

## **Fiona Macpherson**

Fiona Macpherson became editor of *Harpers & Queen* in 1994, at the age of 54, and was responsible for the magazine's final flourish. She lived in London during the week, returning home to Bath at weekends to see her husband Adrian Bailey and children Oliver and Susannah. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer at the end of 1996, she decided not to tell any of her colleagues apart from her PA; she carried on working for another four years. These extracts from her diaries chronicle her bizarre life as a magazine editor and her struggle against illness. Her *H&Q* obituary can be read at [www.anthonygardner.co.uk/obituaries.html](http://www.anthonygardner.co.uk/obituaries.html)

### **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July 1994**

Week of wrestling with the flat plan. It flashes in front of my eyes as I lie in bed fretting at 4 in the morning, like the departures board at Paddington station. Life is a flat plan. Struggling to make the features work. Placate Ann Barr, who as usual is agitating about the contents of Barometer, her pet trend-spotting column. Strengthen the dire fashion stories that keep coming in. Lunch with Liz Kershaw, the publisher of *Good Housekeeping*, at the Caprice. Sally O'Sullivan, who was once in my place, and is now editor of *Good Housekeeping*, is sitting with Miles Chapman across the room. A near miss. 'Merciless Miles', as Bob Johnson [ex-production editor of *H&Q*] used to call him, was the odious chief sub at *Queen*, whom I fired in the 1970s. He's just written an offensive piece about me in the *Evening Standard*. Perhaps I should have strolled across the restaurant and poured a jug of vinaigrette down his shirt collar. Why didn't I?

Eyes rested. On a plateau thank God. What a relief not to be bashing my retinas against that fucking screen every day, getting blinder and blinder. Jamie [Bill, publisher of *Harpers*] talking about the autumn collections which are rising like Hiroshima on the horizon. Certain amount of anxiety about my clothes which I'm pushing to the back of my mind.

## **Monday 10<sup>th</sup> October 1994**

London Fashion Week for me condensed into a day: Elizabeth Hurley, Nanette Newman, Twiggy: home-grown stars watching Amanda Wakeley and Roland Klein and Tomasz Starzewski. Miserable evening reception at Lancaster House following British Fashion Awards the previous night: I'm all frocked out. What is it that makes people who report on clothes such bitches? Fashion has gone to their heads. And how can someone who has recently seen the pearly gates open and close care about hemlines, as in the case of Liz Tilberis, editor of *Harpers Bazaar* (v. frosty)? Crawled home from the reception at midnight feeling very dispirited. Never been so deeply tired. How I could have looked glamorous at Celestria [Noel, social editor]'s party I don't know. I must have been in some kind of overdrive, but Justin Large of the *Daily Telegraph* was nice about me. Threw away the chance to appear in the *Independent* – just couldn't handle it. NatMag's PRs will be furious with me.

Recovered over the weekend. Enjoyable tennis lesson and blackberrying with Adrian and Susie in the country lanes around Bath.

## **Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 1995**

Made a speech at Commonwealth Institute in front of lots of American matrons in their thirties who were holding a fair in aid of Marie Curie (one of them darted up afterwards and told me her aunt had been Carmel Snow, legendary editor of American *Vogue* in the 1930s). Told them about some of the backstage agonies of running *Harpers*. For example, this was the week when Armani had threatened to withdraw all their advertising and the fashion bookings editor resigned; the fashion director was in a panic; her poor assistant's mother died of cancer; the production editor 'came out', then got the push from his Portuguese boyfriend, wrecking his concentration; the picture editor's diver husband upset her by coming home and going out for a night with the boys rather than with her; and by Friday we'd got the Armani advertising back. A fairly average week I'd say.

## **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 1996 (Milan Fashion Week)**

Blumarine show – sat beside Marcus von Ackerman (aka Tony Watts) who tells me there's someone holed up in the room next door to him with a 24-hour minder outside, and heavies with mobile phones at the front door. Well, this must be a Mafia city, and what better way to launder Mafia money than via clothes!

