

Sunday Life

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I STOLE OPRAH'S CHEF

... AND DINED LIKE A
SUPERSTAR FOR A DAY

WHY WE'RE LESS
TRUSTING IN LOVE

THE BEST
MEN'S SUITS





When Rosie Daley, one-time chef to Oprah Winfrey, came to town, **RACHAEL OAKES-ASH** snaffled

Bedside manners: chef Rosie Daley (left) serves writer Tachael Oakes-Ash a boudoir breakfast.

I STOLE OPRAH'S CHIEF

OPRAH AND I HAVE A LOT IN COMMON. NO NEED for a last name, international adoration, a thriving, billion-dollar company and our own personal chef, Rosie Daley. Well, one out of four ain't bad. Rosie is known for helping Oprah drop 33kg in the mid-1990s. Oprah is known for "giving" Rosie her own cookbook, *In The Kitchen With Rosie: Oprah's Favourite Recipes*, in 1994. Oprah, America's daytime chat-show queen, features in the cover photo alongside Daley. She wrote the introduction and refused to take a cent from the royalties, instead giving them all to Daley. With six million copies sold, it sure beats an employee-of-the-month biro.

As of today, however, Daley will be forever known as Rach's personal chef as I employ her talents in *my* kitchen, and I shall forever be known as that girl Oprah's chef cooked for. Sadly, my budget doesn't stretch to 24-hour on-call cooking (unless it's Macca's drive through) – in fact it only just stretches to a 10-hour working day but I am sure I can lose 320g within this time.

Daley arrives at my doorstep early, and I hope I don't have to pay for the extra time – don't want the hired help getting ahead of themselves. She is a compact bundle of energy in eggwhite leather wedges and a pale blue pashmina over her capri pants and soft knit shirt. Her skin is gently freckled and her eyes clear and blue. Her face belies her 40 years and I marvel at how this woman could be closer to menopause than me when she looks as if she's only just left puberty.

Damn this healthy eating, double damn it when I discover she has a child of 20, Marley St John, named after Bob Marley. This doesn't surprise me, coming as it does from a self-proclaimed former hippie who, at the age of 16, moved from her family home in South Seasville, New Jersey, across country to California. She's the ninth of 13 children (seven boys, six girls) of Fred and Joan Daley. Bernadette, her closest sister, a year older than Rosie, was killed in a car accident aged 17. Her death propelled Rosie to grow closer to another sister, Christine, who was living in California. She packed up and left after graduating from high school.

Daley describes her childhood as that of Cinderella (*before* the fairy godmother) and ▷



In The Kitchen With Rosie was written in a couple of weeks and went on to sell 6 million copies – Winfrey (above, right) gave all the royalties to Daley.

PHOTOGRAPHY (OPPOSITE): MICHAEL P. McLAUGHLIN

er up for a taste of the high – and healthy – life. Photography by **STEVE BACCON**

suspects her mother displayed some favouritism with various children, of which she was not one. She puts it down to not being breastfed and to spending the first seven months of her life separated from her mother, who was ill. The mother-daughter bond was never cemented. Her father, a sand and gravel pit owner, liked to drink and has survived throat cancer.

"I don't want to tell you how poor we were; we ate garbage a lot and that's why I'm very inventive because I know how to do things with not very much stuff," Daley says with a mischievous glint before she gets serious. "It wasn't good but I was on my own from 16."

She still lives in southern California, in Encinitas, just outside San Diego. As a struggling artist (her work was hung in the basement of the local coffee shop, which she thanks in her most recent book), she waitressed to pay the bills. At the age of 19, she met Billy St John, a carpenter 20 years her senior, and became pregnant to him with Marley.

"He was a hippie and I found that attractive in my hippie days but now I do not find it attractive," says Daley. It was at this time that another family tragedy struck. Her 21-year-old brother, a schizophrenic, took his own life.

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BUT ENOUGH OF DALEY FOR THE MOMENT. I'M getting hungry. I insist on being served what Daley would have cooked for Oprah and as Daley is in Australia to promote her new book, *The Healthy Kitchen*, a book written with natural-health guru Dr Andrew Weil, she obliges with recipes from within its pages. First up, breakfast. She plumps my pillows (I'm going to be served in bed) and brings in a tray of pancakes with berry compote. I think she's sweet to colour coordinate the breakfast with my watermelon-coloured bed rug.

