



Sarah Murdoch: How I *stay* real

One of Australia's most marketable women tells JANE SOUTHWARD how giving back has changed her life

Sarah Murdoch, 34, is holding court in one of Australia's best restaurants. In the audience are some of the nation's top marketers from companies including Johnson & Johnson, Accor Hotels and Ernst & Young.

They have come to hear the woman who carries one of the most powerful names in world business, but she's not giving out any secrets. She needs help. Not for herself — for others.

There are a dozen of them listening as she asks them to get their companies to help raise money for breast cancer research. "Once I saw the figures (one in 11 women will get breast cancer), I was so shocked I was really honoured to come on board," she tells them by way of explaining how she came to join the National Breast Cancer Foundation five years ago. And with a stunningly sweet smile, she adds: "I hope you can all support us as well."

"Who wouldn't," one guest comments to me as Murdoch takes her seat again. "She is the most beautiful woman in the world."

Beauty has been a friend to Murdoch, who, as Sarah O'Hare, studied ballet in high school, graduating from The McDonald College, a Sydney performing arts school, before being snapped up by Vivien's Model Management after her brother Ryan took

her in to see whether she had any chance of getting work as a model.

Within a few years, she had been signed by Stuart Cameron, the agent responsible for Elle Macpherson's rise from schoolgirl model to international icon to the successful businesswoman behind a lingerie brand. Murdoch has followed a similar path, taking over from Eva Herzigova as the Wonderbra model, winning contracts with Revlon and Ralph Lauren and now with iconic Australian brand, Bonds.

Still, she's the first to admit that international modelling success requires big doses of luck. "I never really wanted to be a model," she tells me plainly. "I fell into it and was so lucky because I got to travel and earn an income and do all the things you want to do in your 20s."

Recently, she says, her attitude has changed. "I realise I have been in an industry where you

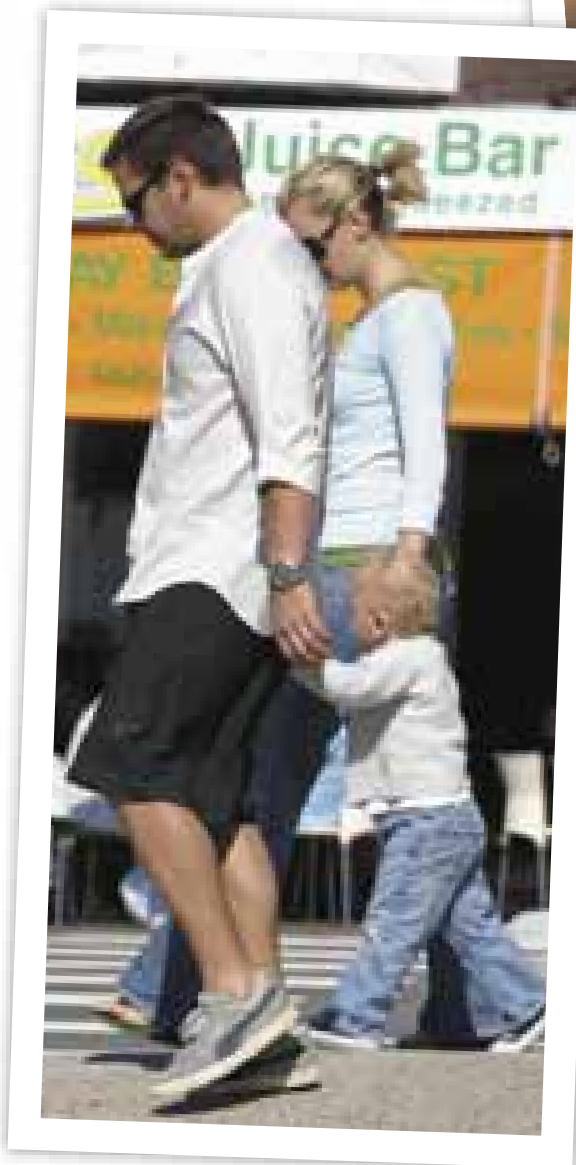
really have no control over your success," she says. "As a model, you don't have control over whether you get a contract or not. Someone else makes that happen."

She explains that her charity work for breast cancer and the Murdoch Children's Institute makes her feel real. "I didn't feel I was really contributing until I started the charity work," she says.

"A lot of people wonder what they can do to help. Fashion Targets Breast Cancer gave them the door to get involved. I was hesitant about it because sometimes celebrities attach themselves to things to promote themselves.

"But then I realised there was no awareness about breast cancer. I never really knew anyone with breast cancer. We need to raise funds to get women to take control of their bodies by self-examination and knowing the risks. And we need money for more research."

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From left: With husband Lachlan and son Kalan at Bronte Park, August 2006. With Lachlan at a book launch, November 2005. At work for Collette Dinnigan, October 2001.

Sue Murray, general manager of the National Breast Cancer Foundation, was thrilled when Murdoch told her she would like to be involved with the foundation, a charity that funds research through donations from companies and the public.

