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UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

In one of his most candid interviews to date, Russell Crowe reveals that while his most important relationship will always be with his sons, he's finally ready to find love again. By Elaine Lipworth



Russell Crowe is gazing out of the window of his gold-tinged suite at the Beverly Hills Hotel, an iconic Hollywood landmark. He turns around when I'm ushered in, greets me with a firm handshake, and gestures to the desk in front of him. "Cup of tea, coffee, roast chicken, pizza? Anything you like," he offers cheerily. I ask for tea; Crowe orders coffee, stubbing out a cigarette into an overflowing ashtray. Our drinks arrive from room service; Crowe takes a sip of his, then lowers his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "This is a latte. Crappy American coffee with foamy bits, not a proper coffee," he laughs.

Muscular and bearded, wearing a black polo shirt over jeans, the actor, 52, is in great shape – in stark contrast to the character he plays in his new film *The Nice Guys*. It's a stylish, '70s-era crime/buddy comedy and Crowe plays Jackson Healy, a burly bruiser of a hit man, opposite Ryan Gosling as Holland March, a bumbling private investigator and single father. Crowe piled on the kilos for the role to create a physical difference between the pair that is intrinsically comical onscreen, but he's since lost 24 kilograms and made headlines with his weight loss.

I've interviewed Crowe many times and have always liked him. He's direct, enthusiastic and reflective. A devoted father to Charles, 12, and Tennyson, nine, from his marriage to Danielle Spencer, he politely asks about my family before launching into a discussion about his own sons. "They live in Sydney with their mum and if I am in the city I get to have them on weekends," he says. The boys also join him for extended stays at his 566-hectare Nana Glen property near Coff's Harbour in northern NSW. "But the farm is not practical just for a weekend, you need to be there in the school holidays when you really have some time," says the actor. "They are still young enough that

even though we have our own bedrooms in the places where we live together, they choose to sleep in the same room as me." His face lights up. "It's just fantastic, there is nothing cooler than being that close to your kids. One of my greatest fears is that over time they won't want to spend all of their school holidays there with me. Because that is the best part of my year, when I have them to myself."

They're revealing remarks, displaying a side of the actor which is often overlooked – the emotional, vulnerable family man, and the proud father. Crowe split up from Spencer in 2012 after nine years of marriage, and is currently single. The former couple are clearly on good terms as they co-parent their sons, with Crowe commenting that he "respects" Spencer's parenting structures: "I follow the rules she puts in place."

Reports over the years and ongoing displays of solidarity have suggested Crowe wouldn't rule out reconciling with his ex. Early last year he told the UK's *Sunday Times*, "I've loved Danielle Spencer since 1989; that's never going to change", while she disclosed to *Sunday Style* in April 2015 that "we've been on and off and in and out of each other's lives for a very long time".

But today, Crowe reveals that he's finally ready to find love again in a new relationship. "There is a craving for some sort of intimacy in the future... and I'm not talking sexually; it is starting to grow inside me again," he says. "I really need that. I thought I could just tough it out and not worry too much. But you just want the feeling that you have someone you can make a plan with." (In the weeks following our interview, rumours swirl of Crowe being linked to New Zealand-born artist Gabrielle Pool, but no romance has been confirmed.)

The actor, however, remains much less certain about remarrying. "Nothing that has happened to me has changed my belief ►

in the beauty of marriage, but would I elect to do it again? I'm not sure. I have what I feel is an obligation to my kids, to not confuse their lives too much. It's already pretty tricky for them. There's life itself, then there's life as a famous person's kids."

In contrast to his own children's lives, there was little financial stability for Crowe growing up. Born in Wellington in 1964, his family moved to Sydney when he was four, where his parents Jocelyn and John ran a catering business for film sets. It gave Crowe his first taste of acting and he was cast as an orphan in the TV series *Spyforce* by age six (the first of many bit parts as a child actor). The family moved back to New Zealand in 1978 and Crowe attended a private high school in Auckland before leaving at age 16 to pursue acting full-time. By the early '80s, he was back in Australia performing onstage in *Grease*, *The Rocky Horror Show* and *Blood Brothers*.

