

**READER'S DIGEST:** I would like to start by talking about what it was like for you to take the last two years off.

**CELINE DION:** Crucial. It was very, very important. It's not about vacation, it's not about going on a cruise, and it has nothing to do with being home every day and just relaxing. You have to do what's healthy. I needed a balance. When you're in show business for twenty-something years...

**READER'S DIGEST:** All your life, nearly.

**DION:** Yes. At some point you need to take it easy and have a normal life. I needed to get away from show business. I think it was time for me to stop. It was just too much. After *Beauty and the Beast* and *Titanic*, and everything else, so many things are being said, too much publicity, TV, radio, big hits, too much, too much.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Maybe too much exposure.

**DION:** I didn't want people to say, "Oh, my God, her again." I wanted a life career. I don't want people to be tired of seeing me or hearing me, so I wanted to take a break.

That's only one reason—there are plenty more. My husband was diagnosed with cancer almost three years ago, and he's still in remission. He's doing—I'm knocking on wood—fantastically well. He needed me, and I needed him to need me at the same time. It was great to be in charge, in a soft way, in charge. When somebody loves you and when that person comes to you and says, "I need you..."

Normally René's a tough guy. He's the one that's in control of everything, the one who decides everything. I'm trying to sing my songs the best I can. That's all I want to do and that's all I'm doing. But now he wanted to lie on my shoulder, and he gave me a responsibility, and it made me feel very powerful and very strong. I loved that responsibility.

Also, we wanted a child. He almost lost his life, so to give life was an incredible achievement for both of us. So, I took off for all those reasons: For the health of our minds, to be relaxed, to have a balance in our lives, to have a normal life, to be home for him, home for us, to rest, for people not to be tired of me, and to have this kid.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You mentioned there were normal things you wanted to do like drive your own car, iron your husband's shirts, things that you had missed.

**DION:** Yes. But to be honest, I didn't have time to do all of those things. Time flew very quickly. I don't feel like it's been two years. Mostly every person told me, "How are you going to do that? Stop for two years. You aren't going to be able to do that. Impossible."

And for me it feels like it's been three, four months. It didn't feel like two years. And I've had a baby. When you're pregnant and you breastfeed, that's all you do. Time flies. We went back to Montreal and saw family and it just flew so quick. We were talking about it, and I'm like, "Really, I don't miss show business at all." But when I go back in the recording studio, and I start to sing again, then something is still there that never left me. I didn't live with show business in my mind everyday, but the feeling that I had was like when I travel. I'm from the province of Quebec, Canada, and when I leave my country, a piece of me stays there. I feel like I never leave. Well, it's the same in show business. I stopped, but a part of me, like this little candle, stayed lit. So, when I started to sing again, it was still there and it was fun. It was great. My son was with me and it's great also to have

something to talk about and something to sing about. When you sing one song after another over the years, you get a little tired and you don't know what you're going to talk about in the interviews, on TV, in your songs, it's pretty much the same thing. When you stop and go back and enjoy life, and instead of talking all the time, you listen to others, and you have a child and a home and you visit your family that you don't see so much. Then when you come back, it gives you something to talk about and something to sing about. It's refreshing for me.

**READER'S DIGEST:** How did you arrive at the decision of saying, "I'm going to come back"? Did you give yourself a timetable?

**DION:** Yes. First of all, it was never said that I was going to retire. It's probably my French. I probably expressed myself wrong, but everybody says to me, "You were supposed to retire, and we didn't know you were going to come back." Taking two years off didn't mean retirement. It meant a break. Vacation and a break and a time-out can be five years, it can be 10 years, it can be a month. We decided two years was going to be fair. I didn't want to stop my career. I didn't want to stop for too long to rebuild the whole thing, but at the same time I needed more than six months. I wanted to have a child and I needed more time. But it was always clear in my mind that I was going to come back. So, knowing that, I'm glad that the first try of in vitro worked, because it would have pushed me even more.

**READER'S DIGEST:** This time around, I imagine, you're a different person simply because you're a mother, you've got a baby, you've done other things. Is your show-business life going to be different?

**DION:** Very different.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do you think differently about touring?

**DION:** Very differently and that's why I'm not going to be touring anymore. That's why in March 2003 I'm going to be moving to Las Vegas for three years. René and I talked, and I said, there's no way that I can take the plane every night, leave the hotel every afternoon, do the sound check, eat, do my hair and makeup, stretch, do vocal exercises, do the show, get in the airplane again, next city, René-Charles [Ms. Dion's son], ear infections... How am I going to deal with all this and not being able to be with my son? These are very important years. I mean, every year is important, every moment is important, but the first years of a child are very, very important.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's when you establish a foundation.

