

# “I want my daughter to know there are children who aren’t as lucky as she is”

## Carey Mulligan

Actress, 31

THE  
MAGAZINE  
INTERVIEW  
**CHRISTINA  
PATTERSON**

**C**arey Mulligan is cuddling a baby. “The most important thing in my life,” she says, “is my baby.” But the baby she is holding in her arms is not her daughter, Evelyn, who will be one in a couple of weeks. The baby she is cuddling is just two months old. She is the ninth daughter of Fatima and Mohammad and we are sitting with them, their eight other daughters and Fatima’s mother, in the caravan they now call home.

Four years ago, the family lived in a nice house in a village near Daraa, in southwest Syria, just a few miles across the border. But when a bomb blew up their next-door neighbour’s house, they decided it was time to leave. Now they are among the 80,000 people who live in the Zaatari refugee camp, in caravans that are really just shacks. This place, which sprung up in the desert in 2012, is now one of Jordan’s biggest cities. It has shops, schools and hospitals, and a “high street” known as the Champs-Elysées, but is surrounded by barbed wire and feels like a giant prison.

Mulligan has been here before. As an ambassador for War Child, a charity that helps children who have been affected by conflict, she made her first trip to Zaatari a year ago. If she is shocked by anything she has seen or heard, she certainly isn’t showing it. She is quiet. She is polite. Almost waif-like in her War Child T-shirt and plain black trousers, and without a scrap of make-up, she looks less like a Hollywood star and more like a child. Her flight was delayed. She has just snatched a few hours sleep. But she was the one who leapt out of the minibus on the way here to buy us coffees at the garage. It’s clear, from the hours I’ve spent with her so far, that she is here to listen and to serve.

Mulligan first got involved with War Child when her brother, then a captain in the British army, helped save a girls’ school in Afghanistan whose water supply had been poisoned by the Taliban, by building a new well. Since then, she has worked hard to raise the profile of the charity. Two years ago, she and her husband, Marcus Mumford, the lead singer of the folk-rock band

Mumford & Sons, who’s also a War Child ambassador, organised an alternative charity concert, which they called a “winter wassail”. With contributions from celebrity friends, it raised £300,000.

Syria used to spend a higher percentage of its GDP on education than the UK, but now many Syrian children can’t even read or write. War Child is making sure that the children in the camp get at least a basic level of education. As well as classes in maths and literacy, it also teaches children how to protect themselves from some of the dangers of the camp, where there are regular reports of sexual harassment and violence. And it helps them to process the trauma they have been through.

In one of the caravans, a roomful of girls, all beautifully turned out in colourful clothes and hijabs, are taking part in a “self-expression” session. The girls are given Post-it notes. On one, they are asked to write down “negative situations that impacted you”. On another, they are asked to write down “positive things”. Somebody asks Mulligan if she’d like to get involved. “I don’t know,” says Mulligan, frowning slightly, “what my ‘negatives’ would be. I lost my dog?”

One by one, the girls troop up to the front, stick their notes on the wall and talk about what they have written down. “When we came to Jordan,” one of the girls tells the class, “we first wanted to leave, but now we are participating in activities that are nice. The negative,” she adds, “is that I lost both my parents.”

Through all of this, Mulligan is still. Of course, she knows how to control her emotions; it is one of the skills she has developed as one of our finest actors, and one of the skills that has won her a clutch of awards. She was just 24 when she won a Bafta and an Oscar nomination for her role playing the young Lynn Barber, in the film adaptation of *An Education* — the writer’s memoir about her teenage affair with a conman. After that, Mulligan cemented her reputation with acclaimed roles in *Shame*, the director Steve McQueen’s 2011 film about sex addiction (she ➤➤➤)

PHOTOGRAPH  
**IVOR PRICKETT**



IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE

**BORN INTO CONFLICT** Carey Mulligan, an ambassador for the charity War Child, cradles a baby at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan

played the sex addict's sister) and 2015's Suffragette, during interviews for which she used her platform to speak out about female rights.

**M**ulligan has never been very comfortable with her fame. She hates personal questions. But she realises there is an upside to the public's interest in her — it allows her to draw attention to causes she believes in, whether that's children afflicted by conflict, or the Alzheimer's Society, of which she's also an ambassador (her grandmother has Alzheimer's and is in a care home).

Her charity work has allowed her to put the pressures of her fame into perspective. She has previously said that she found the scrutiny of the red carpet so difficult, she would have tears in her eyes every time she walked along one. Has she got any better at dealing with it?

"I think, honestly, War Child had a role to play in me not caring about that stuff as much," she says. "I used to get so upset because I thought it was so important what I looked like and whether I had fat arms or not... But who gives a shit what you look like? It's so irrelevant. It has nothing to do with the work."

