

Sarah, Duchess of York

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Sarah, Duchess of York (Sarah Margaret Ferguson) born 15 October 1959, is the former wife of Prince Andrew, Duke of York. She is a former member of the British Royal Family and the mother of Princess Beatrice and Princess Eugenie, who are respectively fifth and sixth in line to the British throne. The Duchess is known for being at the centre of a number of tabloid scandals, as well as for her charity and commercial work.

Early life

Sarah Margaret Ferguson was born in London on 15 October 1959, a daughter of Major Ronald Ferguson and his first wife, Susan Mary Wright.

Sarah comes from an aristocratic and royal background. On her father's side, Sarah is a descendant of King Charles II of England from his illegitimate son the Duke of Richmond. She is a great-great-granddaughter of the 6th Duke of Buccleuch, a great-granddaughter of the 8th Viscount Powerscourt, and a step-granddaughter of Air Marshal Sir Thomas Elmhirst. Through her paternal grandmother, Lady Elmhirst (née Marian Montagu-Douglas-Scott), she also is a distant cousin of Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, an aunt of Queen Elizabeth II.

Marriage

Sarah and Prince Andrew's romance began after some scheming to bring them together was orchestrated by Princess Diana in 1985. Early in 1986 the couple were engaged and subsequently married in Westminster Abbey on 23 July 1986. Prince Andrew had the title of The Duke of York bestowed upon him by the Queen. Sarah automatically became Her Royal Highness The Duchess of York. She is known to many, including family and friends, as Fergie which was an old childhood nickname. The Duke and Duchess of York had two children during their marriage:

- * Princess Beatrice of York (born 1988)
- * Princess Eugenie of York (born 1990)

Divorce

After some 4 years of being officially separated, the Duke and Duchess made the mutual decision to divorce in 1996. She has since been known as "Sarah, Duchess of York" (title normally used by the ex-wives of peers), No animosity was ever directed at each other when it came to their children. Both agreed to share joint custody of their daughters. It has been a situation that has worked very well for the former couple. Despite their divorce, the Duke and Duchess remain close friends and still spend time in each other's company. They have striven to spare their children any upset over their divorce. The girls have come through seemingly unaffected as a result of the co-parenting arrangement of their parents.

Sarah has always denied any infidelity during her marriage. As she herself admitted, she was simply not cut out for life in the royal family. Constant exposure in the media did not help matters, nor did her husband's frequent absences due to naval duties. Both the Duke and Duchess have expressed regret for not doing more to help their marriage. Regrets aside, both have moved on with their lives. Aside from temporarily dating Tuscan aristocrat, Count Gaddo della Gherardesca, the Duchess admitted she never really dated anyone, at least not seriously. Her personal life is forever keeping her in the gossip columns as frequently and as prominently as her business endeavours and personal candour.

After the divorce

After her divorce she continued to struggle with her weight, under intense media spotlight, and saw many publications dub her unflatteringly as "The Duchess of Pork" [1]. The press criticism was constant, focusing not only on her weight but also on her lifestyle and perceived extravagance. Sarah now attracts far less intrusive and unflattering media reports. Since her divorce, she has determinedly rebuilt her life with a successful media and commercial career.

Having lost weight and discovered a new confidence, Sarah felt able to pass on her experience to others as a spokesperson for Weight Watchers, replacing Lynn Redgrave, who referred to the situation as "Rent-a-Royal". Her other commercial interests in the USA include fronting publicity campaigns for Ocean Spray Juice, Wedgwood China and Westfield Malls, drawing crowds of thousands at promotional events. These activities, as well as the success of her many books, allowed Sarah to overcome the huge multi-million pound debts that she ran up in the 80s and early 90s to the Queen's creditors within a year. She is now financially independent, although she avoids commercial activity in Britain so as not to upset the Royal Family.

Family relationships

Her divorce from Prince Andrew has always been amicable - they have a system of "co-parenting" their daughters and

still enjoy each other's company. The Duchess fully supports her children in their role as royal princesses but long ago formally withdrew attending royal functions to avoid awkwardness between herself and the Royal Family. Her relationship with the Queen is cordial, although communication with Prince Philip is minimal. Once it was suggested he could not stand to be in the same room with her. Prince Philip has publicly said that at times her behaviour has been "odd". Sarah remains fond of the Queen and enjoys the time spent in her company often when her daughters go to visit "Granny".

