

'Wakey, wakey!' It's time for horse riding, walking and films

I've got sporty only as I've got older. There's no point playing tennis with Rupert; I get too upset because I always lose.

Interview by Caroline Rees

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or Rupert Penry-Jones and Dervla Kirwan Photo: GETTY IMAGES

Weekends are totally family focused. I don't think my husband [actor Rupert Penry-Jones] ever switches off.

But he's a very hands-on dad and misses his kids when he's away. So it's a time for us to eat together, listen to each other, play and not rush around.

That was the idea in moving from London to Hampshire two years ago. I hated the cars, the rubbish and the foxes. I remember waking up at five o'clock one morning [in London], and there was just incessant noise.

Mornings always kick off with both children - Florrie is five, Pete is three - flinging open the door and saying, "Wakey, wakey!", usually at seven o'clock.

It would be a perfect weekend if they'd lie in but I know that I'd only have to get up and check what was happening. I'll do breakfast, ideally with fresh fruit and pancakes.

Rupert works very hard and comes home late on a Friday so he walks the dog in the morning because that's his chill-out time; I'll go in the afternoon. We've got a very intelligent border collie called Blue.

There's a pleasant walk nearby through a forest and fields of ponies, and we go over the South Downs - all of it is breathtaking.

I'd much rather go for a long walk than spend an hour in the gym. It's good for your brain to be stimulated outside, and that's when ideas come to me.

The kids don't like walking, so I do a lot of bribery, such as inventing the jelly bean producing tree half a mile away.

I take the kids horse riding every weekend at Quob Stables - the people there are lovely. I've been passionate about riding all my life, and it's when I feel most free, but this time is focused on them.

I love watching them learn, but I think Florrie is more interested in the packed lunch. She loves her food, bless her. Rupert might come with us but he'll probably be learning his lines.

In the afternoon, we all watch a film, usually at home, but we went to the cinema twice the other weekend, which was brilliant.

There are some fabulous Japanese animation films for children, such as Howl's Moving Castle and Kiki's Delivery Service. I also watch a lot of nature programmes and my kids are following in my footsteps. David Attenborough's Life series is phenomenal. He's a wonderful modern soothsayer.

It's important for each child to have separate time with the parent who's been predominantly away, so Saturday might be Pete's day and Sunday Florrie's. Pete is obsessed with cars.

I took him to Beaulieu, where they had cars from Top Gear, and when we go riding there are tractors and trucks to climb around. Florrie would be happy to colour and stick things together all day.

We eat at home. I'm a terrible cook but I wish I wasn't. Food brings people together and I want my kids to be introduced to different types.

Rupert's a brilliant cook. He's good at pasta and shellfish and he does a good thing with Puy lentils and tuna, which sounds disgusting but is delicious.

Our private time in the evening is spent watching movies and American telly: I like the comedy series Hung, The Vampire Diaries, Will and Grace. I tape a lot. It sounds like a busman's holiday but that's who we are.

On Sunday, if the weather is good, it's a nice walk in the morning then the local pub for Sunday lunch. The owners' kids go to Florrie's school so it's actually a relaxing time for us. Usually, friends come around in the afternoon and enjoy looking after the kids.

Sometimes we just play in the garden. Now that spring is in the air, we're trying to grow things and get the kids' hands dirty.

The coast is only 10 miles away so we might spend a half-day playing on the dunes, trying to keep warm and having typical British ice cream.

But the last time we went to the beach we stayed in the car while a deluge of Biblical proportions fell down. Chichester and Winchester have a lot to offer but small children don't really want to look at cathedrals. I do. I love all that.

My own "weekend" tends to be in the middle of the week. I'll go riding, have a golf lesson play tennis with friends. I've got sporty only as I've got older. There's no point playing tennis with Rupert; I get too upset because I always lose.

Sunday evening is a nice bottle of wine and a very good film on DVD. That's really all we're capable of. We have pretty similar taste, though Rupert likes horror films and I hate them - invariably, women are being hacked to death. I love the fantasy of films like Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and The Hurt Locker was brilliant.

My favourite things...

- Thai food - pretty much all of it
- Anything by Sade, especially her latest album, Soldier of Love
- Fashion. I like to surf designers' websites to see what's coming out
- Liberty in London is my favourite shop - ever
- Dervla Kirwan stars in the film Ondine, which is in cinemas now