

Nicole Kidman Love, laughter & *lies*

The Aussie star opens up to **Jenny Cooney** about her career renaissance, the power of female friendships and the joy of finding true love later in life.

Nicole Kidman may well be Hollywood's quintessential Renaissance woman. At 51, a time when most Hollywood actresses bemoan the lack of substantial roles and the fading lustre of their careers, Nicole is riding the crest of a professional wave that has reinvigorated her presence and longevity in a notoriously capricious industry that often abandons genuine talent if it's not wrapped in a vivacious 30-something package.

Yet here stands Nicole, who strode onto the Hollywood stage almost 30 years ago as Tom Cruise's love interest in *Days of Thunder*, defiantly winning accolades and honours not only for her moving, complex roles on screen but also for her skill and acumen as a producer.

Underpinning this professional revitalisation – *Big Little Lies*, the HBO TV series which Nicole

starred in and co-produced with actress Reese Witherspoon, received an astounding 16 Emmy nominations and won eight, including a personal Emmy for Nicole as Best Actress – is yet another successful second act, one that forms the perfect foundation for her recent triumphs.

That foundation is the commitment, security and affection Nicole has found with the great love of her life, country superstar Keith Urban, the father of her daughters, Sunday Rose, nine, who goes by Sunny, and Faith Margaret, seven, who Nicole affectionately calls Fifi.

"We're told that the chances of finding love get less as you get older," says Nicole, who was just 23 when she married fellow actor Tom Cruise and from whom she split in 2001, wondering if she would ever be happy again. "So, that's why I actually like to say to women now, 'No, I did meet the love of my life at 40'. That's a really important thing to →

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Cover story

emphasise because it's a beautiful thing; because if it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone."

Nicole is speaking to *The Weekly* via telephone from her home in New York. The previous evening she was sitting in the front row at the Oscars ceremony in Los Angeles, playing a part in the 90th anniversary Academy Awards to honour past winners. Nicole flew back to New York today to resume shooting an indie film in the morning. She warns that she has limited time to chat tonight because she needs to tuck daughters Sunny and Fifi into bed. Even so, she is in an expansive mood, discussing her relationship with Keith, the joy of working with friends such as Reese Witherspoon and Meryl Streep (soon to join *Big Little Lies* in its much anticipated second season), and her hope that her renewed success in Hollywood may give inspiration to other women.

For now, though, she is basking in that post-Oscars glow, acknowledging what an honour it was to be included. "It was nice being there with no pressure in terms of presenting and not being up for an award but having such a great year with television," says Nicole proudly. "It all feels rather surreal right now, that I am having this extraordinary time in my life going into my 51st year."

In another surreal moment, shortly after *Big Little Lies* became a global TV obsession, Nicole received an email from an unexpected fan, acting legend Meryl Streep.

"She really responded to the show and wrote one of the most beautifully eloquent emails about her emotional response to my character Celeste's storyline of domestic violence," the Aussie star recalls excitedly. Nicole and Meryl have been friends since they shared a screen credit (but no scenes) in the 2002 drama, *The Hours*, which earned Nicole an Academy Award for Best Actress as author Virginia Woolf. "I still call her The Great One," she giggles as she recalls the nickname she playfully gave Streep at that time.

So, when *Big Little Lies* author Liane Moriarty submitted her novella



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about the next chapter in the lives of those characters for a planned new season, Nicole and her co-producer Reese Witherspoon both had only one thought, 'Meryl Streep'. The 21-time Oscar-nominated actress was perfect to play Mary Louise Wright, the distraught mother of Perry (Alexander Skarsgard) who comes looking for answers about her late son's "accident". "I called Reese and we were like, 'gosh, I wonder if Meryl would be interested' and in our wildest dreams we didn't dare to hope," Nicole says. "But we were able to reach out to her and it was amazing that she thought the role was good enough that she wanted to do it. It really came down to her standing up and going, 'I support you as women, and I believe in you' and that's a big statement coming from her."