I've always found Crowe to be engaged and communicative in interviews; years ago,

He says that specific instruction came from his ex-wife. "It's a sensible thing."

Crowe hasn't forgotten his roots and makes a point of not spoiling his children. "You have to make sure they realise what a 'normal' experience is and things [like travel] they get to do aren't because they are special, or because their dad is special, it is just a bit of luck," he says. "I will never, ever put them in a situation financially where they don't have to [earn money] themselves. I've told them, 'I don't care what you do in your life, but if you do the thing you love, you are going to have much more fun.'" Are his sons planning to follow in his showbiz footsteps, then? "My little one is hilarious," smiles Crowe. "I asked him, 'What do you think you'll do when you grow up?' He said, 'Well, Dad, I'm sifting through my options.' The other day he said he would either be a cook or a stand-up comedian."

If Crowe's son has inherited his father's talents, comic or otherwise, he has a bright future ahead of him. From his impressive

"It's not about gags," says the actor, who plays it straight. "It's about believing in the situation and then watching it become more and more absurd, but making it feel real." It was also the first time he and Ryan Gosling worked together (their characters reluctantly team up to investigate the case of a girl who's gone missing) and there's undeniable chemistry between the pair.

For Gosling, it was also the realisation of a goal. "Russell is an acting hero of mine," he tells me. "Seeing him go from *Gladiator* to *The Insider* and make such an about-face from one film to another was a big moment for me. I always wanted to work with him and figured we'd star in a drama together. But to do this, where I find myself talking to a giant bee with Russell Crowe," laughs Gosling, referring to a bizarre moment in the film, "is the perfect way for it to happen – doing something neither of us have ever done before."

"We have a natural 'thing' together," Crowe says about his co-star, before getting up from the desk, walking around the room and glancing out the window at the picture-perfect Beverly Hills locale. I comment that he's seemed ambivalent about LA in the past. "I don't feel that way anymore," he quips back. "I've been followed around by a quote I gave in the early '90s. In reality, I really like LA. The best thing about it is the private dinner parties; I can create a party at the drop of a hat. Let's see, who was here the other night?" He sits down again and leans back in his chair. "Jim Jefferies [the Australian comedian], RZA from the Wu-Tang Clan [the rapper who appeared alongside Crowe in *American Gangster*], Samantha Barks [his *Les Misérables* co-star], and Glenn Hughes from Deep Purple. You have an amazing ability in this town to put together a room full of genuinely nice people, who all just happen to have achieved incredible things."

"THERE IS A CRAVING FOR SOME SORT OF INTIMACY... I REALLY NEED THAT"

though, he was more defensive. Frequently attacked in the tabloids as fiery and bad tempered, today he says those old reports were based on misconceptions as well as quotes that were taken out of context. While they don't worry him, he's still concerned about the effect they may have on his family.

"My kids are old enough now to Google, and you somehow have to explain to them about other people's interpretations of who you are, what you may have said, and why so much they read is absurd," he says. "You discover how impossible it is. I've been doing lead roles in feature films for 26 years, right from the beginning of the internet, so now they're not allowed to Google me anymore!"

portrayal of a suburban skinhead in *Romper Stomper* (1992) to his Oscar-winning role as Maximus Decimus Meridius in Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000), and his equally compelling turn as a tobacco industry whistleblower in *The Insider* (1999), the actor has delivered a slew of powerful performances. His extensive CV also includes a mix of critical and box-office success stories, such as *L.A. Confidential* (1997), *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), *American Gangster* (2007) and *Man Of Steel* (2013).

The Nice Guys, an action-fuelled, mismatched-buddy flick from director Shane Black, showcases what is arguably Crowe's funniest performance to date.

