

# SUMMER'S HERE

Former Olympic champion and television personality Summer Sanders escapes back home to the mountains of Park City, Utah to plug back into the good life. BY DINA MISHEV



**BACK TO SPORT**  
After Sanders and her family moved to Park City, Sanders and her husband, Erik Schlopy, and their children and dogs all live in their home in Park City.

With the exception of only a very few specific instances, “no” isn’t in the vocabulary of Summer Sanders. Since winning four medals, including two golds, at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona—three of which were in individual events—the swimming superstar says, “Saying ‘yes’ to experiences wasn’t in my make-up when I was a kid—I didn’t have the opportunity to have many crazy experiences. I was a very shy child, but I learned from my parents not to take anything for granted. By trying everything I can—saying ‘yes’ as often as I can—I’m being grateful and respecting the opportunities that come my way. I love the idea of not saying ‘no.’” Sanders has said yes to everything from running her first marathon with only a day’s notice, a skeleton ride with Olympic gold medalist Jimmy Shea, interviewing Michelle Obama, competing on *Celebrity Apprentice*, starting a production company, aerial yoga, writing a book, traveling to Rwanda as an Olympic Aid athlete ambassador shortly after that country’s genocide and moving to Park City, Utah with husband, former Olympic skier (1994, 2002 and 2006) and seven-time national champion, Erik Schlopy. “Many of these things were out of my comfort zone, but it is really fun to try new things and put yourself out there,” she says. “It is humbling—you learn what you’re not great at—and beautiful all at the same time. I’ve failed at a lot of things.” More often than not though, Sanders succeeds, and you kind of want to hate her for it, but then she isn’t shy about sharing her failures. These are the stories she likes telling the most, her voice escalating in pitch as she tries not to laugh at the memories of herself in these instances. The end result is someone you want to be friends with for life.



ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY



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### Inspirato Summer 2014

By Dina Mishev

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### HER BIG BREAK

In 1993, when still a junior at Stanford, Sanders agreed to do color commentary for the NCAA Swimming Championships (she had given up her own eligibility and could no longer compete at the collegiate level). The fuchsia 100-percent silk long-sleeve blouse she had borrowed from her best friend’s closet was a disaster. “I was in an indoor swimming facility. I sweated through that shirt so fast, it looked like I had literally taken a swim in it. I guess I could have freaked out, but that didn’t even occur to me,” she says. “For me, there was nothing to do but laugh. You couldn’t have written a script funnier than that.”

Despite the sweat stains, CBS Sports invited Sanders back to cover the next year’s NCAA Swimming Championships. She soon graduated to TV host—working for the 1994 MTV sports competition series *Sandblast*. For eight years she co-hosted *NBA Inside Stuff*. She was also a sideline reporter for the WNBA. She’s been an on-air reporter covering the U.S. Open. Sanders hosted the Nickelodeon game show *Figure It Out* and also the Fox celebrity reality series, *Skating with Celebrities*.

Today, she’s a television journalist, most recently working for NBC at the Sochi Olympic Games and on the various projects developed by her production company, Blackline Media, which she started with long-time industry vet Melissa Chusid.

“I’ve worked with lots of talent, and Summer really stands out,” says Chusid, a former Director of Talent at Nickelodeon. “She is able to relate to whomever she interviews, whether it’s a huge celebrity or a fan on the street.”

### PATH TO THE OLYMPICS

Born and raised in Roseville, California, Sanders’ own childhood never included any brushes with the First Family (Her children met Michelle Obama at the London Olympics.). Her parents divorced when she was 7 and older brother Trevor was 9. In her 1999 book, *Champions are Raised, Not Born: How My Parents Made me a Success*, Sanders writes that people are often shocked to learn she comes from a broken home. “Divorce and dysfunction, they go together. But divorce and achievement? Divorce and self-esteem? Success out of failure?” Sanders continues that she never wants to gloss over the difficulties of the divorce, but that “by and large, Trevor and I had a happy childhood.”

Much of Sanders’ childhood happiness came from time spent outside—camping, skiing and, of course, swimming. At age 3, she could already swim a lap, an effort to keep up with Trevor, whom she adored. “I wanted to be just like him,” she says. When she was 4, after begging her parents they signed her up on a local, summer-league swim team. By the time Trevor moved onto his next sport, around age 10, Sanders was hooked on swimming, because she got to see her friends at practice and because the team went on fun trips.

As a 12-year-old spectator at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, Sanders had her first dreams of Olympic glory. “Before going to those Olympics, I was on the fence about swimming. I wanted to do other things after school than hop into a pool,” she says. “When I saw Mary [T. Meagher] and Tracy Caulkins swim in the Olympics though, I had this dream—this grand vision—of how amazing it would be if I could be at that level. I imagined myself going through the whole thing.”

