

TOM FELTON

The Magic
& Mayhem of
Growing Up
a *Wizard*

*Beyond
the Wand*

BEYOND THE WAND

THE MAGIC AND MAYHEM
OF GROWING UP A WIZARD

TOM
FELTON



GRAND CENTRAL
PUBLISHING

NEW YORK BOSTON

This memoir reflects the author's life faithfully rendered to the best of his ability.

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Grand Central Publishing
Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104
grandcentralpublishing.com
twitter.com/grandcentralpub

First published in 2022 by Ebury Spotlight, an imprint of Ebury Publishing. Ebury Publishing is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies.

First Grand Central Publishing edition: October 2022

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2022943295

ISBN: 978-1-5387-4136-8 (hardcover), 978-1-5387-4197-9 (signed edition), 978-1-5387-4198-6 (Barnes & Noble signed edition), 978-1-5387-4199-3 (Barnes & Noble Black Friday signed edition), 978-1-5387-4138-2 (ebook)

E3-20220803-JV-NF-ORI

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Foreword by Emma Watson](#)

[1 Undesirable No. 1 or Draco's First Scrape with the Law](#)

[In which an embarrassing teenage episode highlights the difficulty of balancing an ordinary childhood with life on the big screen.](#)

[2 My Muggle Family or Runt of the Pack](#)

[In which Tom introduces us to his family: three lively brothers, a patient mum and a playful dad.](#)

[3 Early Auditions or Mother Goose!](#)

[In which Tom's early stage performances leave much to be desired, but he finds his way into professional auditions nonetheless.](#)

[4 The Magic in the Making or James Blond and the Ginger Whisker](#)

[In which Tom lands his first big film, rubs shoulders with 007 and endures the first of many dodgy haircuts.](#)

[5 My Brothers Are Already Sick of It or Projectiles at the Premiere](#)

[In which Tom's first experience of the red carpet is overshadowed by his brothers' antics.](#)

[6 Anna and the King or Clarice and Hannibal](#)

[In which Tom travels to Malaysia and embarrasses himself in front of two Hollywood stars.](#)

[7 The Potter Auditions or When Draco Met Hermione](#)

[In which Tom lands the role of Draco, despite knowing nothing about Harry Potter, and disses a young Emma Watson.](#)

[8 The Table Read or Kiss Kiss Kiss on the Bum](#)

[In which the Potter cast first assemble and Tom receives an inappropriate message from Peeves.](#)

[9 Draco and Darwin or How Malfoy Got His Sneer](#)

[In which Tom's grandfather teaches him how to look down his nose at the Gryffindors.](#)

10 Undesirable No. 1 (Part 2) or Gregory Goyle and the Exploding Hot Chocolate

In which Tom and his fellow Slytherins really do get up to no good.

11 A Day on Set or Severus Snape's Sausage Sandwich

In which Tom takes us on a tour of Leavesden Studios, and Snape gives the Muggles what they want.

12 Fans or How (Not) to Be a Real Dick

In which Tom is introduced to the crazy world of fandom, and learns to be empathetic to those who see him as part of their lives.

13 How to Fly a Broomstick or The Wasps and the Wimp

In which Tom encounters difficulties during the first years' flying lesson, and Madam Hooch comes to the rescue.

14 The Best of Both Worlds or Broomstick Prick

In which Tom does what he can to keep things real outside of the world of Harry Potter, but doesn't always find it easy.

15 Transfiguration Troubles or Maggie and the Millipede

In which a self-pleasuring baboon causes havoc on set, and a free-spirited millipede disrupts a Transfiguration lesson.

16 Dramione or The Chicken and the Duck

In which Tom talks openly and honestly about his friendship with Emma Watson.

17 The Weaslebees at Work or Golfing with Gryffindorks

In which Tom shocks a young Rupert Grint, and the Phelps twins come up with a wizard wheeze.

18 Draco and Harry or Two Sides of the Same Coin

In which Tom talks about his respect for, and friendship with, Daniel Radcliffe.

19 A Bop on the Nose or Crabbe, Hagrid And The Spooky Rubber Tom

In which Tom introduces us to some of the actors on the Harry Potter set.

20 A Kind Word from Dumbledore or A Breath of Fresh Air

In which Dumbledore rocks up in his red Ferrari and Tom receives an unorthodox pep talk.

