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Actress Nicole Kidman opens up about marriage and children as she makes her TV return in *Big Little Lies*

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The BLESSING of LIES

Nicole Kidman and Reese Witherspoon lead an epic cast of accomplished actors in *Big Little Lies*. In a wide-ranging interview, Kidman reveals why her return to TV felt right and how her girls and husband are where her heart is

BIG LITTLE LIES Mondays from February 20 at 8.30pm on **showcase** [114] available in the **DRAMA** pack

In late 2014, Nicole Kidman received an urgent request from her Australian friend, Bruna Papandrea. The producer asked her to read *Big Little Lies* – the bestselling novel from Australian writer Liane Moriarty, about a murder at a primary school trivia night.

“They were interested in getting the rights [to the book for TV],” Kidman recalls, referring to Papandrea and her producing partner and friend, actress Reese Witherspoon. “I read it overnight and knew right away I wanted to be a part of it.”

The Hawaiian-born actress – whose first telemovie role was in 1983 – didn’t just say yes. She immediately jumped on the phone with Papandrea to suggest she meet Moriarty in person, since she was already on her way to Sydney.

“We had coffee and I begged her to give the rights to us,” the excited actress recounts. “I promised her we

would get it made and, 18 months later, it was in production – so I think we are all pretty proud of that achievement.”

Not only did the two Oscar-winning actresses and Papandrea get a deal with HBO to turn *Big Little Lies* into a seven-part limited TV series – with the setting relocated from a coastal town in New South Wales to California – but they also attracted a star-studded cast including Shailene Woodley, Laura Dern, Alexander Skarsgård, Adam Scott and Zoë Kravitz.

Behind the camera they convinced film director Jean-Marc Vallée (*Wild*) to make his television directorial debut. They also secured David E Kelley, the man behind successful television series such as *Ally McBeal*, *The Practice* and *Boston Legal*, to adapt the book into a teleplay capturing the subversive, darkly funny undertones that propelled Moriarty’s book to the prestigious *New York Times* bestsellers list.

Opposite: Kidman is a trailblazer, being the first Australian actress to be nominated in the Best Actress in a Leading Role category in consecutive years (*Moulin Rouge!* in 2002) and the first to win an Oscar for the second, *The Hours* in 2003. She also received a nomination in 2011 for *Rabbit Hole*

“You think it’s going to be serious like *The Slap*, but it isn’t,” teases Kidman, referring to the highly-acclaimed 2011 Australian book-turned-miniseries.

The statuesque star is sitting in a dark corner of a Beverly Hills hotel bar, chatting over a cup of tea before heading off to continue promoting her enthralling new movie *Lion*.

“I just related to the whole piece because it’s entertainment and I found it funny, but it’s also dark and truthful and a mishmash of things that I hope people will get addicted to when they watch,” she says of *Big Little Lies*.

“There hasn’t really been a strong female show like this for a long time actually. Maybe *Sex and the City* and now *Girls* but still, none of them really capture the tone of this one.”

Big Little Lies follows a murder investigation and the flashbacks that introduce us to the mostly affluent group of mothers whose first-graders ▶



“EVERYONE HAS GOT THINGS THAT ARE GOING ON BEHIND CLOSED DOORS” – NICOLE KIDMAN

attend Otter Bay Elementary School together. Jane (Woodley) is a single mother and new in town. Celeste (Kidman) seems to have a perfect life with Perry (Skarsgård) and their twin boys. While Madeline (Witherspoon) is someone who likes to know people's business at the school.

Los Angeles-based Papandrea – who became friends with Kidman while working with the Oscar-winning writer and director Anthony Minghella on 2003 film *Cold Mountain* – says she and Witherspoon were looking for female-driven stories to adapt for the screen when a friend gave her the book.

They previously produced *Wild* in 2014, which earned Witherspoon a Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role Academy Award nomination, and the 2015 comedy *Hot Pursuit*, which starred Witherspoon and Sofia Vergara.

Witherspoon initially discussed being behind-the-scenes for *Big Little Lies*, however, those plans soon changed.

“But then Reese began reading the script and halfway through she said ‘I want to be in it too,’” Papandrea recalls.

“For Reese, it was especially nice to be able to produce and act with Nicole because normally there just aren't two great roles in the same project for women. In this one there are multiple and complex roles for great actresses, so it was an incredible experience to see them all together on set.”