The success of *Big Little Lies* has not only refreshed Nicole's acting career, with her Best Actress Emmy and Golden Globe wins, but also established her as a powerful producer – she picked up another Emmy and

Golden Globe for Best Limited Series. It's a glorious achievement for her long-time production company, Blossom Films, and the 10 projects now listed in development at her company are just another sign that, after managing to produce only two films in the previous eight years (*Rabbit Hole* in 2010 and *The Family Fang* in 2015), things are changing. Not just for Nicole, she is quick to point out, but for women everywhere.

"You see people like Meryl and Reese leading the way with this allegiance and solidarity and it's great to have the conversation happening and see the changes happening right now," she says optimistically. "I think it's an important time for us always to be reaching out to help each other."

Surrounded by powerful women in her own life – starting with her beloved mother, Janelle, and her sister, Antonia – Nicole sounds grateful. "I called Reese the other day and at the end of the call I said, 'gosh, I love working with you'," she recounts. "We both bring different things to the table and

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As Swisse Wellness Global Ambassador, Nicole says exercise and meditation help her find balance. From top right: Reese Witherspoon and Nicole filming a scene in *Big Little Lies*; Laura Dern, Nicole, Zoe Kravitz, Reese and Shailene Woodley celebrate their Golden Globes win; Nicole with her heroine, Meryl Streep.



it's exciting and fun when women can get together and complement each other to get things done. We still keep pinching ourselves. We can't believe we've wrangled everyone to come back together again, but we wanted to do it because it's ours and it's fun and it's really cool!"

Not surprisingly, Reese returns the compliments about her "beautiful, soulful, talented friend". "I've worked in Hollywood for 25 years and I've never seen anyone transform so completely on set," Reese said when presenting Nicole with an acting honour at the Gotham Film Awards last November. "I was in awe of the way

that she would go into scenes, shooting some of the most violent and tormented scenes her character experiences, and then our director would say, 'cut' and she was back, talking about schools and kids and holiday plans."

The only person who does not seem to realise she has been elevated to the status of The Great One is Nicole herself. She talks humbly about the career she has unexpectedly maintained long past the use-by date of most Hollywood actresses, turning in award-winning performances in recent films such as *Lion*, *The Beguiled* and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*. She is even generous enough to restrain from

reacting when she hears tabloid reports that claim she opposed casting Streep out of jealousy. "As a group of girls, we don't even bother answering all those stories," she says in speaking for all her close-knit co-stars.

"I love hearing that magazines like *The Australian Women's Weekly* are working to support women, because that's how we change things," she continues. "We all know what it's like out there for women on their own, and if we don't help each other, by God it's going to be a bad path for you."

With an occasional interruption from her eldest daughter in the other room, asking for a snack before bed, Nicole remains focused and engaged after a long cross-country day, talking with deep emotion in her voice about the love that's brought her to this sweet spot in life.

"To have met Keith just before I turned 40 and to be able to have Sunny and Fifi with him, what a beautiful, unexpected turn of events for me," she continues in a hushed tone. "I wanted it and I dreamed of it but I had →

no idea if it was actually going to happen. I feel beyond blessed to have this incredibly deep and powerful relationship I have with him and that our children are the recipients of the love we have for each other too.”

However, if you think her life sounds exhausting, you would be right. So how exactly does Nicole maintain the stamina to juggle family and work, including two films already wrapped this year and the heavy producing commitment required to bring back five of the busiest women in Hollywood – Nicole, Reese, Laura Dern, Shailene Woodley and Zoe Kravitz – for another season of *Big Little Lies*. The mega star and Swisse Wellness Global Ambassador admits it isn’t always easy, but she has come to understand the importance of making her own health and wellbeing a priority.

“If you don’t take care of yourself, it really starts to show and you don’t have energy and you can’t do the things you want to do,” she explains. “So as a mother with young kids, I have got to keep myself energised and stay strong. I was carrying Sunny up the stairs the other night and I said, ‘do you realise how strong I am?’ and she looked at me, shrugged her shoulders and said, ‘nah’. I made it up 20 stairs before I said, ‘okay, you can walk!’” she recalls with a chuckle.