I feel terribly decadent and wonder if asking Daley for a neck massage would be crossing the line. Instead, I settle for being hand fed, but I feel like Barbara Cartland and feed myself instead. Daley's food is delicious and looks sensational – I consider getting a mortgage to keep her in the country.

As a kid, Daley worked at a fruit stand in Stone Harbour, New Jersey, 25km from her family home. "When I was nine, I'd take the watermelons up the front, wash the grapes, hang the baskets, pile them up; so I didn't sell the fruit, I prepared it. We'd do this big display and people would stop because it looked so pretty." An obsession with preparation and presentation of food has stayed with her.

With breakfast served, I settle in to watch Daley prepare my warm chicken and asparagus salad (see recipe p20), which she assures me was an "Oprah fave".

"I met Oprah at Cal-a-Vie," says Daley. Cal-a-Vie is a \$7,000-a-week celebrity health spa outside San Diego. "Oprah was really cool. She was leaving [she had been at the spa for two weeks] and she came in and I thought maybe she was going to tip us or something, and she said, 'I want to talk to you.' I went outside to her limo and she said, 'I really want you to work for me.' I said, 'I have a nice job, I'm happy, I really don't want to do that.'"

"So her assistant called me and I said, 'No, I'm happy with what I'm doing now.' She called a couple of times and she said, 'You're not supposed to say no to Oprah Winfrey,' then I said, 'OK, OK, I guess I'll go.' I really didn't want to, but this was opportunity knocking and I thought I'll at least try it. If it doesn't work out, I can always quit and come home."

But she didn't go home. She stayed for five years, from 1991 to 1996, leaving her son in California with his dad. She admits that was difficult but she wanted Marley to go to college and felt working with Oprah would help that. As it turned out, Oprah became a surrogate parent, encouraging Marley with \$100 rewards for good marks and inviting him to spend Thanksgiving dinner with her. Marley went to college and is now at film school in Los Angeles.

Together with Bob Greene, Oprah's personal trainer, Daley helped Oprah shed 33kg by making sure there was always plenty of healthy, tasty food on hand. Soups were Oprah's favourite, as were healthy muffins and, when she wanted, french fries: Daley would make her own baked low-fat potato chips.

"We were really close," Daley says of Oprah. "I started running with Bob Greene and Oprah in the morning and I'd have to get back to get breakfast ready. But what happened was they got better and faster, and so I had to stop running because I couldn't get home to get the breakfast made, as it takes a little bit of time to make Irish oatmeal."

I'm curious about Art Smith, Oprah's new personal chef, who released a book, *Back To The Kitchen*, in October last year. It may be on bestseller lists, but there is no official endorsement by Oprah

in the book and it hasn't sold anywhere near the 6 million that *In The Kitchen With Rosie* sold. Perhaps it's more to do with Oprah's present weight?

"Art Smith is a very good guy but he does more Southern kind of comfort food," says Daley. "When I was working for her, we always had an amazing amount of good food in the office. Mashed potatoes with stock and spice and no butter is going to be a lot better than something else. When you eat well all the time and go back to eating badly, it doesn't feel good. Consistently having healthy food around is important."

The warm chicken and asparagus salad is ready and waiting for me in my courtyard. I'm beginning to love this personal chef experience. Daley's adorned the dish with goat's cheese, having ascertained earlier in the day that it is one of my favourite foods.

In 1993, Oprah signed a \$4 million book deal with Knopf Publishers for her autobiography; the following year she reneged on the deal. This decision not to "tell all" worked in Daley's favour as Oprah told her they were going to do a book together. *In The Kitchen With Rosie: Oprah's Favourite Recipes* was written in a couple of weeks. The first print run was 200,000 and it pre-sold 1.4 million copies. "It floored me," says Daley. "Oprah was aware. She knew it was going to sell a lot because it was the first book that had to do with her weight and that made it bigger."