Since she took over from federal politician Jocelyn Newman as patron, fundraising has grown from \$1 million a year to \$10 million in 2005. "There is no doubt that Sarah Murdoch is incredibly attractive to the public," Murray says, stating the obvious. "If people know who you are, then they can give to you. Her biggest impact has been raising our profile and she has dedicated herself very diligently to this."

Former federal member Ros Kelly goes

further, saying Murdoch's spunk and energy have enabled the foundation to move from a healthcare charity to an organisation about empowering women. "Sarah has become a figurehead of life and vitality," Kelly says. "That image takes us away from any negativity that comes from dealing with cancer."

Sarah O'Hare met Lachlan Murdoch in 1998 at a dinner after a photo shoot for *Condé Nast Traveler*. Sparks flew and, within a month, Lachlan had flown across the Pacific to take her to dinner in Australia. Thirteen months later, they were married and spending most of their time in New York where Lachlan was Deputy Chief Operating Officer of his father's global media company.

Exposed to a new world of politics, economics and, of course, the media, Sarah started reading numerous newspapers a day, taking courses in history and politics and expanding her own career as a model.

She orders a cola drink as we continue our interview. When I comment on her choice, she explains she and Lachlan have had three sleepless nights with their toddler, Kalan, who had been diagnosed with a virus.

"Parenting has changed my outlook

entirely," she says. "It's the first time I realised life wasn't about me any more. Having a baby, all you want to do is give, give, give."

Not that becoming parents came easily to the couple. For four years, she suffered devastating miscarriages until, finally, doctors diagnosed an underactive thyroid. Once treated, she conceived Kalan, born two years ago, and Aidan, now six months.

"Everything you did in your life before you had children seems so insignificant," she says. "Lachlan and I share the same values and feel like a normal family."

In August last year, Lachlan cited "family reasons" for quitting his post at News Corp in New York and the couple headed home to raise their family in Sydney.

Within a few months, they had downgraded from a \$20 million-plus mansion overlooking Sydney harbour at Point Piper to a luxurious family home

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on the beach — worth one-third of their original home. Determined to live the Australian dream, the couple now breakfast together most days, spend family time walking to the park near their beachside home in Bronte and enjoy regular visits from Sarah's mother, Carol.

Of course, there is also hired help: a mothercraft nurse when Aidan was born and a nanny, who Murdoch says doesn't live in but is a wonderful extra set of hands.

"I was never brought up by nannies and I know my mother raised four children without one, so I took a while to get used to it," she says of the luxury of hired help.

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"Lachlan is the opposite, as he's had nannies for his upbringing. He also understands the importance of maintaining our relationship.

"It [having a nanny] is great for spontaneity, like lunches with girlfriends. But being away from them [the children], all I want to do is get back to them."

Murdoch approached childbirth with enthusiasm, signing up for natural birth classes with physiotherapist Juju Sundin, an advocate of exercises to help women move through the pain without drugs for as long as they wish.

Murdoch was so impressed with the approach, she has co-written a childbirth book with Sundin, published by Allen & Unwin. "She is amazing," Murdoch says. "With Kalan, I was totally prepared and I had a 16-hour birth. It was the most positive experience of my life.

"When I look at Kalan, he is so beautiful and I can see the birth is such a part of that. I can't believe people allow themselves to miss out on it."

Since Aidan's arrival in May this year, Murdoch has resumed a childhood passion, taking ballet lessons three days a week. In March, she joined the board of the Australian Ballet. "I've been pregnant for the last three years," she explains. "I wanted to feel fit again. It always gives me much more energy when I exercise and it's energy I need with the kids.

"People often get to 50 or 60 and talk about all the things they wish they had done. I think our generation — maybe because there is so much cancer around — has made up our minds to re-evaluate our lives."

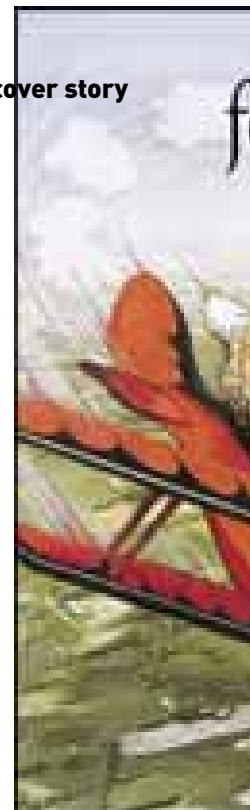
She also plans to continue her university degree in literature and history, which she started at New York University before having the children. "Even if it takes me the rest of my life, I will complete it," she says. "Going to university is something I could do for me and it was up to me. I just loved it."

As for balance, she says the key is to follow your passion. "You have to pick the things that are important to you and learn to say no," she says.

"I feel guilty all the time. After I had Kalan, I felt pressure to go back to work, but I just wanted to be a mum. I can see the big picture and how fast the time goes. I feel lucky that I can combine my work with Bonds with my charity work and looking after the boys."

And her dream? "My dream is that we find the cure for breast cancer, I guess. Australia should feel confident that it could come from here. Look at cervical cancer, with the vaccination created in Australia." ■

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