Lovely Ferre show, though I am the odd one out in thinking that – our tastes are so far apart, the fash pack and I. No wonder they're wary of me. Dolce & Gabbana all see-through evening dresses with ostentatious corsets and bras. Hilary Alexander of the *Daily Telegraph* orgasmic with joy beside me. Loony? If their readers could see the fashion editors, they wouldn't bother to read the copy half the time. D&G dinner, beautiful table decorations, great urns of pomegranates with red roses, nuts and candlelight (it's always Christmas at D&G). Tom Ford at Gucci has cancelled his interview with Marion Hume following last night's coup [his show had been a huge success], but you can't apply normal standards of behaviour to fashion folk.

### **Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1996**

Josh (mad friend of Ollie's) comes to collect his TV, making me late to office. Row with Ann Barr. Busy in the office. Race to appointment in Cadogan Place late, and in a lather of stress. Marvellous woman – Dr Ali Joy – calm but insistent. I go immediately to Mr Sacks at Parkside, Wimbledon. He tells me I have a tumour, right breast. The good news is it's small, the bad news that it's hard and almost certainly serious, and he would like to operate between Christmas and the New Year because there is 'calcification' (obviously a trigger word as I heard him use it to a woman in reception who may have been trying to decline the op). I explain about our family trip to Africa, and our proposed weekend in Nairn. He and his secretary persuade me to cancel Scotland and come in on the 11<sup>th</sup> Jan. to the Lister. Stunned, I make my way back to the centre of town & Claridges to meet Paula Reed [future fashion director] (fashion: who cares?). I mumble something about being with a friend who's had bad news about a lump, and quiz her about her sister [who had died of cancer]: she may have guessed as I probably looked as if I'd seen a ghost. What a Christmas present. Huge amount still to do in office. I stay on till 9pm

and then go home, whacked, see Dawn briefly & say that in my next life I'm coming back as Dixie, her dog; she says sweetly we can live together.

### **Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January 1997**

I take Diana [Maclean, her PA] over the road and break the news. She is horrified but hides it reasonably well. I break the news to Adrian on my mobile, standing in the street in the cold round the corner from Chinacraft. Can't afford to be overheard phoning from the office, and there's no other way I can let him know. I tell him that I have breast cancer, and I'm not coming home for the weekend. He is stunned. I ask him to tell the children I've got flu and can't get out of bed. Go to see Terry [Mansfield, managing director of National Magazines] to wish him a happy New Year (while I'm looking tanned and thin).

### **Friday 5<sup>th</sup> September 1997**

Went to [designer] Gilly Forge to borrow a hat for the Princess of Wales's funeral. The Duchess of Kent, exiting, smiled and nodded as if we were old friends. Princess Michael's driver was waiting for her and both the Princess's sisters expected – all of us borrowing from old, hard-working Gilly. I chose two hats but she warned me that one of them might go to one of the sisters, and she's sent the other one over in the afternoon.

Lunch with Terry at Mark's Club: crab salad and liver and bacon. I sat opposite a table with Lucia van der Post [journalist] and Stephanie Churchill [PR] with two sleek business gents. Terry fairly reassuring, and amused at *Tatler* having to pulp a 4-page piece about Princess Di's extravagant holidays. Went on reluctantly to do an interview at Bush House on the prevailing mood in London, to be broadcast following day. Arrived home late, anxious about getting to the Abbey tomorrow, no taxis to be had for love or blackmail.

### **Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September 1997**

Mercedes Benz say that they will withdraw their advertising spread in November if we do a piece on the PofW funeral photographs near the beginning of

the mag (since she was killed in a Merc). Ghastly long day: dry-mouthed and achy, my head (wig?) hurts. Feel lousy: everything is a huge effort: and I'm snapping at people as I never have before. Too much work, too many people with problems – aaargh ...

