

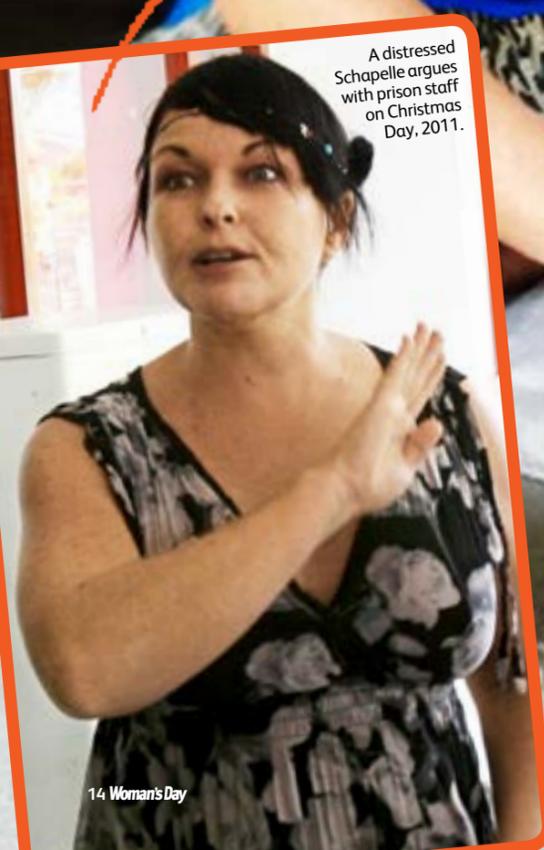
Woman's Day EXCLUSIVE PICS

Just last week

Schapelle exclusive

HAPPY & HEALTHY: THE FACE OF FREEDOM

'She's her old self again'



A distressed Schapelle argues with prison staff on Christmas Day, 2011.

Sudden fast-tracking whips up talk that something big is about to happen, reports KATHRYN BONELLA

Last Tuesday began like any other hot humdrum day for Schapelle Corby, who was in her cramped Bali prison cell cleaning the squat toilet. Then a guard walked in to change everything, dropping the bombshell that officers from the parole department were on their way to meet her.

Slim, clear-eyed and groomed, the 36-year-old, who hasn't been outside the prison walls since she was admitted to hospital years ago, walked out of the women's block to Kerobokan Prison's admin office. Waiting there were three female Indonesian officers, one of whom she'll report to if she gets parole. "Schapelle wasn't too excited

– she's become emotionally detached after all the heartbreak and shattered hopes over the years," says her sister Mercedes. "She will only get emotional about the step that really counts, and that's the one she takes out the front door of the jail."

Family 'numb' at news This is the first tangible sign that Schapelle's freedom is imminent. "The women asked her what she'd like to do if she gets parole," says Mercedes, who also got a surprise visit from the officers later that day at her Kuta house. "I was hoping it wasn't going to turn into disappointment. Nothing has moved for a while so it's a relief for these visits to be happening. Parole is now even closer and a real possibility. I feel numb. We've been waiting for this for ages." Since Tuesday there's been a frenzy of speculation about when Schapelle will be released – some reports stating it's just days away,

and others saying October 30. But Mercedes reveals the officers said they "didn't have a clue" when the parole decision would be made. "We haven't even lodged the application yet," she says, "but I still made calls to check whether there was any truth to the rumours of Schapelle walking free on Independence Day [August 17]. The jail's parole officer said no."

"PAROLE IS NOW EVEN CLOSER AND A REAL POSSIBILITY."

While Schapelle is expected to get a six-month sentence cut on Independence Day – fairly standard at this point for good behaviour – there's been speculation this could be the day of her release. "I really can't imagine it. She still has to meet with the prison board, Immigration has to sign a letter, we

have to pay the \$13,000 fine, get a letter confirming she's not wanted by Interpol, lodge an application and have it sent to Jakarta."

