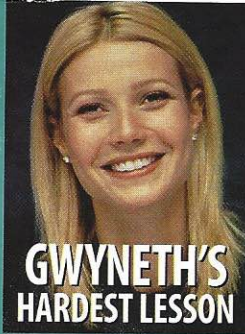


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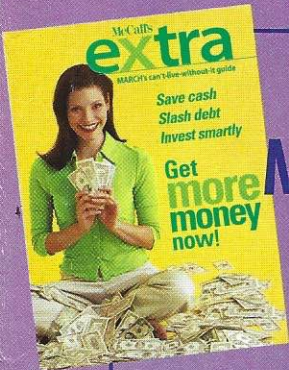
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SAVING & CREDIT

celebrity close-up

How Fergie got



After years of struggling with her weight, her in-laws and her shaky finances, **Sarah Ferguson** is finally in control. In a McCall's exclusive, the duchess opens up about her new life, including her very unusual living arrangement with Prince Andrew.

BY SHERYL BERK • PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL O'NEILL

Feat your heart out, Ally McBeal: Sarah Ferguson makes an entrance at her midtown publicist's office in a stylish black skirt, cut up to there, and stilettos, showing off her shapely legs. Gone are the frumpy dresses and hideous hats; she now favors tapered suits and classic cashmere twin-sets, not to mention to-die-for designer footwear. Her hair—once flaming red—is a soft strawberry blond that falls in long wispy strands around her shoulders.

She's come a long way from the days of being dubbed the Duchess of Pork. "I'm not the old Fergie," she says. "I've moved on."

Besides the physical transformation, Ferguson's attitude has also done a 180. Interviews just a year ago characterized her as flighty, unfocused, even argumentative. Now, though, those words don't apply. She answers every question graciously, and she doesn't even fidget when the tough stuff comes up: the details of her living arrangement with Prince Andrew and the heartbreaking tragedies she's had to weather.

"I'll talk about anything," Ferguson says. "I'm happy to stand up and say, 'This is who I am and this is who I was—the huge hips, the 220 pounds and all. I've made a lot of mistakes, but I've learned.'"

Turning 40 this past year was a major catalyst for the duchess: She's mapped out a plan for herself, eliminating the excess (overeating, overspending) and focusing on what really matters (her kids, her career, her quality of life). If her approach is a little unorthodox (how many

women do you know who live with their exes?), then so be it. "I don't worry about people's opinions anymore," she says.

Victory at last: Winning her lifelong battle of the bulge

A good deal of the duchess's confidence stems from the fact that after being overweight for decades, she has finally managed to slim down and take control of her eating. Several years ago she shed more than 50 pounds, with the help of Weight Watchers and a personal trainer. "In the past I was eating to fill a painful empty space inside me," she explains. "I would starve myself, shed a few pounds, then go back to my old ways." What's allowed her to keep it off this time—besides the incentive (almost \$2 million a year) Weight Watchers reportedly pays her to be its spokesperson—is what she calls "a healthier relationship" with food. Gone are the days of stuffing herself full of cream puffs and crumpets; her breakfast today consists of fruit, a mini bagel and tea; lunch is a large green salad topped with grilled chicken. Dinners are tougher, she admits, since she's often flying or attending a fund-raiser. "Oh, the hors d'oeuvres that go by..." she says longingly. She proudly reports turning down a crême brûlée the night before in favor of a fruit plate.

"I try not to deprive myself all the time—I watch portion sizes—but I allow myself a roll with butter occasionally, some pasta," she notes. "The second I do, however, it's written up in the papers that I'm overeating and how dare I be a role model for Weight Watchers. It makes me furious."

Keeping the weight off is a constant fight, she admits. "It's something I will have to make an effort to do for the rest of ▶

HAIR, GEOFFREY FIRTH FOR JOHN FRIEDA SALON; MAKEUP, GIANA FOR ARTISTS; FASHION STYLIST, MALI LIPENER BAER; PROP STYLIST, SOLANGE AMAR; TWINSET, PAMELA DENNIS; BRACELET AND EARRINGS, STUDIO KARU (NYC)

her groove back

Fergie (continued from p. 21)

my life." She squeezes workouts into her schedule—alternating among an exercise bike, a stair climber and strength training—as often as she can.

Perhaps the biggest change is Ferguson's refusal to feel guilty about her weight. "I think the key is to stop beating yourself up," she says. The support of the millions on the Weight Watchers program also helps bolster her willpower. They flock to her mall appearances, shoving one another out of the way to shake her hand, hug her and tell her they've dropped 20 pounds on the 1-2-3 Success Program. To them, she's the patron saint of lost pounds.