**DION:** I think you do, and that foundation makes you solid for the rest of your life. Foundation, true values, that's what I've received. Our biggest challenge, and the most important job, and the most difficult too, is to raise our kid in this environment of a "not normal life" and to remain normal people. It's going to be difficult, I know. But at the same time, we're not the only artists who have children, and he's not the only one to have artists as parents. It has happened before. But it's important to me that my family and René's family all get together.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Stability.

**DION:** Yes. So I said, "I can't just go on tour and not be able to see him. I won't be able to perform, and I'm going to be sick and I won't be the best of me—neither as a mother nor a performer." I want to be professional in my show-business life, but I also want to be professional as a mother. I have a very important role to play. Being a mother is my biggest responsibility. I remember when we were in Vegas, and I was seeing artists perform there for six months and some for the next ten years. I said to myself, "Why can't we just establish ourselves at one place instead of me traveling the world? Why can't people just come and see our show?" Then I thought it was a little bit pretentious for me

thinking that way. Then I really thought of it, and I said, “You know what? What the heck. It’s the only way. It’s either this or nothing.”

**READER’S DIGEST:** Your child is young only once. You have these years only once, and like you said before, time passes quickly.

**DION:** Oh yes. René said, “Would you come here for the whole year and live in Las Vegas?” And I said, “You know what? Yes.” He said, “Get out of here!” I said, “I’m very serious. If we have a child, you don’t know how important it is for me to be here for my child.” I was not even pregnant at the time. But it was important already in my mind that if we have a child, that this kid sleeps in his own bed, and plays with his toys. Not that it would have been so bad, but it would have been hard for me. If he’s sick, I know he’s taken care of so well. My sister Linda and my brother-in-law have lived with us for four years now, so we know each other very well. They’re the godparents of René-Charles, and I know that I trust them more than I do myself. So I will leave home around six at night, and the show’s at eight thirty, and it’s an hour-and-a-half show. At six o’clock the day’s almost over for a little child. He’s going to get ready soon for his bath and then he’s going to have a little cereal, something to eat, TV or whatever, he’s going to play a little bit, and then he’s going to go to bed. I feel comfortable with that. And we are fortunate that we had the deal working for us in Las Vegas. We’re building a house right now about 25 minutes away from where I am going to be performing. This way, when I leave home, I know he’s fine. I do my show, I can be the best of me.

But also, I wouldn’t have been able to have a show like this and travel with it because it’s going to be so spectacular. It’s being done by the people from Cirque du Soleil—the guys who did “O.” They will do my next show.

**READER’S DIGEST:** Which casino is it at, or which hotel?

**DION:** Me or “O”?

**READER’S DIGEST:** You.

**DION:** I’m going to be at Caesars Palace. It’s going to be a big show that we can’t travel with, a visual show, so beautiful to look at. I’ll be thrilled to do it every night. There are going to be about a hundred people onstage. It’s going to be very, very spectacular. *That* I’m looking forward to. So, with all these things—being back in the studio, singing again, knowing that René-Charles is going to be fine, the Cirque du Soleil, and all that—I’m excited. I’m happy to come back.

**READER’S DIGEST:** Well, you’re obviously very much in love with René-Charles.

**DION:** Yes, sorry!

**READER’S DIGEST:** No, I think that’s wonderful.

**DION:** I’m like every mother: “He’s the most beautiful, he’s the most intelligent...”

**READER’S DIGEST:** Tell us a little bit about him, what he likes, what you have enjoyed about being with him.

**DION:** Oh, every single moment. When he was very, very small, so weak, without any defenses, it was so nice to just hold him. He smells so good, he’s so warm and nice. I love when you take off his socks in the morning, and he opens his toes, and there’s fuzz. If you smell the toes, it smells a little like vinegar. And when he started to crawl, it was another great moment, and now he’s taking steps. There’s not one specific moment that’s been enjoyable. They’re all so precious. I’m trying to take pictures as much as I can, and put everything on film, because you forget things and then you turn

around and he's three years old and you haven't been taking pictures for the last six months. You have to make sure you save everything, as much as you can for them. And it all makes me want to have another child for sure. I wish I could have more time to have another one.

