

COVERSTORY



MORE *More* Moore!

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Oscar-winning actress JULIANNE MOORE's latest film *Suburbicon* may be set in the 1950s, but it tackles some very current issues. She tells *Elaine Lipworth* why co-star Matt Damon is a dream to work with and how fatherhood has changed the film's director George Clooney >

PHOTOGRAPHS BRIAN BOWEN SMITH

Even after decades of interviewing Hollywood actresses, there are still a few true greats who reduce me to a starstruck teenager. Julianne Moore is one of them – although I’ve met her before and she’s always delightful. We’re meeting for lunch at Claridge’s in London to discuss her new film *Suburbicon*, a riveting, dark satire co-starring Matt Damon and directed by George Clooney, about prejudice in the US in the 1950s. ‘It was a time when everything was supposed to be beautiful, but it was only good if you were white and male and if you had a job,’ says Julianne, still sublimely beautiful at 56.

Her 19-year-old son Caleb (with her second husband, filmmaker Bart Freundlich, whom she met when she starred in his 1997 film *The Myth of Fingerprints*) is in his second year at college; her daughter Liv is 15. ‘It’s shocking for parents when their kids get older. Suddenly they’re 18 and doing things on their own. Childhood seems to last for ever; but adolescence goes by in a flash. I was looking at my son’s room and I was, like, “He’s never going to be back here.”’ And my husband said, “He’ll be back, but not in the same way.” College is a halfway house – they’re on their own and responsible, but obviously not entirely responsible.’

Julianne misses her son (‘It’s a big adjustment’) but says that, on the bright side, ‘It’s also wonderful because if you’ve done your job, they’re happy to move on and you have to allow yourself to move on too.’ That entails, she suggests, ‘revisiting your marriage in a different way; any relationship takes effort and needs care.’ Because of her hectic film schedule, she and her husband hadn’t had much time together recently. ‘Last night our daughter went to a friend’s birthday party and I said, “Let’s go for dinner and a walk before I get on the plane.” And we had a lovely time. You realise, “Oh, *this* is why we’re



together.’” Do they share interests? ‘We do a lot of eating together,’ she laughs. ‘And we both like to hike. He’s very sporty, he plays basketball and I do Ashtanga yoga.’

Another key to a fulfilling marriage: a shared sense of humour: ‘Yesterday my husband was playing Elton John songs as I was packing, and I couldn’t concentrate on what I was doing but didn’t know how to turn off the wireless sound system. Then he put on some nutty honky-tonk song and I laughed so hard. If you didn’t laugh you’d be doomed, wouldn’t you?’

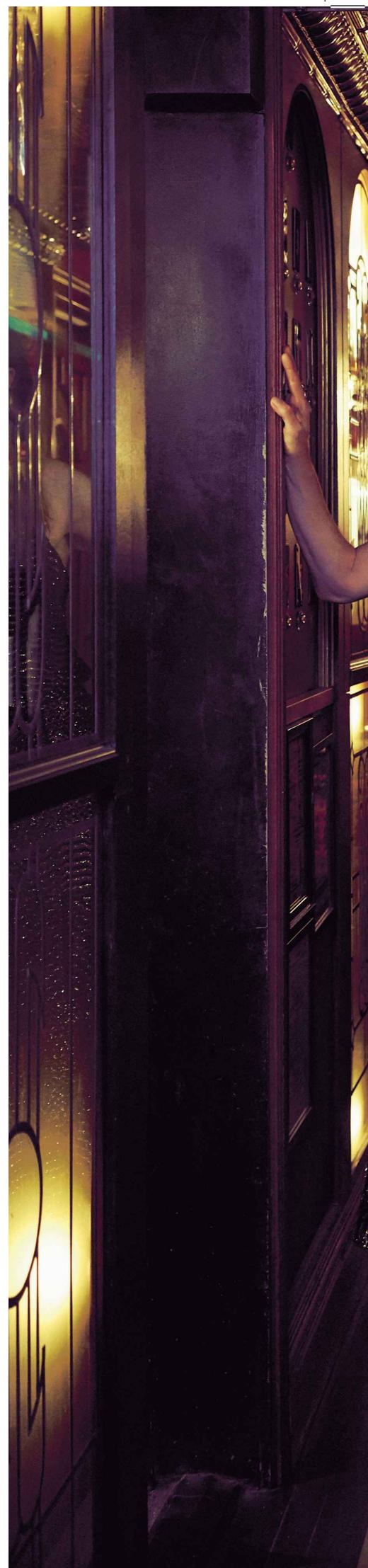
I remind her of one of our previous interviews, at a time when my elder daughter was thinking of applying to colleges abroad, thousands of miles from home. Julianne, who met my daughter when she dropped in on the interview, told her not to. ‘Don’t do it! Don’t go far away,’ she practically shouted, explaining

