

Stars in the making: encouraging other girls to follow their dreams like she did



CARDIFF



# Meghan: The early years

We follow the journey of our future princess, from  
sweet new-born to confident college graduate

— Words by Sarah Dawson —

Meghan showed total ease in the spotlight, even at a young age... one of her first public performances was as early as 1986



**B**orn on a sunny Tuesday 4th August 1981, in Los Angeles, California, Rachel Meghan Markle was the much-loved only daughter of Doria Radlan, a yoga instructor and social worker, and Thomas W. Markle, an Emmy-award winning lighting director. Meghan, who now goes by her middle name, was a happy baby and doted on by her parents. She also had two older half-siblings from her father's first marriage, half-brother Thomas Jr. and half-sister Suzanne. Doria and Thomas Sr. were living by the beach in Santa Monica when Meghan was born, but decided to move to the suburbs of Woodland Hills, before settling in The Valleys, a leafy and idyllic Hollywood neighbourhood, along with Meghan's half-brother Thomas Jr, a few years later.

#### STARTING SCHOOL

Meghan attended the private Little Red Schoolhouse in Hollywood – which counts actors Robert de Niro, Elizabeth Taylor and Johnny Depp's daughter, Lily-Rose among famous alumni – from the age of two. It was here that Meghan met Ninaki Priddy, with whom she quickly forged a tight friendship, that would last through High School and beyond. Speaking to the *Mail Online*, Ninaki remembers her earliest memory of Meghan reaching out to touch her hair. “She loved it because it was so long and straight. She had this amazing curly mane. I always cherished her hair and she mine.”

Meghan showed total ease in the spotlight, even at such a young age – in fact, one of her first public performances was as early as 1986, when she sang *The Wheels On The Bus* at the

A laidback Californian lifestyle in Los Angeles

## Family life

Meghan enjoyed a close relationship with both her parents and it was arguably her father who ignited Meghan's early love for performing.

**Thomas Sr. worked on the hit TV show *Married... with Children* and his daughter often came to visit the set after school.**

Although her early years were filled with love and happiness, Meghan has spoken out about the issues she faced growing up as mixed-race in an area that was not very diverse. She credits her parents with helping her establish her own identity, something summed up so perfectly in one of Meghan's own childhood anecdotes, as told to *Elle*. One Christmas,

Meghan had begged her parents for a family of Barbie dolls. They didn't sell mixed-race families, so her father bought two sets to create a special doll family to put under the tree. Meghan recalls she had "a black mom doll, a white dad doll, and a child in each colour. My dad had taken the sets apart and customised my family."



Meghan's father made her a special present

school's end of year show. Even then, a star was born! She enjoyed her time at Little Reds, but at home things were more unsettled as her parents began to drift apart. They divorced in March 1988, shortly before Meghan's sixth birthday, although the pair remained completely devoted to their daughter, sharing custody of the future princess.

Meghan would go on to live with her mother Doria during the week, but visited her father and half-brother every weekend, keeping up a close relationship with the whole family – even happily holidaying together as a trio. ▶

**RIGHT** Meghan's soon-to-be brother and sister-in-law, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge receive the bespoke Barbie treatment in 2017





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“[Meghan] was very dedicated.  
I knew she would be  
something special.”

*Gigi Perreau, school teacher*

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**LEFT** Destined for great things: charismatic Meghan's star shone brightly from an early age

**BELOW** Meghan was a strong campaigner like her fiancé's mother, Princess Diana who met First Lady Hillary Clinton at the White House in 1997



## THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

It was when Meghan turned 11 and started at the all-girl Catholic high school Immaculate Heart, in the Los Feliz area of LA, that her personality really started to shine. Bubbly and charismatic, Meghan was instantly drawn to performing arts and excelled in this subject. Gigi Perreau, Meghan's drama teacher for four years, recalled to *The Telegraph*, "She was a wonderful student, a lovely girl even then, and very hard working. She was very dedicated. I knew she would be something special." Meghan played starring roles in a number of school plays, including *Stepping Out* and *Stage Door*, as well as playing the secretary in *Annie*, where she got to sing a solo number; "I remember her being very excited and nervous about that," says Perreau. Her father, with his technical skills, also liked to get involved, volunteering to help with school plays – even after Meghan had graduated.

She loved high school and was popular with her classmates and teachers. Tracie Thomas, head librarian at the £12,000 a year school, recalled to *The Telegraph*, "I remember her because she was just so sweet and charming and respectful. A really lovely girl." In her high school year book, her fellow students summed her up with the words 'Classy Girl' and she was even crowned homecoming queen at her 1998 prom – every inch the princess-in-training in her floor-length lilac gown and tiara!