She also has plenty of other ways to be good to herself. “I’ll exercise, I love reading and I meditate,” she says. “I also try to make sure I get enough sleep. Sometimes when we [the family] are low on sleep, we’ll get extra sleep on weekends, putting our jammies on and getting into bed to watch a movie and spend all day there.” My dad always taught me when I was young to take care of your own physical health and your own emotional health. I thought it was great advice and that’s all I have ever known. I try and teach my kids that. Being happy is an easy thing to say, but sometimes you can just put a smile on your face, look around, and have some gratitude for what is around you.”

She doesn’t underestimate the power of good belly laugh, either. “I have to



Nicole and Keith (above) and (far left) with daughters Faith and Sunday. Left: Nicole shares a laugh with Margot Robbie. Nicole with parents Antony and Janelle (right and below, as a teenager) and with sister Antonia (bottom right).

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“Keith’s been through a lot and he’s a very good father and husband.”

be able to laugh at things and I am a bit cheeky and mischievous by nature. I’ve always been that way. I still love having that sort of child-like approach to life and having that curiosity and intrigue about where you are and what you’re doing. Being able to find something in your day that makes it fun is so important.”

In a perfect alignment of everything Nicole stands for, the Armani-clad star found herself sitting in the front row at the Oscars just a few seats away from Meryl Streep on one side and Aussie Oscar nominee Margot Robbie on the other. “Meryl is definitely my heroine because she’s also still so excited about her craft and

would rather work than be put on a pedestal,” she says.

Her friendship with Margot is new, but already Nicole is a fierce supporter. “What Meryl taught me and passed along is that being a woman at this stage in life means being able to help younger women, whether it’s offering advice or a hug or whatever they need. I love seeing the way Margot is handling her life and she’s a fantastic actress too.”

Long before the #TimesUp and #MeToo movements inspired women to stand up for themselves, Kidman had been quietly doing it in her own way. “I just finished working with a female director on a very low-budget film [the Karyn Kusama-directed drama *Destroyer*] and that’s my way of creating opportunities for women too,” she says. “The bottom line is that I’m an actress who has made almost 60 films, yet I’ve only worked



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with a handful of female directors, so it would be great to shift that so there are percentage changes. I don’t see enough key positions filled by women, wouldn’t it be great to change that?”

Listing off commitments that will fill up another busy year, Nicole says she and Keith have gone to great lengths to be sure they can be there for each other. He will spend the next three months with their daughters on location in Monterey, California, for her *Big Little Lies* summer shoot, and as soon as that wraps up, the family will accompany him on tour to support his upcoming album, *GraffitiU*. Talking to me recently for the *Aussies* in Hollywood podcast series, Nicole confided that her marriage was one of mutual understanding when it came to their artistic process.

“I do a lot of nodding and a lot of listening to great music and try to be a sounding board for Keith but in the end, I really know nothing about music so it’s his own process and I’m just on the periphery watching it all happen,” she admits. “And he is the same with me, because he won’t sit and read my scripts so then a lot of times he has no idea what the movie is even about, like when he saw *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* at the Cannes Film Festival and said to me after, ‘I had no idea!’” she laughs.

Does being married to an artist make it less awkward, then, when he does finally see the film and her intimate scenes with other men?

“No because he’s a grown-up,” Nicole replies firmly. “He’s a man, Keith, not a boy and he’s seen a lot and he’s been through a lot and he’s a very good father and husband and he’s just an adult, which is a great thing to be able to say at this time in my life.”

Nicole also credits her parents with helping her to navigate her own marriage. “They were married 50 years before my father died,” she says with a catch in her throat, “so I saw 50 years of strong, beautiful love and learned that it was possible.

“We don’t have all the answers,” she quickly continues, “but we know we are blessed and we are just taking it all day by day.” **AWW**