm a loyal and supportive friend. And honest... or as honest as you can be, anyway. And up for a bit of fun! I've got about three close girlfriends, and a close male friend and his wife as well. There are lots of other people, but these are the ones who know everything about me, if you like. Girlfriends are like that, aren't they? They know more than my husband! No they don't... I'm joking! He just knows different things, I suppose.

**Do you make friends with your co-stars?**

Acting jobs are for a short period of time, so you don't really sustain relationships – you're going from one job to the next. I live in the country, too – if I was coming into London all the time it might be different. It tends to be the people you meet at the beginning of your career that you stay friends with. Victoria Wood and I have stayed friends – I hope we work together again. Victoria's always busy



Hard act to follow (from top); with Helen Mirren in *Calendar Girls*, 2003; as Mrs Weasley in *Harry Potter*, 2010; with husband Grant Roffey in 2005; and *Billy Elliot*, 2000

## 'I turned up at the BAFTAs with mud on my dress!'

and she lives in north London and I'm in Sussex. But with old friends it's like the years melt away and it's the same old jokes.

**What do you get up to with your friends?**

We go out to lunch and sit and talk. Talking mainly – for hours! I had two holidays with friends last year. One was a walking holiday in Cornwall, and that was brilliant – we walked and talked! We were bloody lucky with the weather, because we went in June and it was fabulous. And then I went to Greece with my best friend. She's got a place in Corfu and we went there for a week in September – that was heaven.

**What would be your idea of the perfect way to spend an evening?**

I find that perfect evenings fall into different categories. One of them is having something to eat then lying on the sofa and watching the soaps. I love that. Also, Grant and I really love our village pub – it's the sort of place you can go to wearing your slippers and sit down with the paper. We went to the cinema on my birthday and saw *Beautiful with Javier Bardem* – it's pure testosterone. That was nice, but Grant's usually knackered – the farm is such hard work. So going to the pub and talking is what we do together.

**Do you like to entertain at home?**

We don't have dinner parties. If someone turns up, I'll say: 'Have something to eat.' But I don't arrange anything. I couldn't do that – I'd have a nervous breakdown. Cooking is probably more of a survival thing for me. We all used to take the piss out of my mum's cooking, so of course that's rubbed off on me and I think I'm no good either. But I cook things for Grant and Maisie, and they like them, and that makes me feel better. What I like is realising I can do it rather than that I have a flair for it. I like making things like pavlova, because it can look fabulous but it's not really that hard. I love doing roast dinners, too. I've got loads of cookery books – millions! I bought a *Good Housekeeping* one, and it's brilliant. I often spend more time looking at the books than I do using them. I always think 'I'll make that' then forget and just do a shepherd's pie.

**You live on a farm... Is it important to you to be removed from the constant buzz of things going on?**

I like to be away from it, really. I do love London, but it's nice to go home. I always fantasised about living in the country. I dreamed of living with someone who wasn't in the business, so I obviously wanted to escape. Grant's always there when I go home, so that's really great. Lots of people say, 'I couldn't live with someone who wasn't in the business, because they just wouldn't understand,' but he does. And it's great to have his take on things. It's much more grounding when he says: 'It's a television play, and half the population are going to be making a cup of tea when that scene you think hasn't worked comes on.' It's really great to have that. He's also appreciative of what I've done, and I think he's proud of me. We're