

Oprah: more or less

DVD covers reign of daytime's queen

By MICHAEL GILTZ

For Oprah Winfrey — like so many talented African Americans — it all began in church.

"I used to speak in the church all the time," confesses Winfrey in interviews on the new six-DVD box set "**The Oprah Winfrey Show**" — The 20th Anniversary Collection" (Paramount; \$54.99). "The sisters in the front row fanning themselves would say to my grandmother, 'This child sure can talk!'"

She's been talking ever since.

The new DVD box set — due out later this month and more than 17 hours long — covers countless highlights, from weight-loss programs and makeovers to Tom Cruise's jump on the couch and that manic car giveaway.

It also includes complete episodes — including her 50th birthday bash and a trip to Africa. Not just a clip job, it features Winfrey talking about every aspect of the show.

Think she's too rich and powerful to get her feelings hurt? Think again.

Winfrey decided to make dieting a show topic because "I wanted the people to know, 'I know that I'm fat. It's a problem. You know how many diets I've been on?'"

Later, in talking about her single most-popular episode — the one where she wheeled out 67 pounds of fat and showed off her slin, new jeans — Winfrey admits that two days after

that show, she couldn't fit into those jeans anymore.

"Every single tabloid story has hurt me as much as it would hurt anybody else who is reading that you're fat."

Among the revelations: Winfrey once dated film critic Roger Ebert; couldn't get a single celebrity to appear on her first nationally syndicated episode in 1986 (despite begging Don Johnson of "**Miami Vice**," among others); admitted that during the '80s she looked like she was dressed by "a bad drag queen."

Still, she was an immediate sensation — beating industry giant Phil Donahue in the Chicago ratings on the very first day.

On the street, everyone recognized her. Everyone.

That didn't stop Winfrey from doing everything she could to bring in crowds. "I would stop at Dunkin' Donuts in the morning — myself — and pick up the donuts for the audience," she says.

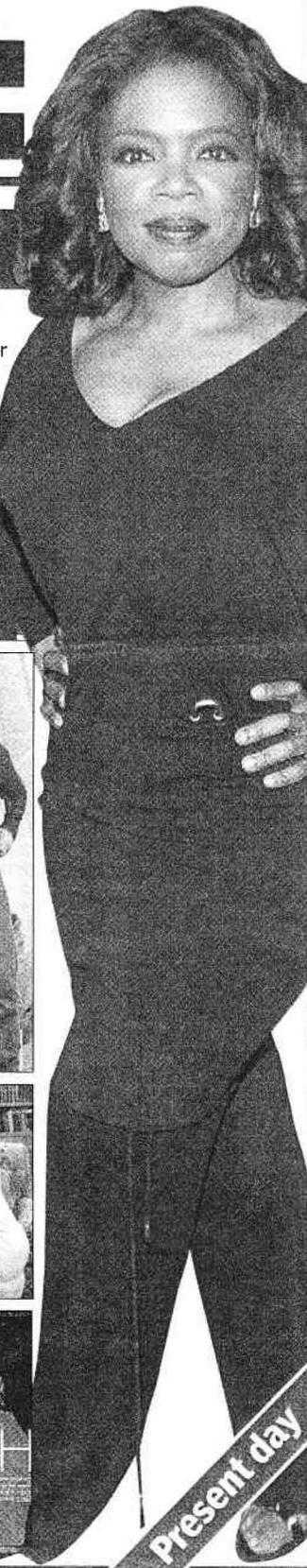
But she can still hear the voice of her father who couldn't understand why Winfrey was unsatisfied working as a TV news reporter in Nashville.

"Well, you're making \$22,000 and you're 22," says Winfrey, imitating her father's gravelly voice. "I don't know what else you want in the world. You better save half your money because you're not going to make that kind of money forever."

Well, Oprah's father was half right.

Highs & lows

One constant throughout Oprah's career has been her fluctuating weight.



Present day