

[Home](#) > [The Other Zuckerberg](#)

THE OTHER ZUCKERBERG

The sister of Facebook founder Mark is stepping out onto Silicon Valley's center stage with her own media company. **Portraits by Douglas Friedman. Fashion editor: Jill Lincoln.**

By Kara Swisher



Photo Credit: Douglas Friedman

*Pictured Above: **Kaufman Franco** gown, \$7,995, [neimanmarcus.com](#). **Cartier** earrings, [cartier.com](#). **Pomellato** necklace (worn as a bracelet), [pomellato.com](#). **Hellmuth** bangles, [hellmuthjewelry.com](#). **David Webb** ring, [davidwebb.com](#).*

In the summer of 2005, Randi Zuckerberg was 23 years old and ensconced in her dream job at the advertising firm Ogilvy & Mather in New York City, when her brother, Mark, then 21, sent her an e-mail. He followed it up with an instant message and a JetBlue ticket. His request: move to Silicon Valley to help with the marketing for his fledgling social-networking site. Against her better judgment, Randi took the ticket and got on the plane.

Her parents weren't sure about this decision either. "I think they were worried that if this went down in flames for him, they did not want their successful daughter to go down in flames too," she recalls.

Now Facebook—despite whatever IPO growing pains it may be experiencing—can only be described as a world-changing colossus. But Randi made another major decision: A year ago, she walked away from the company, after having her first child, a son named Asher, with her

husband and college sweetheart, Brent Tworetzky. And though she could be reveling in new motherhood, she made the leap in order to launch a splashy venture called—what else—Zuckerberg Media.

"Leaving was the hardest decision I ever made," says Randi, now 30. "I mean, I literally bleed Facebook blue even today. It was part of my family, part of my identity. My last name means Facebook."

Randi's story so far has been, somewhat predictably, wrapped up with that of her brother and of the social-media behemoth, where she worked for six years. But now Randi is stepping onto her own stage: She's envisioning a new kind of "social" production company, complete with a blinged-out studio that's being built down the road from Mark's new Menlo Park, California, headquarters, aiming for a January opening.

Does any of this make for potentially awkward sibling rivalry? She says no. "We were never really competitive with each other growing up," says Randi, who also has two younger sisters. "We are just so different."

Indeed they are. While her brother is often portrayed as a tongue-tied brainiac, Randi grew up dreaming of being an opera singer or a Broadway star. She's lived out that fantasy: To celebrate her birthday in February, her husband arranged for her to appear onstage in Las Vegas with one of the stars of *Jersey Boys*, with whom she sang "Summertime," from *Porgy and Bess*.

This kind of thing comes as no shock to those who know Randi; for years she made waves with her impromptu performances, from fronting a cover band of Facebookers called Feedbomb to self-producing videos that hit YouTube (and were scorned by some in Silicon Valley as being too, well, fun). But she couldn't care less. "I don't regret the videos because I am passionate about music and creativity and entertaining people. I am not going to apologize for doing what I am passionate about."

She also offers no apologies for executive-producing a controversial reality show set to air on Bravo this month, tentatively titled *Silicon Valley*, about a group of young tech entrepreneurs who live in some pretty sweet cribs in the Bay Area.

Without having seen the show, some people have accused her of selling out, and even of betraying her brother. In a post acidly titled "An Open Letter to Randi Zuckerberg: How Could You Do This to Real Entrepreneurs?" the high-profile tech writer Sarah Lacy took direct aim, writing that Randi had betrayed her geek DNA: "I hope she made plenty of money off the deal, because as far as I'm concerned she's sold her Silicon Valley soul for 15 minutes of fame on basic cable."

Obviously, Randi disagrees. "The important thing to know is that it is reality, not a documentary," she says diplomatically, with a sly wink thrown in for good measure. "I mean, if Honey Boo Boo can have her own show, surely there can be a show that glorifies entrepreneurship."

Surely. But if you dig a little deeper than these superficialities, Randi is serious about kicking it up a notch. "I really have to admit at this point that I am never going back to New York," she says. "But my entire life, I was one of those New Yorkers: I didn't think people could be happy anywhere else. I did not even think life existed elsewhere."

Granted, her life there was fairly idyllic. She grew up in Dobbs Ferry, New York, in the most normal of comfortable upper-middle-class surroundings. "Believe it or not, we were an incredibly ordinary family. Skiing in Vermont over winter break, summer camp in the summer," she remembers. Her father is a dentist, and her mother, a psychiatrist, manages the office. "One thing I will say is that my parents really encouraged us to follow our passions." Achievement was also important, and Randi hit all the right notes, with good grades at New York's elite Horace Mann School and the ultimate triumph of attending Harvard.

She was followed to the prestigious university by her brother, who soon dropped out to cofound Facebook. "The one thing I can say I have going for me," she jokes of her 2003 psychology degree, "is that my brother didn't graduate."