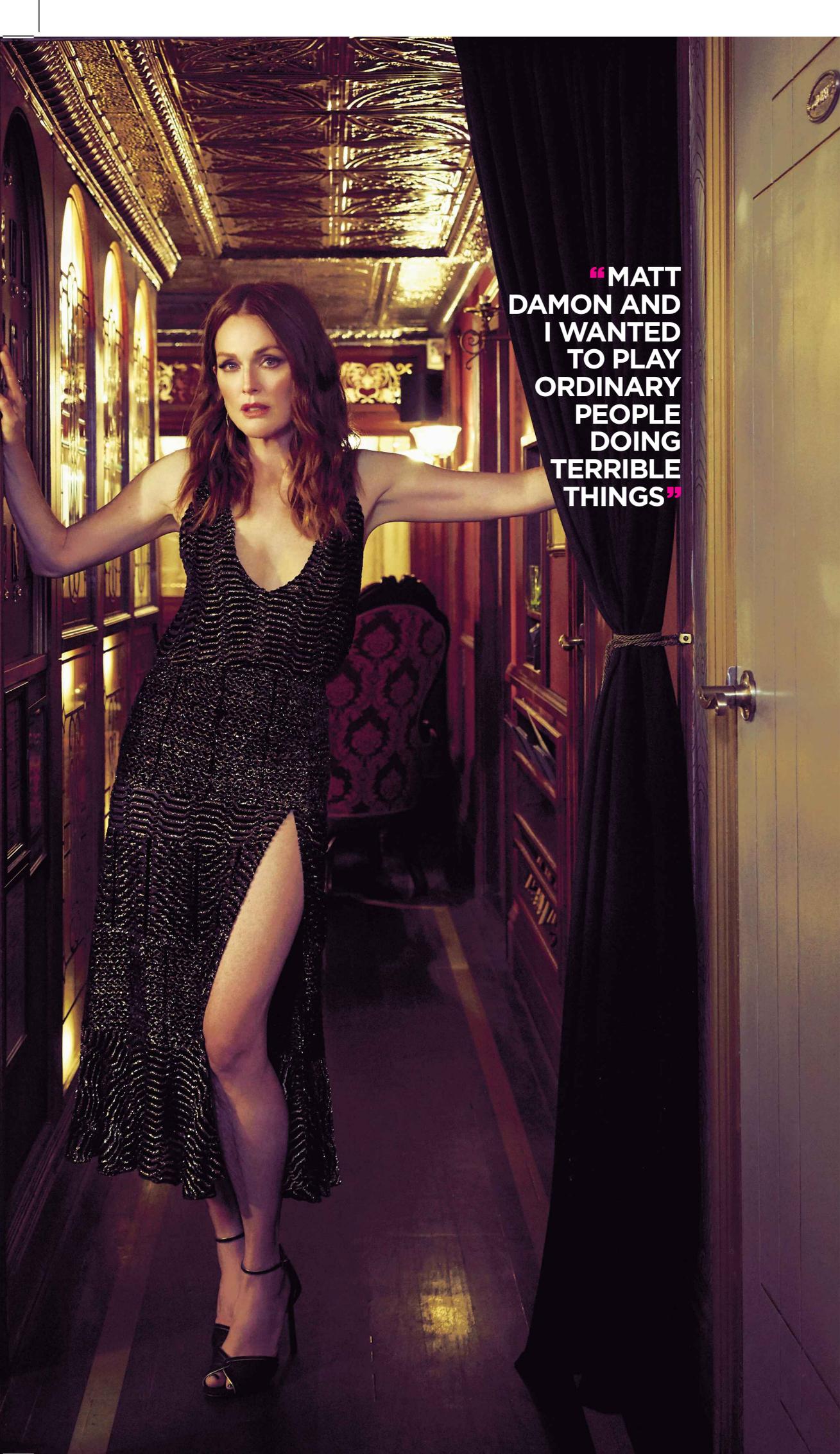
that her father’s army career meant her own family had moved frequently during her childhood. When Julianne enrolled at Boston University to study drama she had been living with her two younger siblings and their mother Anne in Germany where her father Peter was stationed. It was difficult, she says, ‘because I couldn’t go home for weekends’. Caleb is at college in North Carolina (incidentally, where Julianne was born), so reasonably close to the family’s home in New York – ‘but still too far away,’ she says.