### **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> October 1997**

Arrive in Milan, met by Giorgio. Dump luggage at the Grand, where they sit up and take notice at the desk when I announce my name, because of the huge number of carrier bags waiting for me. Rush straight away to the Ferre show (poor, except for 2 beautiful dresses with inset lace and shadowed dark chiffon – like antique dresses copied). Very hot and sticky. My leather jacket is too hot, but I can't take it off as I'm too fat...

Go back to hotel and unpack carriers to find:

1. Dark brown velvet skirt and jacket from Alberta Ferretti. Lovely.
2. Strange velvet evening bag in green with leaf deco from Irv(???) Cavalli (who they?)
3. Flowers from Gianfranco Ferre and perfume.
4. Flowers from Donatella Versace with handwritten note (amazing discipline).
5. Flowers (white gypsophila) from Anna Molinari.
6. Also, a Jil Sander cashmere sweater, Jil Sander trousers; Calvin Klein jacket; Rebecca Moses cashmere top; Liberty scarf.

Baffling. Give trousers to Kim, Rebecca Moses top to Alison, then have to ask for them back when I discover they are for Signora Balfi and there is a bill!

### **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May 1998 (New York)**

A party given for me by Pamela Fiori [editor of *Town & Country*] in her apartment, attended by Evelyn Lauder and other NY bigwigs, where I was fêted by them singing Cole Porter's *You're The Top*. Quite overcome. Dick Evans [an old friend from London] congratulated me on having survived as editor for four years.

### **Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 1998**

Had my hair and make-up done. Still feeling bad-tempered; anxious about my speech (for the Vivienne Westwood fashion tribute at the V&A). I lunched alone at Melati. Margherita [Gardella, senior fashion editor] borrowed some lovely shawls for me, including a black one with midnight blue beading which I wore with my Valentino suit and flat Chanel shoes. Jerry Hall and Mick Jagger charming and friendly, and Viv. Westwood couldn't have been nicer or more grateful. Delivery of speech 5/10. When I got back to my table my knees were knocking. A good evening for *Harpers* though.

### **Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November**

Ecstatic cream memo from Terry re. last night's effort. Faxes from VW, a magnum of champagne from Mœt et C, from [jeweller] Kiki McDonough, Amanda Wakeley, Old Uncle Tom Cobbleigh, so I must have been OK. Calls from David Metcalf; his daughter etc. When I saw Terry he was still spinning, 'You were everything last night the Editor of *Harpers* should be; you are much more beautiful than Jerry Hall, etc.' Crazy. Breakfast with Karen Smith (Liz Hurley's agent), and tentative plans for LH to guest edit the November issue. I would like a diary on her lifestyle and looks maintenance (she does no exercise except gardening!).

### **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> June 1999**

See NS [Nigel Sacks] and he confirms my worst fears. 2 spots on the liver. Says a year, 2 years, but I must start to wind down as I will start to feel off-colour soon. Sit through *Oklahoma!* with Penny thinking practical thoughts – disposing of clothes etc. Gut rot.

### **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> June 1999**

Breakfast at the Groucho with Jamie who says how well I look (second person in 2 days). Coffee with food writer Dee McQuillan. She is no match for [promotions director] Jennifer Sharp (neither am I). Escape at 5.30 desperate to get away from London. Tell A the bad news in the car park at Bath station when he meets me off the train. He retches with shock, and we sit and hold hands for a while. At home, S. keeps telling me how distracted and sad he looks, 'as if

someone has died'. My thoughts are whirling all the time and she accuses me too of being distracted. I keep thinking that tomorrow morning I will wake up and find it was all a nightmare. Slept very badly.

### **Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> June 1999**

Fergie Duchess of York is to be photographed for her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday and would let us have exclusive cover rights. I say no. So tired and agonised, slept-walked through the day. Couldn't bear to sit through the Fauré *Requiem* in Bath Abbey, and we can't find a film to see or anything to do, so we take S for a driving lesson. Grey, cool, windy day, then sun comes out at about 7pm as she potters up and down. Lie on the hay looking up at the persistent skylark wishing I could go like that. Play Scrabble lifelessly till midnight.