Meetings show promise Mercedes had no idea why she was suddenly called to a meeting with the parole boss (scheduled for after Woman's Day went to print) or why the Immigration Department wanted an immediate conference. "I can't let myself believe that Schapelle might be released on Saturday... I don't think so, but something is happening. The parole officers said on Tuesday they were only told that morning they needed to interview us all. They didn't know why," she says. "It's weird that this is happening after so little movement... hopefully it's going to be good news." It's exactly a year since Schapelle became eligible to apply for parole, made possible after President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono granted her clemency in May 2012, slashing

five years off her sentence. But the excitement felt at that time has ebbed over the months, as the case got caught in a mire of red tape. "Schapelle will be the first foreigner to get parole in Bali – she's in the unique position of having Indonesian family – so her case is blazing a trail and all the various government departments are working things out as they go," Mercedes says. "Every time we think we're close to being able to lodge the application, another road block pops up." Meanwhile, Schapelle's mental state and demeanour have radically improved, despite still relying on high doses of antipsychotic and antidepressant medicine. "She started improving last year after I found a reliable prisoner to administer it. Now she's able to take it herself. And I think she sees a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel," says Mercedes. "She's looking really good... and she's got her old wit back, too!"

Mercedes & Wayan INSIDE SCHAPELLE'S NEW HOME

When her jail hell ends, family life awaits with her sister in Bali, writes KATHRYN BONELLA

If Schapelle walks free on parole, she'll move into the comfortable family compound her sister Mercedes shares with her Balinese husband Wayan Widyarta and their three kids.

It was in this house, tucked away in a laneway off the hectic tourist hub of Kuta, that the three parole officers last Tuesday interviewed the couple about being Schapelle's official legal sponsors.

"Wayan was on his way down to the boat to go fishing when the parole office called and told him they were coming," says Mercedes. "He rushed straight home to tell me. I called Mum first, then raced out

to buy some biscuits and drinks. I wanted to welcome them, as we've waited so long for this day.

"We all sat around the kitchen bench talking for about an hour and a half," she says. "They were making sure we're suitable people to look after Schapelle. They asked about our family life, all that stuff."

Located close to the beach, the compound is filled with Wayan's Balinese extended family and has a small garment factory out the back where Mercedes makes swimwear. Schapelle has told parole officials she'd like to work with her sister on release.

"It will be incredible to have my sister working with me designing bikinis, if she wants to do that," enthuses Mercedes. "She's very creative – I can't wait to spend time with her that isn't in the jail!"

But even though Schapelle is still confined, it's clear she's happier than she has been in years. She works in the women's block and is often seen wearing a "Hard life, Hotel K" T-shirt – a parody of the Hard Rock Café garment made by prisoners. Schapelle spends at

least two days a week making fans that are then sold outside. Other days she passes time painting the other girls' nails with elaborate designs, reading, painting or making jewellery.

Mercedes hasn't yet told her three children about the latest

"IT WILL BE JUST INCREDIBLE HAVING MY SISTER WORK WITH ME – I CAN'T WAIT!"

news, as she doesn't want to get their hopes up. "They love their Auntie Pelle and can't wait for her to come and live with us."

She adds that the head of the Kuta community also signed parole papers on Tuesday giving

his support for Schapelle to live within the area.

Mercedes says she was also thrilled to learn that although Schapelle won't be permitted to leave Indonesia, she will be able to leave Bali with approval, and will be allowed to spend nights away from the family house.

"After they left, I started daydreaming about the places in Bali I will take her for holidays now that we know she doesn't just have to stay in Kuta or just this house," says Mercedes.

"We'll snorkel off the outer islands, visit places I love with beautiful rice fields, see farms with buffalo... I just can't wait, I really just can't wait!"



Ready for her release



Schapelle working inside the jail.



Mercedes and Wayan with their children Wayan, 12, Nyleigh, 10, and Nyoman, 6.

to this!



The kids can't wait for "Auntie Pelle" to arrive!

Mercedes and Wayan have been interviewed by parole officials.