21 Alan Rickman's Earlobes or Don't Tread on My F*cking Cloak!

In which the Death Eaters catch the sharp end of Alan's tongue, and Tom reveals what he has learned from working with the cream of the crop.

22 Undesirable No. 1 (Part 3) or The World's Best/Worst Chaperone

In which Tom's brother redefines his on-set duties, and Draco dodges yet another bullet.

23 Malfoy's Manner or A Hug from Voldy

In which Tom introduces us to his wizarding parents and reflects on working with He Who Must Not Be Named.

24 All Things Must Pass or The Girl from the Great Hall

In which Potter comes to an end, and a relationship begins.

25 Beyond the Wand or Lonely in La-La Land

In which Tom heads to Los Angeles and finds that life in Hollywood is not all he expected it to be.

26 The Ballad of Barney's Beanery or If I Were a Rich Man

In which Tom hits rock bottom, and three chance encounters on a midnight mission help him learn what is important in life.

27 Time Well Spent or Versions of Myself

In which Tom acknowledges certain truths about himself, and puts his newfound positivity into practice.

Afterword

In which Tom reflects on the importance of stories, and of one story in particular.

Photos

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

by Emma Watson

You know that person in your life who makes you feel seen? That person who is somehow a witness to all that unfolds? That person who knows—really *knows*—what is happening to you and what you’re going through, without anything having to be said?

For me, that person is Tom Felton.

As you’ll read in this book, our relationship didn’t start well. When we first met, I was a moony and probably rather annoying nine-year-old girl who followed him round like a puppy, desperate for his attention. But, as he has written so eloquently, beautifully and generously in this book, our friendship didn’t end there. Thank goodness it blossomed and endured.

If you could boil the Harry Potter stories down to a single idea (and there are so many I am really stretching here), it would surely be about the value of friendship and how nothing of true meaning can be achieved without it. Friendships are the lynchpin of human existence, and I am so thankful that at crucial turning points in my life, Tom has been there to reassure and understand me. The friendship we share has allowed me to move through some of the most challenging and soul-searching moments in my life.

But enough about me. This book is about Tom. He has a heart the size of a planet. I’ve never really witnessed anything like it, except perhaps in his mum, Sharon. The Felton factor is real. You’ll read a lot in this book about Tom’s brother Chris, who was a regular face on the Harry Potter set, and who is one of the funniest people I’ve ever met. The whole family is special and Tom, the youngest of four brothers, has inherited their kindness and down-to-earth nature.

Which means that if you meet Tom, you meet the *real* Tom. That’s not the case with all actors. The vast majority put on a persona when they meet the public. It’s like flicking a switch: they’re very professional, they do it extremely well and the person they’re greeting will never know the difference. But it’s not the real them. It’s a routine. Tom doesn’t do that. Tom is always Tom. He doesn’t flick a switch. There *is* no switch. What you see is what you get. He is incredibly generous with his fans and with the wider Harry Potter community. That special ability he has to make *me* feel seen extends to everybody. He might have played a bully. He might even have sometimes felt like a bully. But take it from me: he couldn’t be further from one. He is creative, sensitive and whole-hearted. He is a person who wants to love everything and everyone.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. When I look at how honestly Tom has reflected on his life and experiences in this book, I’m reminded that he has an astonishing amount of self-awareness. He has been able to laugh at himself as well as relive moments in his life that have been difficult and painful for him. He is on a journey of self-work, and I’m with Socrates when I say that the people who are on that journey are the only people for me. But Tom

has gone one step further than most: he has unpacked that journey for us, his readers. It is such a generous act, especially in this world of social media and instant news, where the polarity of opinions makes it such an intense time to lay yourself bare in the way that he has. You want to live a real, a truthful, an examined life, and Tom clearly does.

Like Tom, I always struggle to explain to people the nature of our connection and relationship. For more than twenty years now we've loved each other in a special way, and I've lost count of the times that people have said to me, "You must have drunkenly made out, just once!" "You must have kissed!" "There must be something!" But what we have is far deeper than that. It's one of the purest loves I can think of. We're soulmates, and we've always had each other's backs. I know we always will. It makes me emotional to think about it. Sometimes it feels hard to live in a world where people are so quick to judge, to doubt, to question intentions. Tom doesn't do that. I know that, even if I've made a mistake, he'll understand that my intention was good. I know that he'll always *believe* me. Even when he doesn't have the whole picture, he'll never doubt that I'm coming from a good place and will have done my very best. That's *true* friendship, and to be seen and loved like that is one of the great gifts of my life.