**READER'S DIGEST:** We've read that you have another fertilized embryo that is frozen. Are you planning to implant it?

**DION:** *After Vegas*—because I don't want to give any less to the second child than the first one. If I have another child, if we're lucky enough, if it works the second time, then he or she deserves to be breastfed the same way, and for Mommy to be at home. I don't want to stress myself and say in three months, "I'm going to start working again, so can you drink a little faster?" I'm fortunate enough to have the choice to do that. So why not? I want to give as much to the second one. Motherhood and babies are incredible.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I think motherhood is a defining factor in a woman's life, no matter who you are, even people who don't think of themselves as being very motherly. Once you have a child, it's a turning point. How did you change?

**DION:** The natural instinct comes out. I have this in my blood for sure. I hope it isn't wrong for me to say this, but everything else doesn't matter now. There's nothing else. He's the center of our universe. I'll die for my child. I don't know if I can say more than that. I would definitely go in front of a train, or if I had to give my heart, my lungs, my everything, I wouldn't even think about it. I will open my whole body up and they can take whatever they need. I'd give everything for my child. I don't think I can be any more precise than that. It changes your life. You love them so much. They are you. Since the first day when they cut the umbilical cord, whew, that was hard already. It's tough, the cuts started right there. Then they start to walk and they want to fly, and then they start school, and then they get married, and then... It's always a cut. When you stop breastfeeding, it's hard.

**READER'S DIGEST:** My mother always said, "Wait until you have children." And it was true because I think it's like a chain. Every generation goes, in some way, through the same feelings of separation and realizes that this is what children are supposed to do. They're supposed to move away. It's so hard for mothers to let go.

**DION:** It is very hard. I feel that already. I'm not saying that nothing else but your child is important, because you have to be healthy, you have to take care of your life and your happiness, you have to keep going and do your stuff, but if I would have to choose, there's not a question about it. He's your own blood. He's priority. He's first in everything, for sure.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Is there one thing that you're worried about after becoming a mother, that you perhaps didn't think about or didn't know about yourself?

**DION:** I knew I was going to love this kid more than anything in the world, but I didn't know how strong it can be. You love your mother and you love your husband, but when you have children, it's something else. I thought it was going to be just as strong as all those other things, but it's stronger.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Is it the same for René?

**DION:** I'm pretty sure. He has three more children and he always said to me, "Wait, when you have your own kids..."

**READER'S DIGEST:** Your older children, they have this new baby now.

**DION:** They have this new brother, but now it's weird because two of his other children, they had children recently. So René-Charles is an uncle two times already. So Anne Marie is 23 years old and

she's René's daughter, and her son is six months old. Patrick, his oldest son, just had a little girl—she's about two months old. It's pretty wild. I'm glad I was a mother before a grandmother, though.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Now you can give advice. Think of it that way. I think every parent has dreams for their children—you know, little secret dreams you harbor. Some of them can be things that you would want them to do with their lives, but other things are about just being happy.

**DION:** I don't care if he's a garbageman, if he's a fireman, if he's in show business, a rock 'n' roll guitar player, a singer, a lawyer, a dentist, a father... What I care about is that he is a good human being. I want him to have values, be generous, caring, open-minded. I want him to be a good human being no matter what he does. I think it's most important. You know, sometimes you're nobody in life. You have no money, you're not successful, you're not pretty, you have hard times, but you mean well and you are generous, and you have a good heart. That to me deserves everything. Some people should pay more attention to people like that. If you go for a job today and you're short and you're ugly, you're not going to have as much chance as somebody who's six feet tall and nice-looking. I don't think it's fair. I know it's like that, but I don't think it's okay that it's like this.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do you think those are values you've learned from your family? You said you're very close to your mother. Is this something that she taught you?

**DION:** Well, I'm sure whatever is in me comes from my childhood and my brothers and sisters, and my coming from a family without money and having a hard time. My mother never had money and put aside her whole life. She gave her life to us, but even though we had no money and just enough to put on the table, we never missed food. We had just enough, but the door was still open for anybody else who knocked on the door.

Today I'm looking back at that. I have a big house and all the help in the world, and money. And I

wish she could have had a house like this, my mother, to raise her children. I wish she could have just had a little bit of money to help her. She had nothing. But at the same time, everything that we needed to have, she gave to us. And that was the most important stuff. Whatever I am today, whatever I've become, it's not only coming from the fact that I'm 34 and I'm learning and traveling, but it's been given to me also by my family. I don't even know how my mother did it. She's my idol. She's the person that I look up to the most.