### **Friday 10th September 1999**

Ollie and Susie were at home when I got back to Bath. Susie said immediately on seeing me, 'What's the matter with your hair?' So I told them both the facts. I'd been rehearsing this scene for a long time since the announcement was inevitable. There's no easy way to cushion the blow, and time was running out. 'I've had breast cancer' I said, 'and the hair is the result of the chemotherapy treatment.' Susie's eyes filled with tears of shock. She fled and shut herself in the bathroom. Ollie went very quiet and just stared at me, unable to take it in I think. Me quite bouncy and as normal, then A and I took them out to the Pizza Express in Bristol as if everything was OK. Swore them to secrecy – explained the family fortunes were at stake, etc.

### **Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2000**

A drove me to the station. There's a recurring hollow pain in my chest. Went back to the flat at lunchtime to lie down, it's the only way I could get through the day. Never thought to call to check about chemo but I knew something was wrong. At the clinic Dr. Slevin came in and explained that the Taxol hadn't worked though it works in 60 to 70 per cent of the cases so there would be no more chemo. The tumour has spread to the liver, but there is nothing in the lungs. Nurse Fiona sent to

talk to me, then had salad for dinner and a glass of wine, got dressed (ironically it was the one time I got into bed ready for the treatment), went back to the flat briefly, then to Paddington. Adrian met me having guessed, but hid it amazingly.

### **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2000**

Lie around all day in my pyjamas soaking my feet. I also feel queasy, and have done for days. Talk to NS on the phone about my feet, since I can barely walk – he advised coming off pills for the time being. Soon I'll be carried to the office on a stretcher.

### **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2000 (Fiona's resignation is announced)**

Check press release and Liz K [Kershaw, by now publisher of *H&Q*] and I make the announcement at 11.15am and the press release goes out. Frantic calls from Harriet Green [newly appointed features editor] about her security – 'but I only wanted the job to work with you'. Sort her out with Nanette Gibb [personnel director] who is wonderful. Catriona [Howatson, chief sub-editor] plans to quit – the others all look anxious. Sheila [Jack, art director] and Alison [Edmond, fashion director] and Newby [Hands, associate editor] say nothing. Nice email from Susie Smith [editor of *Country Living*], silence elsewhere. All the people most fond of me can't bear to talk to me in case I've been fired. Tierney [Gifford Horne, former fashion director] rings Jeannie Norman and says 'Can it be true?' Kim [Hersov, executive fashion editor] doesn't mention it. Paula Reed very nice about last night – otherwise the CN [Condé Nast] phalanx don't catch my eye at the Nicola Farhi show. My green Stephen (?) shoes are snapped by a photographer – that's a first! (And they've given me a blister.) Feel euphoria and huge relief. Clothes arrive from Missoni including very N2 sparkly blazer! Go to David Linley's party and talk to lots of people, including [PR] Susan Farmer who says loudly 'Oh, I thought from the *ES* tonight that you'd been fired. But I can see from your face it's not bad news.' Cartier and Chanel troubled: big money sponsorship at stake. 'They like the magazine as it is.' [Illegible] says it is to be Tatlerised and she wants to quit. Catriona *has* quit and is v. happy. Generally, people who know me and who can't bear to raise the subject ask me solicitously if I 'am all right'. It's a bit like that



Walther Matthau joke where he's lying injured on the floor and Jack Lemmon puts a pillow under his head and says, 'Are you comfortable?' and Matthau replies, 'I make a living.'

### **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2000 (Final entry)**

Have 9am CT scan with Professor Restrict at London Clinic. Maurice S. to get results by 12 noon. There turns out to be some growth on the liver and a lot of liquid around the waist, which can be drained. Maurice organises a 4pm blood test; 5pm radiology and start of fluid removal. I rush back to the flat, collect a few things. I get to the London Clinic, have ultrasound and needle put in and a huge amount of yellow liquid begins to run into the bag – 2 litres in no time. Have light supper and doze all night. Tell Adrian the bad news.

*Fiona died at the London Clinic on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2000, with her husband and children beside her.*