We have always shared a love of words, of how they can be used better to express oneself. Tom, you're a poet. The way your mind works and the way you express things is beautiful, charming, funny and warm. I'm so glad that you have written this book and shared it with us. It's a delight and a gift. The world is lucky to have you, but I'm even luckier to have you as my friend.

Chapeau, little piece of my soul. And congratulations.

Emma Watson
London, 2022

1

UNDESIRABLE NO. 1

or

DRACO'S FIRST SCRAPE WITH THE LAW

Cards on the table: this is not going to be my proudest moment. In fact, my mum doesn't even know this story. So, sorry Mum.

It's a busy Saturday afternoon in a bustling English town. Punters hurriedly go about their business and clusters of teenagers haunt the shopping centres, doing what teenagers do. They pay no attention to a skinny fourteen-year-old boy with a pale complexion and bleached hair loitering in the vicinity, surrounded by his crew. The boy in question is yours truly and I'm genuinely sorry to report that we had trouble in mind.

You might think—and rightly so—that with my distinctive blond hairdo I'd be well advised to *avoid* trouble. You might think that trouble would be low on my agenda. But it turns out that regular teenagers don't always do the right thing—they certainly don't always do the *sensible* thing—and I am trying very hard to be just that: a regular teenager.

Which is not always entirely straightforward, when your alter ego is a wizard.

. . .

This was early on in my wizarding career, between the first and second Potter films. The object of our attention was the HMV record store in Guildford, Surrey—quite the place to hang out back in the day. It was commonplace for kids to swipe CDs from their cases and walk out with them under their coats, a constant challenge for the poor security guards who paced the aisles looking for scallywags up to no good. On this particular Saturday, though, my crew had a bigger prize in its sights than mere CDs: a DVD of an “adult” nature that none of us were remotely old enough to buy. I wince now to remember it. Truth to tell, I was inwardly wincing then, but I didn't want to show it because I was trying to fit in with the cool kids. Even the top boys were reluctant to commit a crime of this gravity, with all the potential for extreme embarrassment.

Which was why I volunteered to do the deed.

Reader, the Artful Dodger I was not. Palms sweating, pulse racing, I entered the shop with excruciating casualness. The smart move would have been to identify the prize, swipe it and get out of there as quickly as possible. Maybe if I had a bit more Slytherin cunning about me I'd have done just that. But I didn't. Rather than execute a swift, subtle theft, I located the DVD and then I stalked it. I must have wandered up and down the aisle fifty times, my skin tingling with apprehension. I even asked a random stranger if they would buy the DVD for me so I could feign success with the cool kids. The stranger rightly refused and I continued my stakeout, up and down the aisle.

Up and down...

Up and down...

An hour must have passed. I honestly doubt that there was a single security guard who hadn't clocked me by now. Whether they'd recognised the world's most inept shoplifter as the boy from the Harry Potter films, I couldn't tell you. What I do know is this: my hairdo was distinctive, if not downright weird. It was a beacon, and it made it impossible for me to melt into the background.

I wished I hadn't volunteered. I knew it was stupid. But I couldn't face tucking my tail between my legs and leaving the shop empty-handed, so eventually I took a deep breath and went in for the dive. Pretending to look at the ceiling, with sweaty, fumbling fingers clumsily ripping off the security sticker, I removed the shiny disc from its plastic box, slipped it into a

pocket and speed-walked to the exit.

I'd done the deed! I could see my crew outside and gave them a knowing smirk. I could sense their excitement.

Then... disaster!

I'd barely taken a single step outside the shop when three burly security guys surrounded me. My stomach turned to ice as they escorted me—politely but ever so firmly—back inside. I made the walk of shame through the store, head down, all eyes on me, desperately hoping that I wouldn't be recognised. The characters were not so iconic then, but there was always a chance. The guards led me into a little booth at the back of the store, where they stood around me, grim-faced, and asked me to turn out my pockets. I sheepishly handed over the disc and asked them—*begged* them—not to do the one thing that would make this whole sorry escapade ten times worse. “Please,” I said, “*please* don't tell my mum!” If she found out, the humiliation would be unbearable.

