

## Felicity Jones

# “I feel my job is almost like becoming a monk or a nun - it's a calling”

It's been a meteoric rise from *Chalet Girl* to leading a rebellion in the new *Star Wars* franchise - but what's the force behind Oscar-nominated actress, Felicity Jones? Nick Morgan goes on a mission to find out

PHOTOGRAPH JAY L CLENDENIN/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

**F**elicity Jones was 'working' as a maid scrubbing the scum from showers when I first met her. This month, she's graduated to beating up Stormtroopers, stealing the blueprints to the original Death Star space station and generally saving the universe.

A few years ago, I interviewed the up-and-coming actress in the Austrian ski resort of St Anton, while she was filming *Chalet Girl*. We met in her caravan and sat opposite one another at the fold-down table. She looked the part, fresh from the set in her purple chalet maid's uniform, bare-faced and with 'dragged backwards through a hedge' tousled hair.

She pre-empted my questions before I asked them - her father was a journalist, so maybe she has a nose for it. Later, she says of my profession, 'Interviewing someone is similar to preparing a character, isn't it? You're just asking

questions: "Who's this person? Why did they make that choice? Why are they doing that?" You're being Sherlock Holmes.' So, there we were, sitting in a mobile home in the heart of Tirol, surrounded by the Alps covered with crispy white snow; Jones is a megastar-in-the-making pretending to be a chalet girl and, as far as she's concerned, I'm doing an impression of a fictional detective. In this profile, I investigate what makes this girl tick... tick... tick.

### Grit plus luck

Jones says success comes from: 'Hard work, never giving up, even if you are turned down for jobs - and a little bit of luck.' This 'success equals grit plus luck' formula is far from the whole truth. In a later interview, she digs a little deeper: 'Without sounding too pretentious, I feel my job is almost like becoming a monk or a nun - it's a calling.' >>>



>>> To understand Jones's passion; why she's so driven; her serious edge, it's useful to consider her youth. While other girls her age may have been lusting after boy bands, it's widely known that she was spending hours embroiled in heated political debate with her father and older brother. Every Sunday, their table would be piled high with newspapers from across the political spectrum, and they would read, analyse and talk about current affairs. At one point, she considered studying law. 'I'm so thankful that I didn't do that,' she told her home-town newspaper, the *Birmingham Post*, 'I don't know if I would have survived it.'

Her mother, who worked in advertising, was also unconventional by traditional standards, introducing Jones to French and Swedish cinema at a young age – but the film the actress remembers most is *Gone With The Wind*. 'I remember watching it with my mother when I was quite young. She absolutely loved Vivien Leigh, so it must have been a formative experience for me, thinking, "Oh, maybe one day I'll be like Vivien Leigh."'

Jones says she grew up embracing every opportunity to do something physical. That included horse riding, biking, surfing and skiing. 'My brother and I were always pushing our parents because we wanted to go further and faster. When he became adept at rollerblading, I had to be good, too. We always pushed the boundaries of how late we could stay out doing those things.'

She was just three years old when her parents divorced, and Jones says the experience left her with a great need for financial independence; always wanting to be self-reliant. She says, 'I think it kind of showed that things don't always pan out; that they're not always as comfortable as they seem.'

Jones remains close to her family. Before filming *The Da Vinci Code* sequel, *Inferno*, she had it written into her contract that, when her brother's wife gave birth, she'd be allowed time off the set to visit them. Director, Ron Howard, said, 'She was going to blow the movie if we couldn't rearrange the schedule and let that happen.'

### Childhood in the spotlight

At the age of 11, Jones auditioned for Central Junior Television Workshop, a well-connected youth drama group regularly visited by talent scouts. She got a main role in the children's TV

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series, *The Worst Witch*, and later a part alongside Keira Knightley in the TV feature film, *The Treasure Seekers*.

After turning 15, Jones landed the part of Emma Grundy in the Radio 4 serial drama, *The Archers*. She worked on the soap for almost a decade, and she credits it as the place that she learned her craft. 'I started on *The Archers* as a teenager and I continued all through university. At Oxford, I remember being in the library one day and jumping on the train to Birmingham [where the show is recorded] the next.'