I tell Julianne that her advice probably had more impact on my daughter than anything I could have said, as she ended up abandoning her plan to do a degree overseas. Do we view actresses like her as role models who seem to have all the answers? She has a different view. ‘My theory is that people see themselves and their own lives



Julianne with co-star Matt Damon in *Suburbicon*, top, and, left, with her husband Bart and their children Liv and Caleb





“MATT DAMON AND I WANTED TO PLAY ORDINARY PEOPLE DOING TERRIBLE THINGS”

reflected through movies. That’s why they are so powerful, because you see a character and say, “I like her... I don’t know why.”

That’s definitely the case with Julianne’s roles. Even if her characters’ lives are far removed from our own, it’s easy to relate to their flaws, from the porn star in 1997’s *Boogie Nights*, which led to her first Oscar nomination, to the wife of a closeted gay man in Todd Haynes’s *Far From Heaven* (2002), which also landed her an Oscar nod – there have been five in total. She was unforgettable as the lesbian mother who embarks on an affair with Mark Ruffalo, her children’s sperm donor, in *The Kids Are All Right* (2010), and as the linguistics professor diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in the moving *Still Alice*. That seminal performance resulted in a Best Actress Oscar in 2014.

Suburbicon is set in a sanitised, postwar American neighbourhood characterised by manicured lawns, cookie-cutter houses and aspirational middle-class residents – all white. Matt Damon stars as Gardner Lodge, a seemingly upstanding suburban dad, and Julianne plays both his disabled wife Rose and Rose’s twin sister Margaret. Chic and blonde (Margaret dyes her brunette hair to copy her sister), Julianne is stunning in a series of elegant 50s dresses. Matt, meanwhile, is paunchy and stolid as Gardner – the polar opposite of his Jason Bourne character from the spy-thriller movies, though Julianne insists, ‘I think he looks great.’ Her co-star is ‘such a delight’, she adds. ‘He is so funny and chatty. And he has a lovely family; I love the fact that [when we were filming] it was Halloween and he said, “I gotta go – trick or treating starts at 5.30!”’

The screenplay, which George Clooney wrote with the Coen brothers and his long-time collaborator Grant Heslov, is gripping and disturbing with some darkly funny scenes. After Rose is killed during a violent burglary, ►



From left: Julianne with Annette Bening in *The Kids Are All Right*; as Cathy in *Far From Heaven*, and with Mark Wahlberg in *Boogie Nights*

◀ Margaret moves into the family house, ostensibly to take care of her young nephew (British actor Noah Jupe who played Hugh Laurie's son in *The Night Manager*), but things are not what they seem. 'Both Matt and I wanted to play ordinary people doing terrible things,' says Julianne of their characters. 'They keep making the wrong choices and as they bumble along, their mistakes get more morally reprehensible.'