They didn't tell my mum. But they did put me against the wall, bring out a Polaroid camera and take an instant snapshot of my face. They put the Polaroid on the wall, part of a rogue's gallery of hardened criminals who'd tried to rip off the record store, and they told me I was barred for life. I could never set foot in HMV again.

No chance of that, mate. Cheeks burning, I hoofed it as fast as I could and didn't look back. My friends had scarpered at the first sight of security, so I took the train home alone to lie low.

. . .

How long did that picture of blond Tom hang on the wall of HMV? Who knows? Maybe it's still there. But for weeks after that I was terrified that Warner Brothers, or the newspapers, would find out about my stupid indiscretion. I never told a single soul, but what would happen if someone recognised my mugshot? Would they fire me? Would the next film see Harry, Ron and Hermione terrorised by a different Draco? Would the humiliating nature of my brush with the law become hilarious fodder for public consumption?

Like I said, I tried very hard to be a regular teenager. In most respects, even despite everything that the future held, I think I managed it pretty well. But there's a fine line, when you grow up in the public eye, between being normal and being reckless. I crossed the line that Saturday afternoon, no doubt. And while the young Tom Felton was no Draco Malfoy, he was no saint either. Maybe that's what got me the part in the first place. I'll let you be the judge of that.

. . .

Oh, and we never did get to watch that DVD.

2

MY MUGGLE FAMILY

or

RUNT OF THE PACK

Draco Malfoy, the character for whom I would become most famous for portraying, was an only child, born to a cold and brutal family. My own family couldn't have been more different. Close-knit, loving, chaotic and supportive, they were the very centre of my early life. I'm the youngest of four brothers, and before I introduce you to my mum and dad, I want to tell you about my three siblings. They each influenced me profoundly in different ways, and I would have been a very different character without them.

My bros will gladly tell you that I'm the runt of the pack. At least, that's what they kindly used to tell me. (I *think* they were joking, but you know how it is with brothers.) I'm the youngest of the four. Jonathan, Christopher and Ashley came along in a cluster, three boys in the space of four years. Then there were six years of respite for my mum before I arrived on 22 September 1987. So from the moment I entered the world I had three older brothers to keep my butt off the couch and my fingers away from the TV remote. Three older brothers to bully me with love. Three older brothers to joke that I came along so late not because I was an afterthought but because I was in fact the milkman's son. (They were, and still are, considerably bigger than me, all six-foot-plus and built like brick shithouses.) In short, three older guys to keep me firmly in my place—which I guess is no bad thing for a kid who's about to embark on a wizarding career.

My brothers didn't only call me "runt." If they were feeling generous they might also refer to me as "maggot." But it wasn't all bad; they also each had a massive positive influence on me throughout my unusual childhood, although in slightly different ways.

Jonathan—we call him Jink—is the eldest and, back in the day, it was he who first showed me by example that it was cool to have a passion for the arts. Jink was the one with the Oasis poster on his wall and the black Stratocaster—or at least a knock-off version of a Strat—in his bedroom. He was into music, singing and performing—pursuits that plenty of kids don't always get encouraged to do. That might have happened to me had it not been for Jink. When I was very young, he went to acting classes and I would go with my family to see him on stage. The actors were only kids, none of them older than their early teens, and let's be frank: these were not slick, professional shows. Jink is a chiropractor now—a talent wasted, as he reminds me frequently—but he is also a deeply creative guy. I remember watching him in musicals like *South Pacific*, *West Side Story*, *Guys and Dolls* and, most memorably, *Little Shop of Horrors*. It was while sitting in those audiences, wide-eyed, that I learned an important and formative lesson: it wasn't weird to do this stuff and it looked like fun. Seeing my big brother up there taught me that it's okay to want to perform, no matter what other people think.

So, nice one, Jink. Which brings us to brother number two.

Chris? Total opposite. "Acting's lame, bruv! Dancing? Fuck off!"

