

# HUGH'S *the daddy*

Hugh Jackman speaks to Elaine Lipworth about his upcoming projects and his most important role to date: being a father

If you're a Hugh Jackman fan, you'll be familiar with the star as the rippling-muscled, adamantium-clawed Wolverine from the *X-Men* franchise, or from his Oscar-nominated turn as Jean Valjean in 2012's *Les Misérables*. Chances are though, you haven't seen the Aussie star perform one of his lesser-known roles as a fiery, volatile chef. At home in New York, the character most in demand from his children, Oscar, 15, and Ava, 10, is his portrayal of "a Gordon Ramsay-type chef who loses his temper all the time".

Over coffee in Beverly Hills, Jackman, 46, explains that he and his wife, Deborah-Lee Furness, 59, have kept their kids enthralled over the years by making up their own bedtime stories. And, in the temperamental chef saga, Ava has several supporting roles. "She'll be various ingredients of recipes I create," laughs the actor who, when asked if his real-life culinary skills are up to scratch, says, "I'm OK, but in the stories I'm brilliant!"

"My daughter makes me tell a made-up story every night – either my reading skills are really bad or she just prefers mine," he grins. Ava's other favourites? "She loves a series that we call the Oompa Loompa Stories, [which have] crazy characters [and] often end in a wrestling match. My

son liked [our stories] for a long time, but now he's more interested in watching Will Ferrell movies with me." Having mastered the big screen and the stage, could taking on the children's literary world be next?

"I hadn't thought about it. Maybe one day."

I'm meeting the actor – who's looking ludicrously fit and dapper as always – to discuss his latest blockbuster, *Pan*, a fresh, fantastical Peter Pan origin story in which he plays the pirate Blackbeard. The film, from *Atonement* director Joe Wright, sees Pan (played by Levi Miller) as a wartime orphan who is spirited away to Neverland. "You're going to be transported to a place even a lot of kids haven't got the scope to imagine. It's so beautiful and emotional."

Jackman is unrecognisable (bald and menacing) as the deliciously despicable villain. The film is scary, but no more frightening than traditional children's stories, he insists. "Look at *Grimm's Fairy Tales*: they're brutal. Fear exists within every kid; it's the monster under the bed, or the boogiemani. In *Peter Pan*, [it's] pirates and walking the plank; [with] Neverland, [it's] the forest and the dark – there are fears that kids relate to and overcome. For adults, the film is a reminder of how we used to look at the world. We often lose that magic and wonder of life." ▶

PHOTOGRAPHY: WARWICK SAINTAUGUSTRAVEN & SNOW

**"[MY KIDS ARE] GROWING UP IN UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES. I DON'T WANT THEM TO TAKE ANYTHING FOR GRANTED"**

The actor still identifies with the childhood fears explored in the film. "Most of us are touched by fear in some way and, if you don't tackle it, it can become really crippling." Growing up in Sydney, he confesses, "I was a very fearful kid. I was afraid of the dark. I was afraid of being home alone. I was scared of roller-coasters, but there was no way I was missing out on going to Luna Park with my mates. They'd go rock climbing or go jump off a cliff into a waiting hole [Warriewood blowhole on Sydney's northern beaches]. I spent a month going to my school's diving board every lunchtime to get through my fear of heights, just jumping, jumping. Now I love it. My children haven't done it yet, but 100 per cent I would let them do it. I'm not over-protective at all! I actually think that can create a worse effect, because [it makes them] want to do stupid, crazy things."

Jackman seems like the best kind of dad. Devoted and hands-on, he describes fatherhood as "unbelievable, tiring, magical... the most challenging role I've ever had." The biggest lesson he's learnt? He strikes his smile and pauses. "Patience," he smiles. "Look, kids have a way of pushing your buttons more than anyone else. If there's stuff in your life you haven't worked through—as a parent, you're going to have to work through it."

There was no shortage of challenging "stuff" in Jackman's early years. The youngest of five, his British parents emigrated to Australia in the '60s. When he was eight, his mother left the family and returned to England (she later remarried and had another daughter). "We're in a great place," he says of their relationship today. But as a child, he admits, "I was hard because I thought she was going to come back. There was a time, when I was about 12, when Mum and Dad were going to reconcile, but they didn't. For most of my childhood, I was brought up by my father single-handedly. He was amazing."

Together with his two brothers and two sisters, Jackman was in charge of the household. "It was very regimented; we cooked all the dinners from when I was eight. Once a week you did the washing, and I really appreciated that—it made me respectful." Is he a taskmaster with his own kids? "I'm much softer than my dad, but I'm certainly stricter than my wife."



There are numerous examples of how the actor has been inspired by his father. He recalls a tough choice aged 21, when he was offered a job on *Neighbours* at the same time as winning a place at WAAPA (Perth's Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts). "I said, 'Dad, I don't know whether to take this job or go to acting school.' He said, 'You've got to make that choice for yourself and live with it.' Two days later, I made the choice to go to acting school. [Dad] goes: 'That is absolutely the right decision—always go for education.' I said, 'Why didn't you just give me a shiver of heat? I've had the most horrible weekend!' Dad goes, 'Because you had to make that choice.' That is a great parent. I don't know if I would have that foresight. Probably, if my kids came to me at 21, I'd say, 'Go to drama school,' just in case they made the wrong choice!"