While Mark moved west to focus on Facebook, Randi moved to Manhattan, where she lived until she received that fateful e-mail. She became one of the first two dozen people hired at Facebook, a number that would explode as the start-up garnered millions in venture funding and attracted tens of millions of users. (Her sisters have done well outside Facebook; Donna, 25, is a Ph.D. candidate in classics at Princeton, while the youngest, Arielle, 23, works for a marketing software developer recently bought by Google.)

When she first arrived at the company, Randi was positioned in the marketing department. (She initially tried to negotiate for a larger salary, but her brother insisted she take more stock options instead, which wound up being a very good tip.) "It was not like I came and worked for my brother directly," she says. "[Our] goal was to show that Facebook was relevant beyond the 17-to-22-year-olds," she says. Randi soon hit upon politics as a way to do that. "I was never that passionate about politics, but somehow politics kind of found me as the solution to communicate the value of Facebook."

That meant striking a deal with ABC for the first online-offline presidential debates in the 2008 election cycle, and with CNN to cover the inauguration of Barack Obama. She took Facebook everywhere from the World Economic Forum in Davos to the Golden Globes, via Facebook Live, the site's official live video-streaming channel, which she created.

But Facebook execs—busy with building the site—gave Randi little money to make a go of it. She refused to give up and persevered with her video channel in classic hacker style, jury-rigging a small office with a couch she'd pinched from an employee area, from which to host her events. At one point, Randi recalls, Katy Perry called and asked to announce her new world tour on Facebook Live, and her team had to scramble to "pretend like it was a whole operation and not just a broom closet."

This hey-kids-let's-put-on-a-show effort continued to grow, and reached its apogee when Randi was called by the White House to do a town hall meeting with President Obama on Facebook in April 2011—just 10 days before she gave birth.

The presidential town hall was the moment she decided to venture out on her own. "Mark was at my house," she recalls, "and he said, 'I lost you today, didn't I? But if this is what you want to do with your life, you should do it.'"

Randi agreed, and Zuckerberg Media was born. "There was only so far I could go on one platform," she explains. "Someone was going to come in and do this on a broader scale, and why shouldn't it be me?" She hooked up with the veteran Good Morning America producer Bradley Lautenbach, and recruited a core team that she calls her "second family." "At the end of the day, people do want great content, and the era of the skateboarding cat video on the cellphone is over," she says. "They want beautiful content done by skilled people; they are just consuming in a new way."

Randi is targeting those she has dubbed the "wired women"—an emerging demographic of everyone from young working women to grandmothers who spend two to three hours a day online. Until now, as far as Randi can tell, she says, all the innovation in online content has been "by men for men." She is aiming to change that. She's her own best guinea pig, after all. "My guilty pleasure is online shopping," she notes, with favorite sites including Gilt Group, ModCloth, and Zulily, adding, "I am really into sites that do the styling for you, like CakeStyle, Stitch Fix, or DailyLook. And I am a big fan of Rent the Runway for big events."

Not that she'll be branching into the fashion world quite yet. To create a next-generation network, she and Lautenbach have been working on the production studio, rustling up a round of seed financing for their start-up, and doing video work for clients to pay the bills. Eventually the idea is to distribute their own content wherever people are watching.

"We want to be with our audience, from tough political coverage to the fun show that they're watching at the end of the day," Randi explains. She's been taking notes from the women she's worked with along the way: Diane Sawyer, Tina Brown, advertising legend Shelly Lazarus, and Facebook's COO, Sheryl Sandberg, among them.

She's also angling for Tinseltown cred, via the reality show, among other ideas she and Lautenbach have cooked up, to shed her image as someone who has produced only for tech nerds. "Now when I go to Hollywood, it's not just 'Randi Zuckerberg did video for Facebook,'" she says.

Still, her studio will be up north. "It is a bold statement—doing our production studio here." To bridge the gap, she has been holding "creative lounges" that include people from Los Angeles and San Francisco, which she calls the "Valleywood movement." "The distribution platforms of the past were in L.A.," she points out, "and the distribution platforms of the future are here."

Despite her crazy schedule, she manages to squeeze in some family time, and regularly trades "Mom tips" with her close friend, actress Soleil Moon Frye. And every night Randi sings her young son to sleep. "Even if I'm on the road, I'll Skype in so I can sing to him," she says. "My husband and I tag-team."

And although she is on her own with this new venture, she says it's worth the risk. "It was the first time for me that I made a decision that was not part of the plan. So this is a win no matter what happens."

As to any regrets, Randi has few. "Maybe I'll look back and say, 'I wish I had sung a little less,?'" she says with a laugh. "But I don't think anyone on their deathbed thinks that."

Read more: [Randi Zuckerberg's Media Company - Mark Zuckerberg's Sister on Leaving Facebook - Harper's BAZAAR](#)

Article can be found at:

<http://www.harpersbazaar.com/magazine/feature-articles/randi-zuckerberg-media-company-1112#ixzz2FRgzvTf4>