She tries not to read about herself, and avoids all social media, but gets as upset as anyone else when people say unkind things. When a celebrity website published a piece saying she "wasn't pretty enough" to play Daisy in The Great Gatsby, she was hurt. This luminously beautiful young woman, with lips that really do form a perfect cupid's bow, really was hurt. Does she seriously worry about this kind of thing? "Oh yeah!" she says. "Yeah, all the time! But I've been incredibly good recently and haven't looked at anything for a really long time. I've just blocked that part of everything off."

And what about little Evelyn, who she calls Evie? In the minibus on the way to and from Zaatari, she has been sneaking looks at photos of her little girl on her phone. There are so many pressures on girls now to look good. Does she worry for Evie? Mulligan looks surprised. "Oh, gosh, I feel like it's so far away. What I do really feel strongly about is making sure that she understands how big the world is. Half the time, I wish the internet would explode. My desire for her is to understand that she lives in a very big world with lots of other children who aren't as lucky as she is."

Has motherhood changed her?

"I think," says Mulligan carefully, "it's all about life being bigger than work. In my early twenties, everything was about work. If I was about to finish a job and I didn't know what I was going to do directly afterwards, I'd be in a state of panic. I think in terms of having a daughter, I've found seeing other people in distress infinitely more painful."

We are hot and dusty and tired after a day at the camp. When we get back to the hotel, Mulligan goes to her room to freshen up. "I was thinking," she says when

**I'm dying to ask if it is true that they first met when they were 12 at a Christian camp. They became pen pals**

we meet up later, "in the shower: 'get that dust off, how lovely!' And these people would all have been able to do that five years ago, have a bit of a day and then go home to their nice houses and have a shower and wash it off."

In her first trip for War Child, she explains, she went to Goma in the DRC. It was, she says, "like a terrible post-apocalyptic world". But here, she says, "the kids have had such normal lives and lost them. It's like, meeting that girl who had lost both her parents. The way she just said at the end of the sentence 'oh, the negative thing about being here is that both of my parents were killed'. And that has become something that doesn't stop the entire room."

In the time since we arrived back at the hotel, there has been a transformation. Carey Mulligan, who's now 31 but looks much younger, is no longer a charity worker in a baggy T-shirt. She's a film star. She is wearing a simple black tunic and black trousers. She still doesn't look as if she's wearing any make up, but there is something about the way she carries herself, and her poise as she sits cross-legged in her chair, that speaks of power.

She is keen to play down the attention she must get everywhere she goes. "You know," she says, "I pretty much go about my business. I'm not a hugely recognisable face. Most of my work is in independent films. Apart from The Great Gatsby, I haven't done any kind of blockbuster films and I'm not on television, so most of the time I'm barely recognised. Especially when I don't wear any make-up! In New York and LA there are paparazzi and they have some magical way of finding out where you are, but I'm not in New York or LA. I'm in London. I think sometimes it's more challenging when I'm with my husband, and it's a different kind of thing..."

I'm dying to ask about her husband, and their life together, and if it's true that they first met when they were 12 years old at a church camp, and what it's like when one of the coolest young actors of their generation gets together with one of the coolest young musicians. I'm dying to ask if there's any vestige of that evangelical Christian faith now. I know that Mumford's parents founded the UK and Ireland branch of an American evangelical Christian movement called The Vineyard in the 1970s, and that his father married the couple at a farm in Somerset in April 2012. I also know that she won't talk about any of this. My guess, for what it's worth, is that both have retained a bit of that evangelical fervour, without necessarily signing up to the theology that might once have fuelled it.

Before her romance with Mumford, Mulligan dated the American actor Shia LaBeouf, who has a reputation for being a bit of a wild child, followed by the British actor Eddie Redmayne. Mumford and Mulligan were pen pals long before they met up again, apparently at a house party in Nashville in February 2011, at which Mumford & Sons were playing a private gig. They were married by the time they worked on the Coen brothers' film Inside Llewyn Davies, in which she co-starred and he co-produced the music. They live in west London but also have a farm in Devon, where they spend, she tells me, "as much time as we can".

I ask her about her appearance: she is constantly changing what she looks like. "Well," she says, "I've done all sorts of funny things to my hair." It's true: she has been blonde, she's been brunette, she's had long hair, she's had short hair. Was it, I ask, partly about finding an identity while growing up in the public eye? Mulligan wriggles in her chair. "Oh no," she says, "it was literally, like, not wanting to look the same as I did

**DUST BOWL DANCE**  
**Right: Mulligan —**  
**who has a baby**  
**daughter with her**  
**husband, the**  
**folk-rocker Marcus**  
**Mumford (below)**  
**— is shown around**  
**the Zaatari camp by**  
**two young residents**



in the last job. I try to not play the same kind of roles over and over again.”