Financially at least, life is easier for Ava and Oscar, "but we don't spoil them, no. I remind my kids to treat people well."

He leans forward on the sofa. "My kids are growing up in a building [in New York] where there is a doorman. I told them, 'Guys, for a month, I'm going to remind you to say 'hello', 'how are you?' and 'thank you!' to him. It's not just a right to have people open doors for you in life. If you forget, you are going to walk up the nine flights of stairs—not everyone has an elevator." I walked up the steps quite a lot with them, he chuckles. "They're growing up in unusual circumstances and I don't want them to take anything for granted."

Nor does Jackman. "I spent so many years flying to London to see my mum, 36-hour flights on Garuda [Indonesia, the airline]. They used to call it the international milk-run [as it was] six stops from Australia to London. I still get on a plane [and when I turn] into first class. I'm like, 'Ahhh, this is awesome.' My wife and I appreciate staying in a really nice hotel. I jump up and down on the bed."

When it comes to raising their kids, he and Furness have discovered that parenting by example is more effective than lectures. "My son isn't sporty, but I deliberately won't shower until he's seen me in the morning after a work-out. I think subliminally [he'll get] the idea that doing something physical every day is really good. It doesn't matter if you go walking with the dog, play tennis or jump up and down in a corner, you'll feel better and be healthier for it. I could say that to him until the cows come home, but it's better that he sees me do that. And they see me meditating," adds Jackman, who practices transcendental meditation. "I don't make them meditate, but I say, 'This is a quiet time in the house you can read or do whatever. I know they like that now.'" I've interviewed the actor before, once on Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour at 3am, where he was filming *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. Even at that unearthly hour, he was friendly and engaging. Is he always in a good mood? "No, I am not nice all the time!" he exclaims. "But I always saw my parents being incredibly respectful to everyone; they taught us you should treat people with respect. Sometimes my wife will make fun of me. She calls me 'Senator



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Jackman. She's like, 'Do you really have to know the name of every waiter?' But I was a waiter for years, so I know what it's like when people are dismissing you."

That sense of appreciation permeates Jackman's life. He and Furness take nothing for granted, particularly their family. Ava and Oscar were adopted and the couple campaigned tirelessly for Furness's charity, Adopt Change. In July, the couple held a fundraiser in Melbourne (and in Sydney a month later), pressing for legislative changes to help make it easier for families to adopt. Jackman and Furness have been married for almost 20 years. "Happy wife, happy life," he laughs. "I really do have a happy marriage, by the way. I don't mind telling you that." Their secret? "I'm a people-pleaser. It's always: 'Is everyone happy?'"

And while I want to please no one more than my wife, I'm free of that with her. I could be myself from the moment I meet her. It was a sense of ease; this is who I am. She was also the funniest, sexiest, most amazing woman I'd ever met. We tell each other everything; trust and honesty is the absolute basis of everything. I have friends who say, 'No, mystery is more important,' and I'm like, 'That's just not how we built our relationship.' Also, Deb put down some rules at the beginning that I would never have thought of: never being apart for more than two weeks; never working at the same time; never going to bed on an angry word."

Family always comes first. "I have a career, but I live for Deb and my kids," he says, although Jackman remains passionate about acting. "I love it." His diverse career includes stage triumphs such as *The Boy*

Jackman credits his success to sheer grit and versatility. "I'm pretty relentless and disciplined," he says. "In Australia, you can't just do action movies because there's only one made every three years, so you have to do everything. But it was actually beyond necessary for me. I always loved to do different things."

Currently at the top of his game, there are no great ambitions or goals. "When I was 29 and at the National Theatre in London doing *Oldman!* [with director] Sir Trevor Nunn, that was a dream. I'd had everything from then I have been a bonus, beyond what I could've imagined." Jackman's future hopes for his children include job satisfaction—and being good human beings. "I don't feel like I've worked a day in my life," he reflects. "My dad was an accountant and I know this might sound funny, but he absolutely loved it. I always try and encourage my kids to do things they love, no matter what they are. And to go through life being aware of other people, not just thinking about themselves. Those are the things I want for them... and to love their father with all their heart!"

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## "[FATHERHOOD IS] TIRING, MAGICAL... THE MOST CHALLENGING ROLE I'VE EVER HAD"

*From Oz* (for which he won a Tony Award in 2004) and 2011's *Hugh Jackman, Back On Broadway*, plus it was recently announced that *Broadway in Oz*, a show based on *Back on Broadway*, will be making a five-city tour of Australia in November and December of 2017. Not only that, he'll be reprising his role as Wolverine one last time for the third *Wolverine* movie, slated for 2017.

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