Sanders, at age 15, competed at the 1988 Olympic trials. She missed qualifying by 27/100s of a second. “In other people’s minds it was a failure—I didn’t make the team,” Sanders says. “But in my mind it was a huge success. It was the first time I realized I could compete with these girls, that my dream of the Olympics could actually be a reality.”

When the Olympic trials next rolled around, in 1992, Sanders became only the second U.S. woman to qualify for four individual events at one Olympiad. With her four medals—two gold, one silver and one bronze—she was the most decorated U.S. swimmer of the Games. Winning the 200-meter butterfly, Sanders also set an Olympic record.

Retired from swimming at the end of 1995, Sanders is still in a pool many days. “Some of my longest days in the pool have been since I’ve retired,” she says, laughing and pausing a bit before delivering the punch line, “keeping our kids afloat before they could swim on their own.”

### A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Sanders moved to Park City, where husband Schlopy, whom she had met on a blind date when she was living in Manhattan and he was still on the U.S. Ski Team, had spent much of his early adulthood, nine years ago. “More than any other community I’ve ever been a part of, Park City is healthy and active and embraces the outdoors,” she says. “It has the energy of people being here by choice too. Most families arrive in Park City because they made the decision to find a better place and lifestyle.”

Sanders had never lived in the mountains before but a move to Utah wasn’t one of the things she could say no to. “I loved the idea of the adventure of a new place. I didn’t really like snow when I was living in the city, but in Park City, snow has a purpose. The slopes are an 11-minute drive away.”

Of course Sanders skis—“growing up my dad would take me to Sugar Mountain on weekends ... here I prefer Deer Valley for its groomers and kids’ programs”—but she lives for Park City’s summers and winters. “Snow with a purpose is awesome, but I do struggle here when I feel like my face is going to freeze off,” Sanders says. “Come summer, it’s beautiful most every day and there are lots of outside activities.”

“We have the most gorgeous days here—pure blue skies when it’s both freezing cold and when it is really warm,” Sanders says. “Those days never get old, and I always feel grateful for them. When I come home, I cannot wait to take the kids swimming, go for a family bike ride, and soak up the changes in the seasons. I’m a California girl and miss the California weather, but that is the one thing California doesn’t get as severely that I enjoy, the changes in leaves and the shifts in seasons.”

Summer, the season, isn’t just sporty stuff. “The arts and music really come alive here,” Sanders says. There are outdoor concerts all summer long—this summer’s shows include Kenny Rogers, the Music of John Williams, Mary Chapin Carpenter and The Music of U2, among others. Several summer-long weekly concert series are even free: Wednesdays it’s the Grand Valley Bank Community Concert Series at the Snow Park Outdoor Amphitheater at Deer Valley; The Canyons does free shows by big-name acts at its outdoor amphitheater Saturday evenings; Silver Star Cafe hosts Plaza Paloosa Thursday evenings.

Their idyllic summer Park City lifestyle comes together through their Wednesday routine. “I hit the weekly Park City Farmer’s Market early to get the best stuff (held at The Canyons between noon and 6), and then later we go back so the kids can get Italian ices,” Sanders says. At the market, Sanders goes for Volker’s Bakery goods, especially the asiago cheese, and whatever else is available for a picnic dinner. After cooling down with help from the Italian ices, the family heads to Deer Valley where the Wednesday’s concerts highlight Summit County and Utah musicians. “We’ll have our picnic and chairs and blankets and the whole family has fun, listening to music and running around,” she says. “I love and am fueled by Park City.”

When she and Schlopy get a night to themselves, they squeeze in as much as possible. “We both love to exercise so much, date nights often include some kind of fun workout followed by the reward of a great dinner and glass of wine,” she says.

Because she likes to look around while riding, Sanders prefers road biking to mountain biking. (Although this summer, because the area has hundreds of miles of buff single-track trails, Sanders plans on taking a mountain biking class at Deer Valley.) Until then, she and Schlopy enjoy Park City’s extensive pathway system or riding through The Preserve, a low-traffic residential area.

For a meal, she and Schlopy love High West Distillery, opened in a historic iron and Victorian home at the base of a ski lift on Main Street by a foodie biochemist. It’s the only ski-in gastro-distillery in the world and the first distillery in Utah since the 1870s. The couple most often sidles up to High West’s bar—made of reclaimed wood from the Great Salt Lake Trestle Bridge of 1904—for small plates of western-inspired comfort food prepared by Swiss-trained chef James Dumas. “I guess my ‘try anything’ attitude applies here too. We get three of these and enjoy so many different tastes,” Sanders says.

For a mid-day rendezvous, often after a swim or trail run through the aspen groves in the mountains, Sanders meets her girlfriends at Park City Coffee Roasters to pick out her favorite treat in the city: a raspberry white chocolate muffin.

“I could live anywhere,” she says about her gorgeous home. “But Park City is even more beautiful because of my family and friends.”