Chris is the second oldest of the Felton foursome and would no more put on a pink leotard and pretend to be the Fairy Godmother than he would fly. Which I have to tell you is a shame, because he would look tip-top in a tutu. Whereas Jink is slightly more sensitive to the emotional shifts of those around him, with Chris, what you see is what you get. So perhaps it's unexpected that Chris should be the brother I was closest to during the Potter years, the brother who looked after me, kept me grounded and was the biggest influence on the teenage Tom. Chris chaperoned me for two-and-a-half Potter films. I say chaperoned, but what I really mean is that he slept in the trailer and made full use of the free on-set catering—more of which later. For now, suffice to say that Chris didn't always take his chaperoning duties entirely seriously. On a fairly regular

basis, we used to leave set at 8 p.m. and drive over an hour from the studios, straight down to our local fishery. We'd set up our tent, cast our rods and enjoy a night's fishing. Then, at six in the morning we'd reel in, pack up our gear, head back (slightly muddy) to set and pretend to the nice people at Warner Brothers that I'd been at home sleeping soundly all night. So if you think that Draco occasionally looked a little pale, it wasn't just down to the make-up department.

There was a time at which in my eyes—in most people's eyes, I suppose—there seemed no doubt that Chris would become the most famous Felton. His claim to fame? He was one of England's most up-and-coming carp anglers. There is a tight-knit community of these carp anglers, and among them Chris was very much one to watch. He made the cover of *Carp Talk* and *Big Carp* magazines several times for catching famous fish in famous lakes, which worked in my favour among my contemporaries who were into angling. They massively looked up to him and I was definitely considered cooler because of my association with him. And since I looked up to him too, we used to go fishing together pretty much any time that we had off. It must have been tough for him when Potter changed all our lives: one minute he's known for being one of Britain's best fishermen, the next minute everyone's calling him Draco Malfoy's brother and shouting "On yer broomstick, mate!" Chris took it in his stride, though, and despite everything that came my way he was truly my hero as I was growing up. He introduced me to lots of music—Bob Marley, the Prodigy, Marvin Gaye and 2Pac—which would become one of my lifelong passions. He introduced me to other less innocent pastimes, too. We'll get to that. Fishing, though, was our obsession.

Thanks to Chris I was a regular fixture at Bury Hill Fisheries in Surrey, and I even had a weekend job there in the very early days of Potter, which I took for a little extra pocket money and the promise of free fishing. My main gig was to help with the parking, so every Saturday and Sunday I'd be there at six in the morning guiding eager fishermen into the tiny car park, hiding my bleached-blond Malfoy hair under a fishing beanie. Afterwards, I'd snag myself a bacon sandwich before doing the rounds of the lake with a brown leather satchel full of coins, selling tickets to the anglers.

I was not, I should say, the most conscientious worker. On one occasion I went back to Chris's flat to watch a big boxing match that was being shown in the UK at four in the morning. I was so excited, and managed to stay up right to the moment that the boxing match started, at which point little tiny twelve-year-old Tom conked out. My brother woke me two hours later to go to work. I made it in, but I got woken up for a second time when the owner found me snoozing under a tree. Meantime, the clients had helped themselves to the car park and the whole place was a complete mess. Sorry, boss.

You might think the punters at the fishery would have found it odd to have Draco Malfoy telling them where to put their 4x4s and collecting their money, but I managed to remain fairly anonymous. In fact, I can count on one hand the number of times I was recognised. The clientele at the fishery was a very particular type of grumpy old man, or so it seemed to me at the time. None of them would have recognised me and, let me tell you, the number of teenage girls rocking up to catch carp at dawn on a Saturday morning was limited. Occasionally a journalist would turn up and write something about my Muggle gig, and from time to time the owner of the fishery wasn't beyond drumming up a little publicity of his own. But on the whole I was left to enjoy the job. And I did enjoy it, not because of the twenty pounds cash-in-hand that I'd receive at the end of each working day, but because of the free fishing. That was the main draw for Chris and me. We were obsessed with the fish, of course, but we were even more obsessed with

everything that went with them: the moon and the stars, the proximity of nature, the rods, the reels, the bivvies and, of course, the boilies. Boilies are a type of fish bait the size of a large marble that you cook up in the kitchen with all kinds of disgusting, foul-smelling flavours like squid liver and double monster crab—items that wouldn't be out of place in a Potions lesson. We used to cook up the boilies at home to Mum's complete exasperation at the mess and the stench, swearing blind that we really *would* clear it all up, before heading out to our beloved fishery.