**READER'S DIGEST:** She had 14 children?

**DION:** Not only 14 children, but none of us are cuckoo, or stupid. We all work hard. We're all doing well.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's incredible... [Ms. Dion speaks to her baby in French.] Do you speak to him only in French?

**DION:** Yes, we only speak French to him, and the housekeepers, the people here, they speak in English and Spanish. Yolanda speaks in Spanish, and the rest in English.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So he's getting a little English.

**DION:** He's going to go to English school.

**READER'S DIGEST:** He'll be fully multilingual. French, Spanish and English. Going back to the life you spoke of before, when you look back, are there things you would have wanted to do differently?

**DION:** Absolutely not. I don't regret anything, and I'm so happy now that I wouldn't change anything because it wouldn't have brought me here. Every piece of the puzzle was in the right place—even

the mistakes, they had to happen.

**READER'S DIGEST:** To learn?

**DION:** To learn, to go forward or to go back and say, "Okay, wait a second here."

**READER'S DIGEST:** They say you really don't learn anything from success. You learn from your mistakes.

**DION:** I'm fortunate enough to have a lot of people around me to protect me from falling and hurting myself, but... [Ms. Dion tends to her baby.]

**READER'S DIGEST:** So he's at the age now where he touches everything?

**DION:** He wants to have everything. He wants to knock on everything.

**READER'S DIGEST:** He knows we're talking about him. Now, you have 13 siblings. You're the youngest?

**DION:** I'm the fourteenth, yes.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Your sister Linda lives here. How often do you get to see the others at family gatherings?

**DION:** Well, not a lot. It's everybody at once only one time a year, at Christmas. That's only one time, because we're too many people. We just had a Christmas party—we were about 200 people. Big party. We try to send flowers for their birthdays, for my brothers and sisters, for them to know

that even though we don't see each other a lot, we're thinking of them. They all live in Montreal. We have a house in Montreal also, but we spend more time here [in Florida]. This is our main house. I don't like to say the main house, because to me, they're all the main house.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So you'll keep this home when you go to Vegas?

**DION:** Yes. I think we will. Because when we have time off, we can always come here. I'm going to be working a month and a half, two months, and then I'm going to take two, three weeks off every time. So it's not going to be that bad. I'm going to go either here or to Montreal. If it's too cold in Montreal, we'll come home.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Will it be seven nights a week?

**DION:** Five.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So you still get a weekend.

**DION:** The days off will be Tuesday, Wednesday or Monday, Tuesday. It depends. So that's cool, because normally I do three, four shows a week anyway, plus traveling. Now it will be five shows a week with no traveling. I think it's less tiring.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Growing up in a large family—we were talking about this before—gives you a certain sense of your place in the world. How do you think it helped you? How did it affect you? You've said that you were pampered by your brothers and sisters because you were the baby.

**DION:** I am still pampered by them—and what has been given to me is security. When you have this solid foundation of love, of being able to count on brothers and sisters and parents, despite every-

thing else that happens to you in your life, failures or loss or things like that, you know you have people there to help you, support you, and encourage you. And that's a lot. I know also that I won't end up alone. That's important for me. When you grow up in a big family, sometimes you think when you get old, because you're the youngest... I don't want to end up dying alone. Having a big family like this, I know there will be a lot of people around all the time. The family keeps growing and growing, which is great.

**READER'S DIGEST:** How many nephews and nieces do you have?

**DION:** I think we're up to 30 or 35. René-Charles is the 30th, if I remember. But it's still growing.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So that's why a family gathering is 200.

**DION:** Two hundred people. Fourteen children all married, 35 something nieces and nephews, and some of those nephews are married and they have children.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You definitely won't be alone.

**DION:** My wealth is my family, the people around me, and their love and support. That's going to play an important role in René-Charles' life.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Someone who has such an amazing talent as you do might say that your wealth is your voice.

**DION:** Oh no, not at all. Okay, you sing, you are lucky, you sing, have a good time, good for you. You have money for your old age. Good for you. But it's not a must in life. Let's say I have a voice, and I'm not successful. I would have been just as happy as a human being, to be a mother or to

work at a store because I'm happy for what I've been given as far as roots and values. It's not my voice that's bringing me joy. It's just a side-order. It's just something extra. When I'm home, I don't sing. I'm enjoying my family pictures, a cup of tea, being in the pool, and cooking. I have some friends over, play outside, ride a bike, and play golf.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You talk about family supporting you in loss. You had a niece who passed away, which has to be devastating.

