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# A stark portrait of media mogul Sumner Redstone Redstone: Ex-girlfriend says he's 'a living ghost'



Sumner Redstone is flanked by Sydney Holland, left, and Manuela Herzer. Until recently both were residents of Redstone's hilltop estate in Beverly Park. (Billy Bennight / ZUMAPRESS.com)



By **Meg James** · Contact Reporter

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**B**eyond the gates of an exclusive Beverly Hills enclave, a round-the-clock crew of more than a dozen staff members — nurses, housekeepers, security guards and a loyal limousine driver — tend to the every need of **Sumner Redstone**.

The ailing 92-year-old executive chairman of **Viacom Inc.** and **CBS Corp.** is largely confined to his 15,355-square-foot mansion with eight bathrooms, gigantic tanks of tropical fish and four dogs, including two long-haired Dachshunds named Arthur and Murray.

Once bustling with activity, the compound is quieter these days. The girlfriends are gone. Football, basketball and CNBC still play on the giant TVs, but the once razor-sharp mogul lacks interest. He perks

up during visits with his grandchildren, friends, his physician, lawyers and executives from New York — but those visits also cause frustration because Redstone has lost the ability to clearly articulate his words.

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This is the stark portrait of the tycoon that emerges from interviews with insiders, lawyers and recently filed court documents. Once one of Hollywood's most imposing and powerful executives, Redstone has become "a living ghost," according to a lawsuit filed last month by a former girlfriend.

It's a humbling turn of events for a man who outmaneuvered rivals to build one of the world's largest media empires that boasts the nation's most-watched TV network, CBS; prominent cable channels, including Showtime, Comedy Central, MTV and [Nickelodeon](#); and the legendary Hollywood movie studio Paramount Pictures.

Redstone long ago relinquished day-to-day management of CBS and Viacom, but he continues to control nearly 80% of the companies' voting shares. There could be a change in ownership of the two media companies should the mogul become incapacitated or die.

"Sumner Redstone has become a tragic figure in the waning days of an accomplished life," said the lawsuit brought by the former flame, Manuela Herzer, who had an on-again, off-again relationship with the mogul for more than 16 years.

Herzer, 51, was Redstone's primary caregiver and was a beneficiary in his personal trust. She was designated as the agent in charge of Redstone's advance healthcare directive, with power of attorney, until October. She alleges that she was wrongly removed from her perch and has asked a judge to rule that Redstone is mentally incompetent.

Lawyers representing Redstone counter that he is still in charge of his faculties and decisions about his healthcare. They call Herzer's tactics "reprehensible" and say her motivation is to keep from getting cut out of Redstone's will.

Herzer's dramatic departure from Beverly Park brought a sudden end to one of Hollywood's favorite pieces of gossip: the aging billionaire and his two girlfriends.

Herzer and another woman, 44-year-old Sydney Holland, until recently were residents of Redstone's five-bedroom hilltop estate in Beverly Park next to the home of Sylvester Stallone. For more than four years, the socialites were part of the mogul's public entourage and played an increasingly important behind-the-scenes role as gatekeepers of Redstone's daily schedule.

Hollywood insiders long marveled about the peculiar bond between Herzer and Holland. The two women

seemed to be in competition for Redstone's affections, but they managed to coexist and were a formidable team.

"Manuela [Herzer] was the brains behind the operation," said one person familiar with the pair who did not want to be identified discussing personal interactions. "She ruled the roost."

But the affair began unraveling in late August when Redstone ordered Holland out of his life. For a while, it appeared that Herzer would survive — but then she too got the boot. Few seem to know the precise reason why, but Herzer lashed out with the lawsuit that challenges changes made to Redstone's legal documents.

In her suit, Herzer depicts Redstone as someone who can no longer effectively communicate, but whose demands for sex and steak are unabated.

"Mr. Redstone demands, to the extent that he can be understood, to engage in sexual activity every day," according to Herzer's petition. "He must be carried around the house, to and from the bathroom, and in and out of bed," Herzer said. "He is emotionally distraught by his inability to eat or drink.... Redstone is obsessed with eating steak and cannot seem to recall or understand why he cannot do so."

Herzer met Redstone in the late 1990s during a dinner party at the home of movie producer Robert Evans ("Chinatown," "Marathon Man"), a longtime member of the Hollywood fast lane. Herzer was seated next to Redstone at the table.

Evans now says Redstone probably was too trusting. "A naivete," he said.

"Sumner is a man of great extremes," Evans said. "But it is a sad commentary for him to be taken advantage of in this way."

Redstone's involvement in the affairs of the two companies is unclear; but it has been a full 18 months since he was physically present at a Viacom or a CBS corporate event. Two strong executives, Viacom Chief Executive [Philippe Dauman](#) and CBS CEO [Leslie Moonves](#) manage their respective companies. Dauman has said that he calls Redstone several times a week to discuss company business. Redstone also listens via phone to Viacom and CBS board meetings, according to people with knowledge of the situation.

Company representatives, however, declined to provide examples of recent decisions made with input from Redstone.

The saga has startled Viacom and CBS shareholders and raised questions about the future of his holdings. Redstone is worth \$5 billion, according to Forbes, but much of that wealth is tied up in Viacom

and CBS stock. Seven trustees, including two Redstone family members, will decide the fate of the companies after Redstone dies or is found to be incapacitated.

"Steak and sex is a great story for Hollywood," said Mario Gabelli, whose investment funds are the second-largest holder of CBS and Viacom voting shares. "But the real question is: Does Sumner have it together — or not?"

Viacom executives and doctors say that Redstone knows what's going on. His lawyers have challenged Herzer's motives, saying she is out for the money and that her lawsuit is an attempt to lay the groundwork to ultimately contest his will. Redstone, they say, has passed several competency tests. His personal physician checks on him twice a week and he had a CT scan.

