

# YOU

25 JULY 2021

**WIN**

A new pair of shoes every month for a year

- Breast cancer
- A violent childhood
- Getting sacked

## VICTORIA DERBYSHIRE

on how to stay positive no matter what life throws at you

**SPOOKY**

**'HOUSES SPEAK TO ME'**

What would yours say?





# ELIZABETH DAY

TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

## Don't define me by my age



I've always liked Julianne Moore. I say that even though I've never actually met her. But I have confidence that if our paths ever did cross, I would still feel the same.

The actress has always seemed to embody a dual strength and elegance. In an industry which is notoriously obsessed with superficiality, she has always striven for depth: choosing interesting roles, maintaining a politely guarded private life and refusing to have plastic surgery even though the pressure to stay stuck in the unwrinkled varnish of youth is especially intense in Hollywood.

Recently, the 60-year-old used an interview with *As If* magazine to dismantle the sexism inherent in the phrase 'ageing gracefully'. She pointed out, rightly, that it is a phrase used only to describe women and never men. No one has ever said the 80-year-old Harrison Ford is 'ageing gracefully'. In fact, he's just reprised his role as the action-hero lead Indiana Jones.

Even when he recently injured his shoulder on set, leading to the temporary halting of filming, no one rushed to comment that he was too old to have taken on the role.

Men are allowed to age powerfully. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be more demure. If they really must get older, the sexist reasoning goes, then surely they can at least do so subtly, without too much fuss and while preserving their femininity?

But being graceful is yet one more straitjacket into which we bind our women. When you are graceful, you are delicate,

discreet, composed, tasteful and held at a slight remove. Being graceful doesn't allow much scope for messiness or contradictory feeling. Graceful behaviour does not mean doing your own stunts – climbing the world's tallest building, holding one's breath underwater for around six minutes, and jumping 25,000 feet out of a plane as the 59-year-old Tom Cruise has done for the *Mission: Impossible* films. If Julianne Moore did the same she would be accused of being unseemly and a bit ridiculous.

'Graceful' sounds like a compliment but, in reality, is simply another way to make women feel less than. As Julianne pointed out during

### 'AGEING GRACEFULLY' IS ONLY USED TO DESCRIBE WOMEN

the course of the interview, ageing is not something anyone has control over, so the idea that one can seek to do it in a certain way is actively disempowering. It introduces an illusory metric that no one can ever live up to. And so we all fail.

There are two alternatives to ageing gracefully. One is to age disgracefully, but that also carries with it a certain weight to rebel against the inevitable march of time. We don't all have to dye our hair purple and get tattoos in our 70s to prove to the outside world that we still feel our wild teenage selves at heart (although if you want to, then that's wonderful).

It's admirable to refuse to be defined by one's age, but why should that be necessary? Why can't we be proud of our years and of our accumulated wisdom while also being grateful that we are alive? Because the second alternative to ageing is, of course, death, for which there is as yet no cure. And no one has ever been praised for 'dying gracefully'.

My attitude to all this is perhaps best encompassed by another strong, powerful woman. The actress Eva Mendes gave an interview last year in which she suggested a different approach, inspired by the Spanish language. She said that "instead of saying I am 46, I wish I could say, "I have 46 years to me" because in Spanish it's very beautiful. It's like I don't feel 46 but I do feel like I have 46 years of experience to me. I just find that so empowering."

I agree. So, from this woman who has 42 years: don't bother about being graceful. It's far more attractive to be wise.

### THIS WEEK I'M...



**HAVING** a Ricari Studios experience at London's NoMad Hotel. A machine that reduces fatty deposits? Yes, please!



**FEELING ROSY** with my Trinnie London Flush Blush. Creamy with a beautifully natural look – plus the pots are stackable.



**WATCHING** the new season of *The Real Housewives of Potomac* on Hayu. The only show on TV.