**DION:** Yes. She was 16 years old. It was hard for the whole family, but it's also hard to see a child suffering since day one.

**READER'S DIGEST:** With cystic fibrosis?

**DION:** That's right. And you have to always think positive. There's always good sides. It's like when you get sick, it's not something you've chosen, but it's been given to you. God said, "You'll be sick, but you still have a choice." You don't have a choice of being sick or healthy. You're going to be sick, but you have a choice of the way you're going to live and go through it. Good or bad. So when you lose a child, it is devastating. It's got to be the most difficult thing for a mother and a father. But thank God, the whole family was there to support my sister. I was very close to Karine, my niece who passed away. And, you have to think, because she's done so much with me for cystic fibrosis, we raised a lot of money and we still do, and you need those people, every person that is known should do something to [encourage public awareness and raise money]. And that's why I'm still doing the cystic fibrosis thing and I'm into charities and I do a lot and I give money. I've been very involved in that because that's also a responsibility. You make money because you're known.

[Karine and I] did commercials together and photo shoots for books. There are a lot of telethons and walk-a-thons. Today people with cystic fibrosis are living longer and longer. I'm sure that one day

[there'll be a cure]. And it'll be because of people like her who have suffered and who have died.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So you're saying there's some good that can come out of this.

**DION:** Some good. You have to think a little bit like that because otherwise you're gonna say, "Why her? Why me?" And you'd go crazy. You'd go very crazy.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You also had a scare with René with cancer. It has to be very frightening.

**DION:** It's not something that you think about every day. But I'm scared, of course. Being the youngest of the entourage, I feel like I'm going to lose all the petals on my flowers. One day or another I'm going to get stuck with my own little stem. We're all going to lose people that we love. We lose our mothers and we lose our fathers, and sometimes I think that if I go first, maybe it would be better. But it's not better. It's not the way it works. Hopefully, we can be together as long as possible. You cross the street, you can get killed—you never know. Everything is dangerous. Every day we have is fortunate. You can't think of death. You have to be thankful and not take anything for granted and say, "Today's a beautiful day. Look at the sun. We're lucky to have each other and Dad is here, Mom's here." Live for the moment. Even though sometimes it goes through your mind, it's not really something that you say, "What am I going to do if...?" You deal with this if and when it happens and you'll have to find the strength. Everybody goes through some things like that. That's life. Life is death; death is life—it's part of it, unfortunately. It's just been given to us for a small moment. Life is just loaned to you. You don't know for how long. So we have to be good to each other. Let's get close. Like what happened in New York—it brought us closer than ever.

You can't go back in the past. There are things you can't fix. But you can make things better. Let's try that. My dad is here. He's 78 years old, and I am happy to have my parents. When I got married, I said to myself, "I'm so glad my parents are there to see this." When I was pregnant, I just hoped

that my parents were going to be there to see my child. In two days, René-Charles is going to be a year old. If God wants my dad to be there, I'll be so fortunate that he'll be there to see my son blowing his first candle. It's just the little things of life that to me are the most precious. You know what? If you look at our family album, it's pregnancies, birthdays, parties, weddings, get-togethers, the first candle, the first Christmas, Santa Claus. On the other hand, if you talk about show business and money, forget it. You don't see those albums on my coffee table—you know what I mean?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Right. Looking into the future, you've talked about perhaps doing a movie.

**DION:** Maybe. I think I want to do the Vegas thing for a few years. And then, take three, four, five years off and maybe do a little show here and there, a record once in a while, and maybe a movie if it's meant to be, but I want to relax too. Not tour so much, not spend three years of my life packing a suitcase.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Living in a hotel room.

**DION:** Yes. I've done a lot of work. Now it's time to just sit down and relax. Just a little stretch again, and then that's it. Doesn't mean I'll retire completely, but I'll do just a few things here and there, if I can just go and present an award, or sing one song, do a movie, do an *Unplugged*, a different type of album. We'll see.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Sometimes we don't have much control over life. It's what happens to us.

**DION:** Well, that's it. You have to try to see ahead a little bit, of what you might want. But then you have to go with the flow and see.