As a strategy, it seems to have worked. After her first film role, as Kitty Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* in 2005, which came about after she asked Julian Fellowes, who had given a talk at her Surrey boarding school, for advice about how to get into acting, she could easily have ended up in costume dramas for the rest of her life. Instead, she has ranged from Jane Austen’s home counties to New York for *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010) and *Shame* (2011); and suburban LA in *Drive* (2011).

All this, from a girl who had a nice small-town upbringing, from the age of three to eight in Germany, where her father was a hotel manager, before the family moved back to England. It was when she and her brother were in a production of *The King and I*, at school in Düsseldorf, that she got the acting bug that has defined her life.

Amazingly, she failed to get into drama school, but learnt on the job instead. A 2005 TV adaptation of *Bleak House*, with Charles Dance, Timothy West and other “incredible actors” gave her, she says, “a masterclass” in how to do it. She played Ada Clare, Mr Jarndyce’s ward — not, she admits, the most gruelling of parts. “I had very little to do, but tootle around in a dress, so I watched them,” she says. Since then, she has

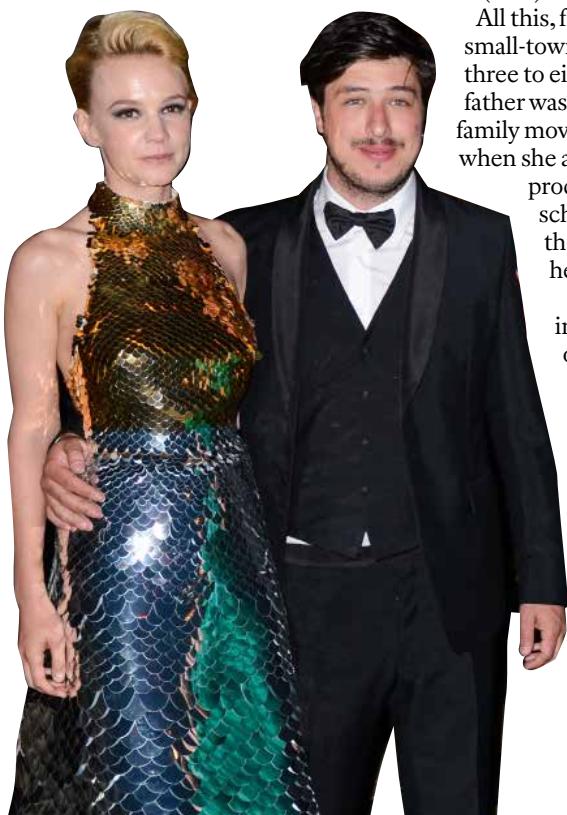
gone on to win accolades from some of the greatest names in theatre. David Hare has said that if he were establishing a National Theatre today, he would start with her. Meryl Streep has said she is “in awe” of Mulligan’s talent. How on earth does that feel?

For a moment, Mulligan looks shy. “I feel like I’ve tricked them,” she says. “It’s super-embarrassing in the moment, and hugely flattering, and something I take home to my mum and go: look what Meryl said! F\*\*\*\*\* Meryl Streep saying these crazy things!”

Mulligan is clearly besotted with her daughter, but that won’t stop her from getting on with her work. Since Evie was born, she has already made one film, *Mudbound*, which will be out next year. She even has plans to get back on stage. Theatre, she says, is much more satisfying than film. “I never sit in a cinema and go, ‘Ooh, I can’t wait to do a film,’” she says. “But every time I go to the theatre, I wish I was up on stage. I miss it.”

Motherhood is tiring. Making films is tiring. Schlepping around refugee camps is tiring. Does she ever relax? “Oh, I mean, by watching *The Great British Bake Off*, eating noodles in front of the TV, going for walks, walking my mum’s dog with her and chatting. Tooting around the shops. I don’t live in Shepherd’s Bush any more, but me and my friend used to go to Westfield and get a coffee, just walk around, pick up the free samples we passed.”

She is self-effacing and sweet — but does she, I ask carefully, ever worry about sounding a bit earnest? Mulligan smiles. “I kind of like being earnest.” ■



*Carey Mulligan is speaking at a War Child event in New York today, on the eve of two global summits — the UN High Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants, and President Obama’s Refugee Leaders’ Summit. Support War Child at [warchild.org.uk/donate](http://warchild.org.uk/donate) or text SAFE to 70444 to donate £3. T&Cs apply*