"I've been in their shoes," Ferguson says, "so it's very rewarding to be able to share my story."

The great sacrifice she makes: "I miss my girls terribly"

Ferguson's family life often suffers because of her busy career. She's on the road for more than five weeks throughout the year doing personal appearances for Weight Watchers, and she has dozens of other social and professional obligations that take her away from her daughters, 11-year-old Beatrice and ten-year-old Eugenie (a governess cares for the girls in their mother's absence).

The separations—even if for only a week at a time (Ferguson flies home every weekend and drops the girls off at school on Monday mornings) are "excruciating." She finds calling every day too painful ("I miss them even more"); instead, she faxes them handwritten notes and drawings. "They understand that Mommy has to work," she says. "But we're together for every holiday and every weekend. That's the rule, no exceptions."

The duchess's own childhood has great bearing on how she raises her little princesses. When she was 12, her mother, Susan Wright, deserted her, her father and her older sister, for another man, Hector Barrantes. ("I didn't feel anger toward her," Ferguson says earnestly.) Tragically, Susan Barrantes was killed at age 61, in a car crash in September 1998—just a year after Princess Diana's death in an auto accident. Ferguson was inconsolable. She still carries a picture of her mother in her wallet. "She wasn't able to love openly," she says, her sadness obvious. "But you knew she loved you."

Ferguson wants her own daughters to know they are loved every day. "I have not stopped telling my



Fergie with, from left, Andrew, Beatrice and Eugenie.

children they are wonderful and beautiful and special," she says. "I'm always hugging and kissing them."

Having struggled with weight issues, she makes sure Beatrice and Eugenie eat healthy meals during the week. "On the weekends they can do what they like," she says, and even takes them to the McDonald's in the town of Windsor, near their home. "But Monday through Friday there are no potato chips, no fizzy drinks and absolutely no sweets."

Ferguson is honest with them as well, admitting she's far from perfect. "I don't believe in completely sheltering them from the real world," she says. "They can make their own mistakes—the more the better—because that's how you learn. I call it experimenting with experience, which isn't to say, 'Go out there and do ridiculous things,' but certainly don't be afraid to take a chance."

Why she refuses to ever leave her Prince Charming

As Ferguson forges into the future, nothing is as controversial as the arrangement she has with her ex-husband. She and Prince Andrew, age 40, though divorced for nearly four years, live together with their children in Sunninghill, their estate in England. They have separate bedrooms, and during the week Andrew stays in a pied-à-terre in London and is frequently away on business. The weekends, however, are a family affair: Andrew is in residence, and the divorced couple spend time together with their children. Andrew dates (although he never brings his girlfriends home to Sunninghill), as does Ferguson. She was romantically in-

involved with Italian count Gaddo della Gherardesca for two years, yet now insists they're only friends.

According to Nigel Dempster, a veteran columnist who covers the royal family for London's *Daily Mail*, the unusual home situation is "entirely for their daughters" and will probably last several more years, until the girls are grown. "Sarah is not looking for remarriage to Andrew," he says. "They simply have two children who adore both their parents, so having them live together makes a great deal of sense."

The relationship she has with Andrew, Ferguson says, is one of respect, regard and affection. She flashes some pictures of herself and her daughters on vacation. "Andrew rang me up that day to say he was having a lovely time on holiday on his own, and I told him we were having a good time too," she says, flipping through the photos. "Then I said, 'Isn't it sad? We should be doing this together.' But he reminded me of how it used to be: the press always following us. We agree it's better this way."

Coming to terms with endless tabloid torture

Since the day she and Andrew announced their engagement in 1986, Ferguson became fodder for the British press. It didn't help that she was the polar opposite of her soon-to-be sister-in-law, the Princess of Wales: Where Diana was cool, aloof and stylish, Fergie was funny, playful and a walking fashion faux pas.

Over the years, she says, she and Diana found themselves in a good sister-bad sister routine. "First she was the saint and I was the sinner," says ▶

Fergie (continued from p. 22)

Ferguson. "Then came the bulimia story, and I was the saint and she was the sinner. Now they're doing the same thing with me and Sophie [Rhys-Jones, Prince Edward's wife]."

The 1992 pictures of Ferguson playing footsie with "financial adviser" John Bryan in the south of France (sans her bathing-suit top) caused even more friction with the palace. When Ferguson and Andrew divorced four years later, the duchess lost the right to be called Her Royal Highness. Although Ferguson says she still "adores" her former mother-in-law and teasingly refers to her as "the Boss," Dempster says most members of the royal family don't share the queen's affection for Ferguson. When Prince Edward was married last year, Ferguson's name

hard time.' Do you think that will ever happen?"