Kidman describes her character of Celeste as being “a woman in a male household with all that male energy”, but doesn't want to give anything else away. “I think the great thing about this whole piece is it's called *Big Little Lies* because everyone has got things that are going on behind closed doors,” she

Below: (from left) mothers Madeline (Witherspoon), Jane (Woodley) and Celeste (Kidman) in *Big Little Lies*. Opposite: Witherspoon and Kidman posing at the 87th Academy Awards in 2015

hints. “They are all mothers trying to raise their children and all of them are fragile and vulnerable and complex.”

Woodley – whose breakthrough role as George Clooney's daughter in the 2011 movie *The Descendants* led to her own franchise of *Divergent* films – admits she couldn't resist signing on, even though the timing was not ideal.

“I had been working since I was 15 with no break and I had planned to take time off and just breathe for a minute,” Woodley explains.

“But as soon as I read the script and I already knew that Reese and Nicole and Laura Dern and Zoë Kravitz, who I worked with on *Allegiant* (2016), were all in this, I just knew I couldn't say no.”

Kidman returns to television three decades after her breakthrough roles in *Vietnam* (1987) and *Bangkok Hilton* (1989). In a big year of television for the star, as soon as she wrapped production on *Big Little Lies* she returned to her hometown of Sydney for a supporting role in Jane Campion's TV miniseries sequel, *Top of the Lake Series 2*.

“I've known Jane most of my life so it was a joy to get the chance to work with her again,” Kidman says proudly. “Now we get to tell stories on television with great filmmakers and great writing, and we get to explore many sides to a character over a longer period of time. I've been so fortunate in the past year to explore both these roles on TV.”

Looking elegant in a cream silk dress with embroidered flowers, Kidman confides she can't wait to leave in a few hours and head back to her Nashville home with husband Keith Urban. She wants to be there when their two young daughters, Sunday Rose, eight, and six-year-old Faith Margaret, wake up so she can take them to school.

Kidman laughs loudly as she confesses to how much she identifies with some of the Otter Bay parents portrayed in *Big Little Lies*. “I do have elements of ▶



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Meet the cast

WITH A STELLAR ENSEMBLE, THERE'S A LOT OF EXCITEMENT FOR THE SERIES

Reese Witherspoon

(Madeline Martha Mackenzie) A whirlwind of good intentions, Madeline's compulsion to set things right has unintended consequences.



Nicole Kidman

(Celeste Wright) The envy of her peers, statuesque beauty Celeste appears to have it all: twins, wealth and the perfect husband.



Shailene Woodley

(Jane Chapman) A single mother, Jane is of modest means and has a mysterious past. She needs to navigate her son's school's social hierarchy.



Laura Dern

(Renata Klein) A powerful career woman and anti-bullying crusader, Renata is at the centre of schoolyard politics – on and off the playground.



Alexander Skarsgård

(Perry Wright) A seemingly perfect couple with Celeste, he is a successful businessman, loving father and husband, but he also has a short temper.



Adam Scott

(Ed Mackenzie) Stable and loving husband to Madeline, Ed is often overwhelmed with his wife's desire to get involved in everyone else's business.



James Tupper

(Nathan Carlson) Ex-husband of Madeline, he is married to the younger Bonnie and struggles with co-parenting his teenage daughter with his ex.



Zoë Kravitz

(Bonnie Carlson) Married to Madeline's ex-husband, yoga instructor Bonnie is a sensitive soul who is a cool stepmom.



Kidman with husband Urban at the London Evening Standard Theatre Awards

the helicopter parent that I grapple with," she reveals. "When my daughters are playing on the monkey bars I try not to hover and say, 'Be careful'. I want them to find their own way and not feel overparented, but I still have that balance of knowing I am there when they need me."

The Hollywood talent looks a little embarrassed as she acknowledges just how much her daughters want that balance, too.

"Sometimes I'm too much and that's when they go, 'Please don't burst into tears when I tell you this, Mum.' So I try not to because I want them to tell me things," she admits.

As she talks about her family, Kidman beams with pride. Celebrating 10 years of marriage to country performer Urban was the icing on the cake in 2016.

"I've said it before but it's true. I would not be able to do anything without Keith," she smiles. "Our union is so nourishing and strong and healing. I'm amazed that amidst all of this we were able to find each other in this world. I'm so fortunate to have him. He's my rock."

Kidman - a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador since 2006 - chooses not to take her good fortune for granted, instead being modest and thankful for the cards life's dealt her.

"I'm down on my knees, grateful for my life and truly humble," she declares as tears begin to well up in her eyes. "I don't feel the need to jump into the future as much as I used to because I just want to stay right here in today and enjoy it for a while." ■

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