In a pivotal subplot (based on real-life events from 1957 in Levittown, Pennsylvania), a black family called the Meyers move in next door. Persecuted by the local community, they're turned into scapegoats after the murder. 'Margaret and Gardner are consumed with their own escalating troubles and turn a blind eye to the prejudice that's destroying their neighbours,' explains Julianne.

The naive Margaret works in a supermarket and fantasises about a more glamorous life. 'She's a single woman, probably uneducated, with no economic authority, and her goal is to be married and have her own house,' says Julianne, pointing out that women in the 50s had limited options. 'Birth control was illegal. You couldn't get a credit card if you were a woman.' Her own mother, Anne Smith, wasn't given the same opportunities as Julianne's uncle. 'She was born in Scotland in 1940. My mother's father was a machinist, her mother was a homemaker. They saved money for her brother to go to college but not my mother. So she trained to be a nurse – that's what a girl would do –

and then she got married.' (Her mother later went to college and became a psychiatric social worker.) As a result, says Julianne, 'My parents worked really hard and saved money for us all to go to college. They valued education.'

In tribute to her mother, who died in 2009 at the age of 68, Julianne became a UK citizen in 2011 (she holds British and American passports). She has told me in the past how close they were. 'I don't want to start crying,' she says now. How does she keep her mother's memory alive? 'I talk about her: I was on the phone to my son the other day, he was talking about his music class and I said, "Nana always said you were very musical." My grandmother died when I was a teenager and I remember my mother would always talk about her.'

Suburbicon is biting funny in parts, but at its heart the film is a stinging indictment of hypocrisy and prejudice that seems resonant in the light of the current racial tensions raging in America. Shot during the 2016 US presidential campaign, it was, says Julianne, 'a reaction to all those allusions to building a wall, defaming Muslims, the anti-immigration sentiment'. George Clooney has said he was angered by the extreme rhetoric from Donald Trump and that this motivated his work on the screenplay. 'We didn't expect that a year later there would be race riots in Charlottesville,' she continues, referring to the recent clashes between white supremacists and counter-protesters. 'What

George is saying in this movie is how easy it is to look the other way while horrific stuff is happening outside your door.' Julianne says she's 'ashamed' at the way Trump has refused to specifically denounce neo-Nazis. 'He actually gave them permission to use their voices in the most disgusting way, by refusing to condemn their actions.'

Does she think Trump will be impeached? She puts a hand on her heart. 'I can only talk as an individual,' she says. 'But I believe he is corrupt and I also believe that there was Russian interference in the election.' A supporter of Hillary Clinton, Julianne is convinced that misogyny was at play in her electoral defeat, too. 'It's very curious to me that [almost] every other nation has had a female leader and the United States still hasn't. Shocking, isn't it?'

There have been suggestions that George Clooney should consider running for president. Julianne has strong views on the subject. 'Honestly, I can't bear it, this idea of relating leaders with entertainment figures,' she says. 'What you want is a president who is experienced in government. You don't want a reality show person. I don't even want to joke about movie stars being president of the United States.'

George the director is a different matter. Julianne raves about how 'prepared and thoughtful' he is. And, she says, George is a changed man since his marriage to human rights lawyer Amal, whom Julianne met for the first time at the Venice Film Festival in September. 'She is so lovely and you can see the difference



“ANY RELATIONSHIP TAKES EFFORT AND NEEDS CARE”



Just Julianne

Your morning routine? I have a pot of coffee and some fruit or a green juice and yoghurt. And I make eggs, pancakes, fruit, cereal – whatever my daughter wants. She eats and we exchange a few words. She'd rather have that with me in the morning than with my husband, who's a lot more voluble and entertaining. She might like him in the afternoon.

