

I had two choices when my children grew up and left home: go mad with empty nest syndrome or move to Los Angeles to live with my sister for some excitement and adventure in Part Two of my life. And I had a much better chance of meeting George Clooney if I lived in the same country as him.

But never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I'd end up having lunch with a proper Hollywood film director in the famous Chateau Marmont on Sunset Boulevard trying to think of actresses who could play me and my sister (and various other friends and family members) in a movie.

My sister, Julia Fordham, is a successful singer/songwriter and gets invited to many openings, parties and Hollywood events. Her invites always allow a 'plus one', which was me, experiencing life in the shadow of her celebrity. Since 'write what you know' is the well-worn axiom, I wrote a book, *Plus One: A Year in the Life of a Hollywood Nobody*, about being a stranger in a very, very strange land.

Trouble is, the world and her sister want to be a writer in this town. Every table in Starbucks has at least

one poor (often deluded) soul staring at a laptop until their foreheads ache, trying to think of an original story line. Didn't Joe Eszterhas get \$5 million for writing *Basic Instinct*? That could be me.

When people ask what I do for a living, I've started saying I work in non-profit – then follow up with the punch line: 'I'm a writer.' The sad, sorry truth is that very few people actually make a living at writing and most need other sources of income. A trust fund or a rich spouse is the ideal but, at some point, we usually have to roll up our sleeves and (gulp) get a proper job.

Each year, around 30,000 scripts are registered with the Writers Guild of America, of which 30 may get made into films, and most of those will bomb at the box office. Encouraging, isn't it?

Yet Mary McGuckian of Pembridge Pictures is planning to make two movies – one based on my book *Plus One*, and one about the making of



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the film of my book, a sort of mockumentary. Does that mean two cheques for me?

Let's hope so, because I need a bigger apartment. My 28-year-old son Max is moving to LA to live with me and my new husband Colin. Max says he can't face another bleak winter in Blighty and wants to write a book. Of course he does. I've written a couple of scripts as well and if I had a pound for every producer who has promised me a job on their show if one of them gets picked up, I'd have...let me see...nearly 20 quid.

I did get to meet George Clooney. Unfortunately, he prefers his women half my age and four sizes smaller, but I can confirm that he is gorgeous and charming in 'real life' and all men should look like him.

Having been to many Hollywood parties and events, I'm lucky enough to have seen all the big movie stars up close and personal. Cate Blanchett has flawless skin and is jaw-droppingly beautiful in the flesh – but if she wants to play me in the movie, she's going to have to eat a lot more cake. Movies are notoriously slow to get off the ground, so by the time mine gets made, Meryl Streep could be playing

me. There is an upside to an American playing a Brit (unless you're Dick Van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*): an almost guaranteed Oscar nomination.

My dream team would be Emma Thompson playing me and Kate Winslet playing Julia (think *Sense and Sensibility* with songs, sex and shopping). And I'm thinking Brenda Blethyn to be our mum. Dad fancies Michael Caine to play him. Try this at home: who would you choose to play you in a movie about your life?

I've learnt enough about Tinseltown insanity to realise that the director will want more conflict and drama in the film than there is in the book, so I won't be surprised to see Emma and Kate mud-wrestling over George Clooney and then for him to ride off into the sunset with our mother. Maybe if Meryl Streep plays Mum...

Claire Fordham's memoir *Plus One: A Year in the Life of a Hollywood Nobody* (Kensington Publishing Corporation) is available from amazon.co.uk