### Balancing act

At university, Jones read English. 'Going somewhere like Oxford meant I could act and be part of the theatre there, and study at the same time. I loved it. I met my best friends, who I'm still really close to, there. I'm so lucky that I had that experience.'

Post graduation – she got a 2:1 – a string of TV period dramas led to a leading role in Ricky Gervais's *Cemetery Junction* and *Chalet Girl*. Both did well without setting the world on fire. The first film that nudged her into the big league was the largely improvised *Like Crazy*, a low-key romance with *Star Trek* actor, Anton Yelchin [who died tragically in an accident last year after his car crushed him in his driveway]. Jones plays a British college student who falls for an American. Things go horribly

### WATCH OUT FOR...

- ***Inferno***: Jones alongside Tom Hanks solving art puzzles in this *The Da Vinci Code* sequel. Adapted from the Dan Brown page-turner, you will learn about great medieval poet, Dante – and watch people running around art galleries. DVD due out January/February.
- ***Rogue One: A Star Wars Story***: Jones takes the lead in this epic space opera. She's a selfish loner who grows a heart, melts ours and saves the universe, of course.
- ***A Monster Calls***: Co-starring with Sigourney Weaver, Jones is a mother dying of cancer. The story focuses on her son dealing with his grief and the titular fantasy monster that comes to visit him.
- ***Collide***: Due for release in February, this is a gangster action romp with Jones alongside Brit icons, Anthony Hopkins and Ben Kingsley.



With her on-screen son, played by Lewis MacDougall, in drama, *A Monster Calls*

Jones as action hero, Jyn Erso, on her quest to steal the Death Star plans in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*



In *Chalet Girl* and, right, gracing the red carpet for the *Inferno* premiere in October

Game changer: *The Theory Of Everything* with Eddie Redmayne

wrong when she's banned from the United States after overstaying her visa term. Her performance got her the Sundance Special Jury Prize for acting and the *Empire* magazine award for best female newcomer. Perhaps, more importantly, it put her on the radar of A-list directors. In 2014, she starred as Stephen Hawking's wife, Jane, in the biopic, *The Theory Of Everything*, for which she got an Oscar nomination for best actress.

### Working with the greats

Earlier this year, she was in the company of Hollywood royalty, Tom Hanks, making *Inferno*. 'I love *Sleepless In Seattle!*' she says. Before meeting Hanks, she familiarised herself with his back catalogue, but wasn't intimidated: 'I felt totally embraced by him,' she says. 'He is so non-egotistical – he hasn't been corrupted by fame in any way.'

In the next six months, Jones has three films in UK cinemas: *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* [she plays Jyn Erso,

a rogue enlisted by the Rebel Alliance to steal the plans to the Death Star before the events of the original trilogy]; *A Monster Calls*, a bittersweet tale based on the children's novel and widely tipped for Oscar glory; and *Collide*, with British acting legends, Anthony Hopkins and Ben Kingsley.

Despite an undoubtedly bright future, what makes Jones so endearing is that she takes none of it for granted. 'No matter how much you do, when you get to the end of a film, you think, "Is this going to be the last one?" You feel as if you're back to square one,' she says. It's partly this self-doubt that drives her, and makes her go the extra mile to do her job well.

When she got the part in *Chalet Girl*, she spent two months immersed in the grubby reality – scrubbing, cleaning and cooking. 'I can make a great canapé now,' she told me. I hope I can be forgiven for my poor imitation of Sherlock Holmes back then – but I didn't have to be a great detective to spot star quality.

PHOTOGRAPHS: REZ; LUCASFILM LTD.; THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER; 2016; 60 SECONDS WITH FELICITY JONES; YOUTUBE; THE GUARDIAN; 2015; THE RED BULLETIN; 2016; DAILY MAIL; 2012; RADIO TIMES; 2016; THE STYLIST MAGAZINE; 2013; THE TELEGRAPH; 2016; ACTORS ON ACTORS; FELICITY JONES AND JENNY SLATE; YOUTUBE