Earliest memory Being in Panama [where her father was stationed] aged two-and-a-half and being told I had to take a nap. Instead, I walked out of the house without my shoes on. My mother always told us to put our shoes on. I got something stuck in my foot and I realised my mother was right.

On your bedside table A Polaroid that my husband and I took of ourselves when we were first dating. And books.

Advice to your teenage self? Relax a little.

Your motto Try to be who you are – be present.

Perfect day Yesterday I went to yoga, made my daughter breakfast, talked to my son on the phone and hung out with my husband. Honestly, that was a great day!

need to be alluring as a parent, right?'

It's hard to imagine a parent with more allure than Julianne. And while it's obvious that family life is her priority, her career is more exciting than ever. She's one of the few women in Hollywood who continue to land complex roles in thoughtful dramas as well as starring in big-budget crowd pleasers such as *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1* and *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*, the recent sequel to Matthew Vaughn's 2015 spy caper.

Was her *Still Alice* Oscar win a defining moment? 'Of course! I think you'd be being disingenuous if you didn't say that it's culturally significant. My son was in a statistics class and they were talking about the chances of winning a Nobel Prize, an Oscar or a Pulitzer Prize. And he went, "Oh my God, that's so weird, my mum won an Oscar." It is a big deal!'

With the buzz of awards circulating for *Suburbicon*, Julianne is also enthusiastic about another upcoming film of hers that has had great early reviews – *Wonderstruck*, based on a timeshifting children's novel by Brian Selznick. 'It's about a girl from the 1920s and a boy from the 1970s who run away from home, and it's a lovely expression of what it is to be a child,' says Julianne, who plays characters from both eras. 'This is the year of double roles!' Next year we'll see her play an opera singer in *Bel Canto*, based on the prizewinning 2001 novel by Ann Patchett.

Before our interview is over, I ask Julianne whether she is concerned about getting older – she certainly doesn't look her age. 'There's no guarantee that you're going to get older. I could walk out of here and be hit by a car and that would be it,' she says, draining her coffee and leaving me with a final piece of sage advice. 'Either you age and you get more life or you die. End of story. We have just one tiny, brief life, so why not live it and be grateful that you have another day?' ■

■ *Suburbicon will be in cinemas from 24 November*

in George's personality, how settled he seems with her; how fondly he speaks of her: I always say it's a great sign when someone talks about their partner a lot and he adores Amal.'

She adds that George is loving being a dad to his five-month-old twins Alexander and Ella. 'It's always difficult to explain to people the tremendous joy children bring to your life, so I'm happy he's experiencing it.' Like any new parent, he is sleep-deprived, she adds. 'I texted him when I got home after seeing *Suburbicon* in New York – I didn't want to call him because it was the middle of the night in London. Then my phone buzzed and it was George. He said he was up with his babies!'

At this point my own phone

vibrates: it's my younger daughter messaging me on the family group chat. 'We do family texts, too,' Julianne smiles. 'We text all the time... emojis, Bitmojis, Snapchat. All that stuff.' And we're back to what constitutes a good marriage. Julianne says she and her husband are 'a really good team' when it comes to parenting. 'He'll take our son surfing; he'll play basketball with our daughter. I'm much better at organising all the school stuff and meetings. I once joked that in my family I am president of business and he's director of entertainment and food services,' she laughs.

Tolerance is essential, we agree. 'Every time I have to go away, I over-pack,' she says. 'I'm not one of those people who lays out their

outfits. I panic. My husband no longer does that, "Oh come on, it's not a big deal," thing. He knows I have to start packing at midday.' Communication is another key. Julianne and Bart 'talk about each other's work and about our future'.

They've discussed downsizing in New York when the children have both finished college: 'And we'll probably get something in Los Angeles, so we'll be able to go, "Oh, it's cold here, let's go there for a bit."' And she says they discuss the prospect of one day becoming grandparents. 'That's why we have a little beach house in Long Island, to make sure we have a place that everybody can bring their boyfriends and girlfriends and children to, so all the family can be together. I mean, you