MY BRILLIANT CAREER A look back at Crowe's greatest movies

STAR APPEAL (from left) Crowe in his compelling *Romper Stomper* role; with Jack Thompson in *The Sum Of Us*; in *L.A. Confidential* with Guy Pearce; his Oscar-winning turn in *Gladiator*; 2001's *A Beautiful Mind*; high-seas drama in *Master And Commander: The Far Side Of The World*; 2007's *American Gangster*.





CROWE'S CREW (clockwise from far left) Russell Crowe with his sons Charles (at far left) and Tennyson; on the red carpet with ex Danielle Spencer; happy families in 2010; with the Rabbitohs.

Even so, home for the actor will always be Australia. It's no secret Crowe identifies fully with his adopted country, but it seems astonishing that he's still not a citizen – a revelation the actor made public in March last year during an interview with Britain's *Radio Times* magazine. His applications for citizenship have been rejected twice, in 2006 and 2013, because of a loophole in the law: immigration applicants who were out of the country for specified amounts of time between 2000 and 2002 were denied citizenship. During that time Crowe was away from Australia filming and he's now standing firm on the issue.

"Look, [citizenship] is something that I could very easily create for myself," he says. "But my point is that there are 250,000 New Zealanders who have contributed to the country, whose kids have grown up there and who are upstanding taxpaying citizens, who get shafted because of the change in the law – and I just happen to be one of those 250,000 people."

"It's absurd. Wherever I go in the world, I'm representing Australia. I have been contacted by the government on many occasions to stand up for them, whether it is meeting this ambassador or that ambassador, or hosting this or that event."

He chuckles, then adds, "I work on behalf of my country as a sub-level cultural ambassador. I'm a living national treasure according to the National Trust of Australia. I just think they should say one day, 'Oh, by the way, here is your citizenship,' but there are these hoops you have to jump through."

Immigration concerns aside, Crowe appears to be remarkably happy. His beloved rugby league team, the South Sydney Rabbitohs, continues to be a major passion. His face lights up discussing the team's 2014 NRL premiership victory, their first in 43 years ("It took nine years of my life to get to that championship win. It was fantastic!") and whenever he's back in Sydney, you can guarantee a close-up shot of him in the stands.

Professionally, the actor plans to spend more time behind the camera, following the success of the World War I drama *The Water Diviner*, in which Crowe both directed and starred. Despite it only being released on Boxing Day in 2014, it became the highest-grossing Australian film of that year and raked in nearly \$15 million at the Aussie box office. Next up, Crowe has his eye on another local story, this time reportedly working with comedian Ahn Do to turn his memoir, *The Happiest Refugee*, into a film.

"People say there are complications in directing," says Crowe of his latest passion. "That you step on a film set and suddenly you have all these decisions to make. But I say, 'If you have done nine years in the corporate environment of rugby league, directing a movie is a doddle!'"

His number one priority leading into the future, however, remains fatherhood. As his two boys head into their teenage years, it's something that Crowe wants them to recognise as his most important role – and one that's constantly evolving.

"For a long time I had this thing with my kids where I said, 'I'm not going to stop and do photographs with people when I'm with you,'" he says, launching into another anecdote about them. "Then one day one of them said, 'I know you do that for us, but you make a lot of people very sad.' So we changed the policy. I said 'OK, if people come up to us, we will do photographs.' We just so happened to have that weekend together and the first day we did 35 or 40 photographs, and on the second day we did more. On the morning of the third day we were having a walk by ourselves, and after the 14th person asked for a photo my son turned to me and said, 'We're changing the policy back, Dad!'" **S**

The Nice Guys is in cinemas on May 26.

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SCENE STEALER (from left) In musical *Les Misérables*; as Superman's dad, Jor-El, in *Man Of Steel*; with Ryan Corr in 2014's *The Water Diviner*; as a hit man in *The Nice Guys*, with co-star Ryan Gosling.