Dempster says it will—but slowly.

"Sarah's doing great," he says. "She's paid her dues and impressed people by working off an enormous debt."

Show her the money: Taking control of her financial future

The way Ferguson has dug herself out of the financial hole she was in has not gone without criticism. Monarchs, you see, don't host their own talk shows (*Sarah: Surviving Life*, a 1998 ten-show series, aired on British Sky One TV; "I'd like to be the Oprah of England," she says) or endorse Ocean Spray cranberry juice on commercials (for an estimated \$500,000) or sign on as a special correspondent for the *Today* show (for a reported \$600,000 a year). "It's a great opportunity to talk to people, which is what I do well," she says; her first segment aired in December.

Ferguson defends herself against allegations that you can rent this royal if the price is right. "I was sorely in debt after the divorce," she says, "and I had two little girls to support." The divorce settlement was relatively meager: She got \$495,000 a year plus child support; Diana got \$28 million when she and Charles split. After all the years of running up bills ("Overspending is like overeating—it comes from being out of control"), Ferguson owed more than \$7 million—and Buckingham Palace wasn't about to bail her out of trouble.



The Princess Brides: Fergie and Diana.

So she said yes to still other deals, including speaking on behalf of Wedgwood china (her pay for this is rumored to be \$750,000 a year) and making an Internet endorsement in Europe and South Africa for a company called World Online.

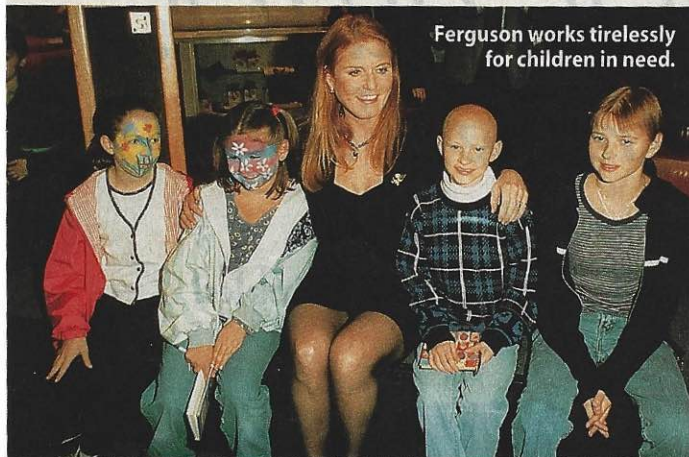
The duchess has a long list of things she still wants to accomplish. She's given herself a deadline of one year to see most of them through. "Why waste time when you know what you want?" she says briskly. "I don't believe in dawdling."

She's writing a novel (jotting characters and plots on flights and in limos) and coming up with a new set of adventures for Budgie, the helicopter hero of her children's-book series. She's also lining up events to raise more money for Chances for Children, the charity she founded in 1994 (see below), and would enjoy landing her own talk show here in the States. "You don't know anyone who might need a host, do you?" she asks, only half jokingly.

With all the planning, it's easy to get caught up in the momentum and forget to appreciate the simple things in life. Ferguson is well aware of that: "I don't want to die from going too fast, too hard and not ever stopping to listen," she says. She plans on taking time out to smell the roses—literally—from a purple bench outside her window at home.

"I want to make more time to paint watercolors and to get really healthy, but I mean inner healthy," she says. "I want to listen to the stuffy old bumblebees coming out to play...."

The duchess trails off, caught up in the lovely daydream. ■



wasn't on the guest list, and she was left out of the palace's Christmas Day celebration.

The press cheerfully reported the slights and still delights in painting Ferguson as the outcast of the royal family. Yet she refuses to let the threat of bad press dictate her actions. Last year, after the shooting at Columbine High School, she took a brief detour on a Denver visit to fly to the site. "I kept thinking, 'Oh, God, wait till the British tabs get a hold of this,'" she says. She assumed they'd see it as "Fergie Seeks Publicity."

That wasn't the case at all, she insists. "I knew I was going for the right reasons," Ferguson says. "My heart just went out to those families."

Still, she admits, a little positive recognition would be nice. "Do you know what I would like to see?" she continues. "Someone in the papers say, 'You really are all right, and we're sorry that we've given you a

Win an autographed doll

To raise money for her charity Chances for Children, the duchess promotes the sale of her adorable doll, Little Red. To win one of these cuddly pals, signed especially for McCall's by Ferguson (normally they are available exclusively at

FAO Schwarz), send a 3 x 5-in. card with your name, address and phone number to Duchess Doll, McCall's, 375 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017-5514. (See p. 147 for sweepstakes rules.)