My third brother, closest to me in age and so in some ways the brother with whom I shared most of my early life, is Ash. Unlike my older brothers, we were close enough in age to be at the same school at the same time. (And put it this way: it's useful having an older brother on site, especially if they're built like Ash was then.) Ash and I share a very particular sense of humour; we were forever watching *The Simpsons* or *Beavis and Butt-Head* together. Even now I speak to him more in the voice of Beavis than in my own voice. We sometimes have to rein it back when we're in public. We played sports together—after watching *Space Jam* we pestered my dad to make a basketball hoop in the garden, and after watching *The Mighty Ducks* we had a phase of wanting to be ice hockey players.

Ash has a huge heart, my favourite sense of humour and is one of the nicest guys in the world, but he suffered massively from big swings of emotion in his early teens, to the extent that as he hit adolescence he stopped wanting to go to school or even leave the house. His constant feeling of not being quite happy with who he was meant he ended up spending long periods of time on closed hospital wards. I remember frequently visiting him after school at a hospital in Guildford. I'd like to say that I approached those visits with sensitivity and patience, but I was young and I don't suppose I fully understood what was going on, so really I just remember asking my mum when we could leave.

By the time Ash was feeling better and able to come home, we thankfully got back to having a laugh together. But his teenage difficulties foreshadowed the mental health struggles of the remaining Felton brothers—myself included. More on that later, but for now let's remember that such a predisposition exists among us, and some problems are too difficult to outrun. They always catch up with you in the end.

So there you have it: three older brothers, each of them close to me in their different ways. I'm acutely aware that my involvement with Potter has affected their lives irreversibly: they'll forever, at some level, be known as Draco Malfoy's brothers. But I'm equally aware that each of them exerted a distinct influence over the young Tom. Jink: the creativity and love of performance. Chris: a passion for the outdoors and a down-to-earth nature. Ash: a sense of humour and an early inkling that there is no light without shade. All important life lessons. And while I might well be the maggot—the runt of the pack—I wouldn't be the person I am today without them.

. . .

Like lots of kids, I pinged from one enthusiasm to another. And one of my greatest advantages in life was that I had a mum who encouraged me, but put no undue pressure on me to stick with any one thing.

We had a comfortable upbringing in a pleasant house called Redleaf, opposite a farm in Surrey. It was a happy, buzzy, homely place. We never had loads of money. Our weekly treat was a trip to Dorking car boot sale where twenty pence could get you pretty far and if you had

fifty pence in your pocket you were laughing. I'm sure my dad—a hardworking civil engineer—will forgive me for saying that he's famously careful with his money. I've seen him haggle in charity shops! It's the reason I never spent a day hungry, of course, but I think it became a tension between my parents in the later years of their marriage. My mum would be the one saying, "I really think we need to get Tom a violin, he says he wants to learn." To which Dad would reply, not unreasonably, "We only just bought him a hockey stick! Is he done with the hockey now?"

And the answer was, yes, I probably was done with the hockey. I'd moved on, seen something else that caught my eye, like a magpie distracted by a new shiny object. It drove my dad to distraction but my mum was excited by each new passion, however fleeting, and determined not to let my enthusiasm diminish. I never had a moment's hassle or judgement from her when the latest attraction inevitably waned; no raised eyebrow when, three months after taking receipt of my violin, I started skipping violin lessons by hiding in the boys' toilets and instead became obsessed with my cool new yoyo. I wouldn't have blamed my dad for wanting to clobber that violin over the back of my head. Mum, though, was happy encouraging me to be the kind of boy who had passions without forcing me to stick to them once something new came along.

That's not to say Dad didn't take an interest. He absolutely did. He was great at building things and if we wanted something, he'd try to make it. He built us an elaborate basketball hoop, a hockey net and even installed a skateboard ramp in the garden after consulting with us to find out exactly what we wanted. He was often to be found in the shed at midnight, sawing away, making us these amazing things, often out of materials "borrowed" from the local dump.

There were some items, though, that he couldn't make, and even if he could we didn't want his homemade effort. We wanted the shiny one with the label that all our friends had. It was up to Mum to fund these objects of desire, so, on top of looking after four boys (five, including my dad), she found the time to work multiple jobs to earn the extra cash. She worked for the local estate agent, but she also stacked shelves and cleaned offices at night with her friend Sally—we call her Auntie Sally—who's always been a part of my life and even chaperoned me on set for a while. All this just because I wanted a new yoyo or Ash wanted a basketball with the Air Jordan logo on it rather than the one that sold for a fifth of the price in Woolworths. Whatever it was that caught our eye, Mum did what she could to make it a reality.