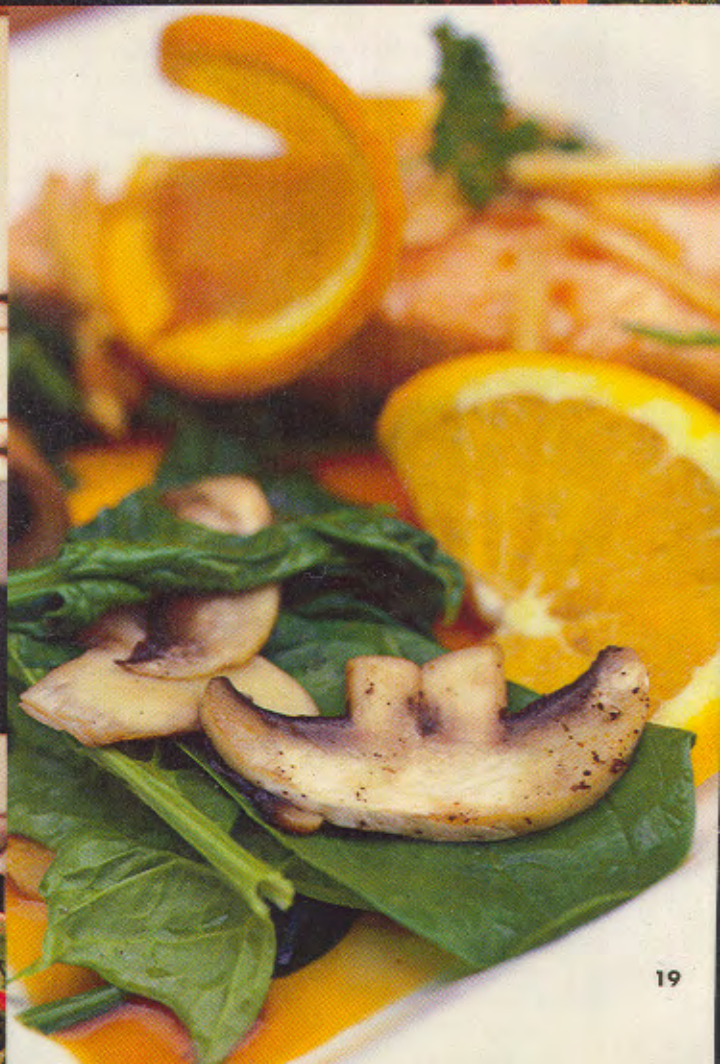
Six million copies of a \$US19.95 book means a lot of money for someone from a working-class family. "Oprah was in charge of that," Daley says. "On air she surprised me and said, 'This is a present for Rosie for life, I'm giving her this book.'" Translated: all royalties to Rosie.

"It happened all at once, so I had to pay a lot of taxes. I paid 59 per cent in taxes because I had another job and a lot of people forget that. I didn't know you could open up an organisation, give to charity. It was just too much. It was kind of nerve-racking. It stressed me out a bit."

Daley has vowed to be more savvy with her finances next time around. She freely admits this second book, *The Healthy Kitchen*, is a financial necessity, having given away a lot of her money supporting friends and family members. ▸



Daley's poached pears (clockwise from left); the author's alfresco delight; salmon with orange glaze; Daley transforms radishes into rosettes.





WARM CHICKEN AND ASPARAGUS SALAD

12 baby red potatoes, cut in half
6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
½ tsp salt or to taste
60ml (¼ cup) white wine
1 tbsp chopped fresh basil
1 tbsp chopped parsley
1 bunch fresh asparagus
2 cups mixed salad greens
goat's cheese, optional
6 radishes, cut into rosettes, to garnish

LEMON DILL VINAIGRETTE

1 large shallot, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
3 tbsp balsamic vinegar
3 tbsp rice vinegar
60ml (¼ cup) olive oil
2 tbsp white wine
2 tbsp chopped fresh dill
¼ tsp salt or to taste

Preheat oven to 170C. Cook the potatoes by putting them in a large pan with about 5cm of boiling water. Cover the pan and cook until tender, approximately 30 minutes. Drain and transfer the potatoes to a large bowl.

Put the chicken into a baking dish, season with salt and pepper and add the wine, basil and parsley. Bake for 30 minutes. Make 2 diagonal slices across each

chicken breast, creating 3 pieces of chicken per breast.

Meanwhile, cut 5cm off the bottom of each asparagus spear and blanch spears in a pan of boiling water for about 2 minutes, just until they are tender.

Lay the asparagus on a platter and leave them to cool to room temperature. When they are cool, cut lengthways down the centre of each spear.

To make the vinaigrette, whisk together thoroughly all the dressing ingredients in a large bowl.

To serve, divide mixed greens between 6 plates and lay 6 or 7 of the halved asparagus spears on top with the tips pointing outwards, creating a fan. Lay 3 pieces of chicken between the asparagus pieces.