"Overall, Mr. Redstone's brain scan was quite good for a 92-year-old," his physician, Dr. Richard Gold, wrote in a declaration supporting the Redstone camp's request that Herzer's lawsuit be dismissed.

The bitter breakup with Herzer is just the latest in a series of Redstone's fraught relationships.

Over the years he has fought vociferously with rival companies, family members (including his two children) and corporate lieutenants. In 2006, he famously fired **Tom Cruise**, one of Hollywood's biggest stars, on the grounds that Cruise was making too much money.

Redstone is estranged from his only son, Brent Redstone. His relationship with his daughter, Shari Redstone, has long been strained. She stayed involved in the family business, and serves as vice chairman of both CBS and Viacom, but the hackles of the elder Redstone were raised when he perceived that his daughter was positioning herself as his successor.

"There is a lot of dysfunction around Mr. Redstone," said Herzer's attorney, Pierce O'Donnell. "He's alienated from his two adult children and he is not on the best relationship with his grandchildren. Why did he pick two women who were his friends to be his healthcare agents and oversee his healthcare when he had other people available?"

People close to Redstone say that family members largely were shunted aside in recent years as Redstone became more involved with Herzer and Holland.

Herzer came on the scene about the same time that Redstone's 52-year first marriage was ending. Then Herzer remained a close confidant throughout Redstone's marriage to his second wife, Paula Fortunato.

"He would ask my opinions on deeply intimate matters such as his marital and family difficulties," Herzer said in the court papers.

After Redstone and Fortunato divorced in 2009, Herzer's relationship with the mogul intensified.

"In 2009, Sumner surprised my children and me by purchasing a new home for us," Herzer said. "In 2011, Sumner named me as a beneficiary in his personal trust."

Meanwhile, the raven-haired Holland had taken up with Redstone and soon moved into his Beverly Park mansion. Herzer was allowed to use Redstone's penthouse apartment at the Art Deco-style Carlyle Hotel in New York. The two women escorted him to parties and other outings, such as when Redstone received his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2012.

Redstone treated her and her children like family, Herzer said. Her teenage daughter, Kathrine Herzer, landed a role in the CBS drama "Madam Secretary."

Interviews and court records show that the women gained additional power and money last year. That's when Redstone appointed both women as co-agents in charge of his advance health directive with decision-making authority should he become incapacitated.

Also last year, Redstone began exercising stock options in the two media companies, according to regulatory filings. During a 12-month period from the spring of 2014 to earlier this year, Redstone's stock sales netted about \$200 million.

Some of that money went to "substantial gifts to Sydney and me to ensure that we would be cared for during the rest of our lives," Herzer said in her declaration. "He did not want us to ever have to worry about our financial security, especially after his demise."

Redstone's health took a sharp turn for the worse in mid-2014. He was hospitalized three times and "lost the ability to eat, drink and vocalize clearly," according to court documents. Herzer said that in September 2014, she, Holland and Redstone agreed that a feeding tube should be inserted to prolong Redstone's life, a decision that caused friction with the family. They objected because "it was against the family's Jewish religion to install a feeding tube," the court documents said.

Family members no longer felt welcome at Redstone's house. Redstone's grandson, Brandon Korff, who previously squired his grandfather around town, all but stopped spending time at the mansion.

The beginning of the end for the two women came last summer after they were prominently featured in Vanity Fair, celebrating their status as co-girlfriends. They posed for photos in designer gowns in an article that ran in June under a headline: "Who Controls Sumner Redstone?"

It was an embarrassment for Redstone, his family and Viacom executives. Within a few months, Redstone was shown more pictures, this time of Holland with another man: George Pilgrim, an actor who was living in a \$3-million house that Holland had bought in Sedona, Ariz., according to insiders.

Redstone became outraged and ordered Holland out of his house. On Sept. 3, Holland was excised from legal documents, replaced by Herzer. She functioned as Redstone's primary caregiver for the next six weeks, until Oct. 12.

When Herzer arrived at Redstone's home that day, she was confronted by the Paramount Pictures limousine driver, who said: "Mr. Redstone does not want you here," according to the court filing. Herzer ignored him and continued past the koi ponds, through the vestibule and down a hall to the "fish room," where Redstone spends much of his time. The room is so named because one of its walls is a massive tank filled with large and exotic fish, insiders said.

She encountered a cluster of people huddled around the mogul: a security guard, a male nurse and Redstone's attorney, Leah Bishop. Bishop told her to leave; Herzer demanded to know why.

"Sumner made a grunting noise and began crying uncontrollably," she said.

Herzer's attorneys say they have been given no credible explanation for why she was evicted. On Oct. 16, Viacom CEO Dauman was designated as the agent in charge of Redstone's healthcare directive.

Since then, Shari Redstone and other family members have returned to the mansion.

"Sumner's family is enjoying their ability to visit with him regularly and to talk with him every day," said Nancy Sterling, a spokesperson for Shari Redstone.

Herzer was allowed back into the mansion Nov. 23 to retrieve her belongings.

"It was like walking into a presidential palace," said Ronald Richards, a Beverly Hills attorney who represents Herzer and coordinated the move. "There were plain-clothes security guards all over the grounds with those little earplugs. And we were not allowed to use our cellphones."

It took about three hours for the professional movers to pack Herzer's possessions, Richards said.

"She had boxes and boxes of shoes and clothing — more clothing than I could possibly wear in my entire life," he said.

And a thick black curtain had been strung along the hallway, forbidding access into Redstone's room.

"He was caged in his bedroom; it was like he was a prisoner in his own home," Richards said. "I've never seen anything like it."

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