

EXCLUSIVE

CHRISTMAS CHEER FOR SINGER AND PHILANTHROPIST

# ELEANOR McCAIN

AS SHE INVITES *HELLO!* INTO HER STUNNING HOME AND OPENS UP ABOUT HER LEGENDARY FAMILY

'My mother instilled a love of the holidays in me from the time I was a little girl'



Classically trained singer Eleanor, whose father, Wallace, was the co-founder of Canada's famous McCain Foods, welcomed *Hello!* to her home ahead of a busy month of holiday performances. 'On Dec. 26, I plan to sleep for a week!'

**W**hen Eleanor McCain throws open the doors to her stunning mansion in Toronto, the place immediately feels like home. Part of it is the inviting décor, high ceilings and an adorable eight-year-old black Labrador named Amy who enjoys everyone she meets. But it's mostly due to the beautiful hostess, who has a warmth, friendliness and joie de vivre that would put anyone at ease.

That's not what you might expect from the daughter of the late billionaire Wallace McCain, of the McCain frozen foods empire, and his wife, Margaret, the first female lieutenant-governor of New Brunswick. Although her family is legendary and Eleanor is herself a nationally known singer

with a gorgeous house and a wardrobe that would leave even the most fashionable of Hollywood stars swooning, she is as down-to-earth as they come.

Credit goes to her grounded upbringing in the picturesque village of Florenceville, N.B. – population then about 800 – which has been home to some of her ancestors since the 1830s.

"The good thing about growing up in an area where your father's family has lived for generations is that no one really cares who you 'are,' so to speak," she tells *Hello! Canada*.

Eleanor, the youngest of four siblings, flourished in this rural setting. And although she moved to Toronto to pursue ▶



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her classical training after graduating from the music program at Mount Allison University – she has released four CDs and plans to record her fifth next year – she still considers herself “a country girl.”

“There are parts of life in the city that are still foreign to me,” says Eleanor, a single mother to daughter Laura, 10. As she and her family gear up for a busy holiday season, Eleanor joins us for a walk down memory lane.

**Eleanor, your childhood must have been quite idyllic.** I love that life was simple and yet so meaningful. Life seems to be moving at hyper-speed now, so I cherish the memories of sitting on my front lawn looking at the most beautiful green hills. Having time to stop and think seems like such a luxury these days! I remember feelings of freedom, peace, serenity in a small village of people you cared about, and they cared about you. Because we didn't have various forms of entertainment or restaurants, when things happened in Florenceville, it was a community event! On Saturday nights in the winter, our entertainment was going to the local senior men's hockey game. In the summer, the kids on our road would play a game of Ghost [a form of hide and seek] at our house after dark. I still have friends that I've had since I was three years old. Having such meaningful relationships with a lifelong history is a real gift.

**What was it like growing up as a McCain?** We were – and still are in our hearts – so much a part of the community. Our last name was just not something we gave any thought to. Dad was one of the “boys” and he never forgot it. I find the idea of the family name came up in conversations more once I left Florenceville. It's something I really don't like to focus on and often feel uncomfortable about discussing in this way.

**How have you managed to stay so grounded?** My parents always wanted us to be part of the community and to not feel separate from it. There is also something in that maritime air that keeps people



Eleanor moved to Toronto when she was 21 to pursue her classical music training and is about to start working on her fifth CD. In her heart, she's never stopped being a Maritimer. 'I adored growing up in Florenceville, and I am so grateful that my parents chose to raise our family there,' she says. Although she travels back to the East Coast as much as she can, home now is an exquisite mansion in Toronto where she lives with her daughter, Laura, 10, and their dog, Amy.

focused on what matters in life – the ones you love, hard work and the things you are passionate about.

**You lost your father, Wallace, to pancreatic cancer in May 2011. What are your fondest memories of him?** Dad was a real character, such a fun sense of humour – he was unique! My father's strength of character, charisma, high energy and strong values of integrity, honesty and loyalty are what I carry with me every day. I also loved how modest he was even though he accomplished so much in his life. He never forgot where he came from. He had a strong work ethic and passion that he embodied and passed on to me and my siblings. And most of all, he loved his wife and his family dearly and we loved him in return. Dad also taught me so much at the end of his life. I saw at an even deeper level ▶





Eleanor and Amy cozy up on the couch in the master bedroom. Family is of the utmost importance to the singer. Her house is decorated with framed photos of her daughter, Laura, and she loves that her mother and siblings live close by.

## 'I never have enough words to describe all I admire about my parents'

feel I never have enough words to describe all of the things I admire about both of my parents.

**Are you raising Laura in a way similar to the way your own parents raised you?** I instill in Laura the values that my parents instilled in me. When my father passed away, I spoke at the funeral about the lessons he taught me. I was amazed that Laura has since periodically referenced the things I said and has started to internalize many of the values that my parents and I hold dear.

**Music is your passion. What first sparked your interest in singing?** I started taking singing seriously after my parents took me to see *Annie* in New York City when I was nine. We were visiting my aunt, who lived in Connecticut. I sat on the edge of my seat mesmerized as I watched all those little girls – who were around my age – onstage performing. I was dying to do that myself. I went back to my aunt's house that night singing the songs from the show which drove my sister, Martha, and my cousin, Andrew, absolutely nuts!

**Tell us about your Christmas CD, *Holiday*.** I have been dreaming of this my whole life. My mother, to whom it's dedicated, instilled a love of the holidays in me from the time I was a little girl. Music was a big part of our traditions. Not just in the music we listened to, but in performing it over the holidays as well. My mother was a pianist and she was our church organist. She played for school Christmas concerts and Christmas services at church. So I've had a song list building for a long time! **H**

the love and respect my parents shared – and that outside of his family, one of the most fulfilling things for him was his ability to give back to many charities in a meaningful way. My parents have influenced me deeply in their philanthropic endeavours. This, along with my father's experience in his final journey with cancer, is why I support palliative-care charities.

I was so grateful to all those who helped my father and our family navigate a very emotional time.

**Your mother, Margaret, is also quite amazing.** She was a stay-at-home, hands-on mother while we grew up. I am so grateful that she was there for us. She listened – and still does! – to all of my tales of woe. [Laughs] She is a great sounding board.

She also supported me in music by taking me to my vocal lessons in Fredericton, which was an hour and a half away, every week and by accompanying me [on the piano] in all of my concerts growing up. Once we were grown, my mother developed her life outside of her family. She not only supports the causes that are close to her heart, but she brings awareness to them. I

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