Pour half of the dressing over the potatoes and mix gently with a spoon so they are completely coated with the dressing. Place 4 potatoes in the centre of each asparagus arrangement and drizzle 1 tbsp of the remaining dressing over the top. Crumble a little goat's cheese on each salad, if desired. Garnish with a radish rosette. Serves 6.

Per serving: kilojoules 1,695; fat 10.8g (saturated fat 1.7g); protein 26.3g; carbohydrate 45.1g; cholesterol 51mg; fibre 4.5g.

"This particular time in my life I've decided it's not that important to do everything that everyone needs me to do, so I start asking more questions. I am extremely generous because a lot of the time I didn't have material things to give. If someone needed money to buy a house, I'd be the first one to give them the money, but now I'm in a different situation: I'm not making much money; I have to get a job myself."

With an initial US print run of 750,000 for *The Healthy Kitchen*, I don't think she'll need to get a second job just yet.

DALEY SEES HER WORK AS A CHANCE TO HELP people by sharing her cooking philosophy. Mental health is just as important as physical health to Daley, especially since her brother died, and she works regularly with mental-health groups, senior citizens and eating-disorder organisations. "I'm doing my karma to get off the planet," she jokes.

You might want to get some extra karma in now by getting that salmon dinner happening, I think, as my stomach rumbles four hours after lunch, or you may be looking for another job.

"Aren't you sick of me yet? I am," says Daley as I ask her another question to pass the time while the salmon bakes in the oven.

With the incredible success of *In The Kitchen With Rosie*, she experienced backlash. "I had a lot of people mad at me," Daley says. "They'd say, 'I worked hard, I wrote a book and no-one bought my book, you bitch, and I've been wanting to beat you up.' I was a bit afraid to go out in public. Everyone wanted to know, 'When is it my turn? When do I get to do it?' and I don't know the answer to that."

Daley eventually left Oprah. The reasons given depend on which tabloid you read. The real reason was her son. "My son wasn't doing well with his dad, the loser, the hippie," Daley says. "He was doing bad in high school and getting involved in things he shouldn't have been and so it was my turn to be the parent. I'd spent five years away from him and it wasn't good for him. So I've spent the last five years at home. It was very hard to give up that job. I had a great position; I felt Oprah had done so much for me and I didn't want to leave her hanging so, no, I didn't really want to leave the job."

With the launch of this new book there was no guarantee she'd be on Oprah's show to promote it. "I wasn't sure that was going to happen. It wasn't set up straightaway, which was really nerve-racking. A lot of people would say, 'What did you do to mess up the relationship? Why aren't you on the show?' I'm like, 'I'm not in charge. I can't call her up and say, 'Have me on the show.' Even

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when I worked for her, I never asked her for anything and that's how I got my job. I was the worker, a lot of people forget that."

A worker, sure, but a close worker. Oprah cried when Daley married in 1997 shortly after finishing with her in 1996. The reason? Oprah didn't like the man she was marrying. As it turns out, Oprah was spot on. "I had a terrible marriage for about a day. It took us two years to get divorced and it was when I quit Oprah and I was trying to have a normal life. I met a guy in Chicago and we got married but I didn't realise that he was illegal and just looking for papers. Oprah cried. She didn't like him at all. He wasn't a good guy; she's very intuitive and very smart about people."

I can smell the salmon with orange glaze and watch Daley set the table where I shall dine on two courses and discuss my meal plan for tomorrow. Daley will calculate the kilojoules and grams of fat and carbohydrates as provided with each recipe in *The Healthy Kitchen*.

As the salmon is served, I am again surprised that food so healthy



Healthy thinking:
"If you eat the
right things, you
don't feel guilty ...
It's all about
simplicity."

can taste so good – though I discover it doesn't hold so well as leftovers the next day. I vow to prepare nothing but fresh, healthy food for myself from now on but know that without Daley, I won't last past tomorrow's breakfast. I beg her to stay but she has to return for the wedding of her sister, Tootsie. Tootsie is spoilt rotten by her elder sister. Rosie is paying for the rental of Tootsie's beachside house where the wedding is being held, as well as cooking for all the parties.

We settle in for poached pears and I ask Daley if there were one thing she wished we could all change with regards to our food, what would it be. "If you eat the right things, you don't feel guilty. If you say the right things, you don't feel bad. It's all about simplicity."

I relax, lie back, well contented with my evening meal and wonder what Oprah is doing today. □

The Healthy Kitchen by Dr Andrew Weil and Rosie Daley is published by Ebury Press, \$49.95.