Bottom line: my mum is a huge reason I am where I am, even though she never pushed me in the direction of being an actor. I could have set my eyes on being a professional violinist, or ice hockey goalkeeper, or an extreme yoyoist. It wouldn't have mattered to her which activity I ended up pursuing, but one thing's for certain: whatever it was, Mum would have helped me achieve it.

Dad was and is the joker of the pack. He loves not to take himself too seriously and always finds some way to make a joke or slip in some sort of self-deprecating humour. Think Del Boy, Blackadder and Basil Fawlty rolled into one. It's a trait I inherited from him and which I still use to this day. In my line of work, you often find yourself in situations where you meet new people and the ice needs breaking fast. I always try to exercise a little disarming humour, a little buffoonery, which is a technique I learned from my dad.

Dad's job as a civil engineer meant dealing with large building projects at sites all around the world, which in turn meant that he was sometimes away from home. As I grew older, however, his work took him away from home even more. That absence only became more apparent when

he and my mum split up. They were married for twenty-five years and I certainly remember them being affectionate, especially during our yearly camping holidays. I remember them calling each other “honey bear” and “darling.” It went from that to me sitting on the staircase hearing something quite different—not fights, but exchanges that revealed a definite lack of closeness. Around the time of the first Harry Potter film I remember my mum driving me into school and telling me, quite matter-of-factly: “Your father and I are getting a divorce.” There was no big song and dance. It was a classically British, pragmatic moment. And I don’t recall feeling any great sense of distress at the time, or anger when my mum told me Dad had met someone else. I was only twelve years old, after all, and likely more concerned about which girl I was going to try to chat up in the playground that day.

After that, Dad moved out during the week and returned home at the weekends, when Mum would leave to stay with her sister, my auntie Lindy. An unusual set-up, I guess, which lasted for a couple of years. It was great for us as teenagers because it meant, come the weekend, that we could get away with pretty much anything. When Mum was around, you could barely tap a cigarette box within half a mile without her shouting, “What are you boys up to?” With Dad, it was all a little more laissez-faire. I remember him padding down the stairs at three in the morning one Saturday to find me and a couple of buddies making pancakes in the kitchen. “What the bloody hell are you doing?” he demanded.

“Er, making pancakes.”

He shrugged. “Okay,” he said. Then he smiled and trudged back up to bed.

My parents’ divorce didn’t upset me like it might upset some other kids. I didn’t want them to be living together and suffering just because they thought it was the right thing for me. If they were happier apart, that made perfect sense to me. Even when Mum and I moved from Redleaf, the only home I’d ever known, to a much smaller house on a nearby council estate, I remember being glad that she seemed happier. And when she softened the blow of moving house by agreeing that we could get Sky TV, I was made up. It’s amazing what seems important to you when you’re a kid.

My dad was, I think it’s fair to say, suspicious about my early involvement in the film industry. He wasn’t particularly worried about child fame, but I think he did have a concern that I might not be spending enough time with ordinary people, or Muggles, for want of a better word. I can understand his suspicion. He had worked incredibly hard to get where he was. He had four kids by the age of twenty-six. He knew the value of a pound and he was, I think, very concerned that his sons should, too. He wanted us to learn and emulate his incredibly strong work ethic. It must have been strange for him when I started earning money of my own from acting at an early age without having to work for it as hard as he did. Perhaps he was robbed of his paternal role. In a situation like that, it would be only natural that one might take a step back.

Sometimes that manifested itself in ways I found difficult to take. At the premiere of the fourth Potter film, when I had my mum and dad sitting either side of me, he teased me when the credits started rolling by saying: “Well, you weren’t in it much, were you?” His lack of enthusiasm seemed harsh at the time, but with the benefit of hindsight I find myself reading it differently. I now know, from speaking to his friends and workmates, the way my dad talked about me when I wasn’t there. I now know he was very proud of me. I also now know that it’s a classic British male trait, that reluctance to express emotion and say what you really think. I don’t believe for a moment that my dad’s suspicion of the film business meant that he didn’t feel proud or care about me then. I think he just didn’t know how to say it. He was trying to figure