Sarah mostly avoids answering questions about the Royal Family in interviews. Even then any comments are of a positive nature as she remains steadfastly loyal. Having withdrawn from attending royal functions after her divorce the Duchess has attended royal occasions only very rarely. She attended the funerals of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother and Diana, Princess of Wales, numerous royal birthday parties and in June 2006, she joined her daughters in attending the procession of Prince Andrew as he was invested as a Royal Knight of the Garter.

In her autobiography, Sarah, Duchess of York, proclaimed, "I was never cut out for royalty ... I have my life back, and I will not let go of it. And I just might live rather happily ever after."

Talk show

Since her divorce, Sarah has hosted her own talk show, although this did not meet with a great deal of success. It did, however, lead to further broadcasting and advertising work on American television, especially with popular CNN talk-show host Larry King. She had a cameo (as herself) in the 1998 season finale of the hugely popular American sitcom *Friends*, in an episode where the principal characters visited London. She has raised funds for children's charities, most notably as the official U.S. spokesperson for the international charity SOS Children's Villages. Sarah also heads two charities of her own, Chances for Children and Children in Crisis, and has spent time in Sierra Leone, meeting children wounded or orphaned by the civil war, and raising money and awareness of the cause.

Author

Sarah, Duchess of York is also an author. Her best-selling autobiography, *My Story* (1996) tells of the transition from (relatively) ordinary country girl to Royal Duchess, and the struggles with her own self-esteem in the face of constant media criticism. 'What I Know Now; Simple Lessons Learned the Hard Way' (2003) is also autobiographical, but has a very different context. In it, Sarah relates to her readers short anecdotes, each demonstrating a particular 'life lesson' or view of the world. Alongside several guides to dieting, she has published many children's books. In 1987, she was inspired by the helicopter lessons she was taking to create the character of 'Budgie the Helicopter'. The plot, style and illustration of the first Budgie book was alleged to be remarkably similar to an existing children's book, *Hector the Helicopter* by Arthur W. Baldwin. "It is difficult for us to say that anything has been literally copied," wrote Jane Moore, group legal adviser of Reed International Books in a letter, "but if this was not a major source of inspiration for the Budgie books then it is a remarkable coincidence"¹. Reed International did not pursue a claim for copyright infringement, and Sarah has always vigorously denied accusations of plagiarism. In recent years, she has created a second children's character, 'Lil' Red'. Furthermore, Sarah revealed in a recent interview with London's *Evening Standard* that she is writing an adult novel entitled 'Hartmoor', in which the heroine, Lady Margaret Hartmoor, is a kind of 17th century alter ego of the author herself. (Margaret is an echo of her own middle name).

Selected works

- * *Budgie: The Little Helicopter*
- * *Budgie: At Bendick's Point*
- * *Budgie Goes To Sea*
- * *Budgie And The Blizzard*
- * *Victoria and Albert: A Family Life at Osbourne House*
- * *The Royal Switch*
- * *Bright Lights*
- * *Moments: Reflections in words and pictures*

Leisure pursuits

In her leisure time, Sarah is a keen equestrienne, a passion that came from her childhood on her parents' farm in the Hampshire countryside. She is a qualified pilot and also enjoys photography, painting, and spending time in her daughters company. Sarah is constantly travelling to fulfill her charity and business interests yet she relishes her summer holidays when she "recharges the batteries" and can spend ample time with family and friends uninterrupted. She has no permanent home as such, as her commercial activities require constant travel, but spends time at her ex-husband's home, Royal Lodge, Windsor, and an apartment in Manhattan.

Titles, Styles, Honours & Arms

Titles

- * 1959-1986: Miss Sarah Ferguson
- * 1986-1996: Her Royal Highness The Duchess of York
- * 1996-: Sarah, Duchess of York

Styles

Sarah Ferguson's full style during her marriage was Her Royal Highness The Princess Andrew, Duchess of York, Countess of Inverness and Baroness Kilyleagh

Charity work

Sarah Ferguson is patron of the Motor Neurone Disease Association and "US Spokesperson" for SOS Children's Villages.

Sarah, Duchess of York is my 9th cousin, Once Removed.
Blair Rogers