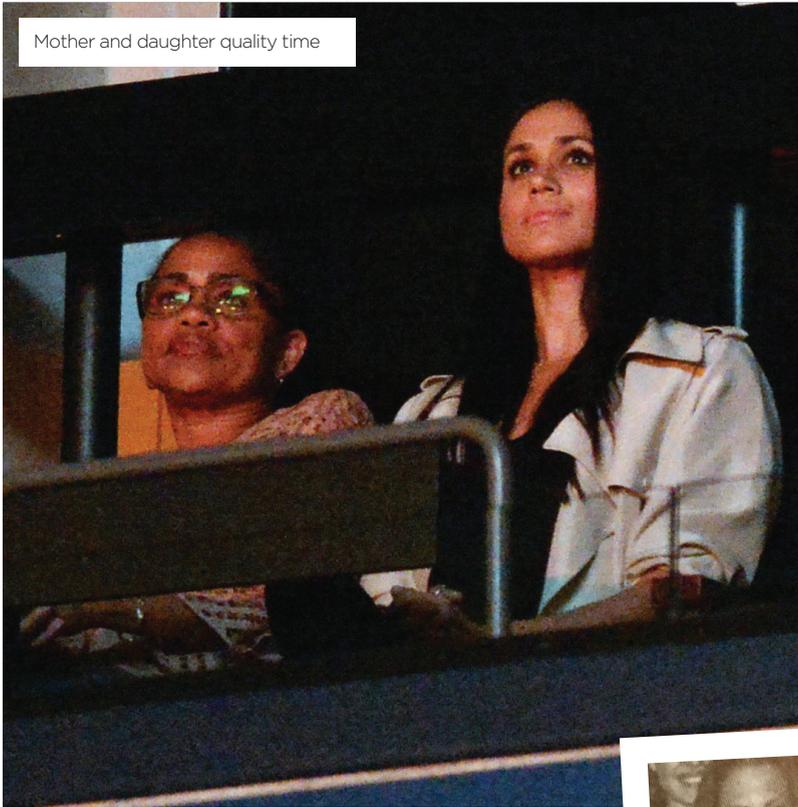
## STRONG VALUES

Outside of school, Meghan showed her caring side by regularly babysitting her nephews Thomas and Tyler Dooley, sons of her sister-in-law Tracey Dooley. The boys have fond memories of this time, with Tyler sharing that Meghan used to babysit them once a month, ▶



Immaculate Heart High School in LA

Mother and daughter quality time



## Meet Meghan's Mum



**Meghan Markle has made no secret of her close relationship with her mother, so much so that rumours have been circulating that this bride-to-be wants to break from protocol and have her mother walk her down the aisle in May.**

Doria Radlan, who works as a social worker and yoga instructor in California, is in her early 60s, but with her youthful complexion, dreadlocks and nose ring you'd be forgiven for thinking she was Meghan's sister, not mother. It's clear where Meghan gets her great genes from! The bride-to-be has often spoken of her 'free spirit' mum and how she's been one of the biggest influences in her life. Speaking to *Glamour*, she said, "We just have so much fun together, and yet, I'll still find so much solace in her support. That duality coexists the same way it would in a best friend."

Doria has been credited for nurturing Meghan's deep interest in philanthropy, often taking her daughter to remote, impoverished, destinations when she was a child. Today, she is undeniably proud of Meghan, even driving a car with the registration plate 'MEGNAME' – but it's not just her daughter who is her biggest fan. Prince Harry said in the couple's first joint interview that Doria is 'amazing' – high praise from the Prince! Apart from an official joint statement with Meghan's father, Thomas Sr, congratulating the happy couple on their engagement, Doria has remained silent on the upcoming nuptials. We can't wait to see the role she plays in her daughter's big day.



Image © The Mega Agency

**TOP RIGHT** Meghan was the first in her family to obtain a degree here at Northwestern University Illinois

**ABOVE** Meghan was a sorority girl at university: as recruitment chair she was in charge of welcoming new girls to the chapter



taking them to the park and duck pond. Speaking to *The Sun* he said, “She was just like any other kid growing up. She was our aunt and she was our family.”

As well as strong family values, Meghan also had an important sense of right and wrong – and wasn’t afraid to stand up for what she believed in. When she was just 11 years old, she wrote a letter to the then First Lady Hillary Clinton, as well as other high-profile figures, to complain that she had seen an advertisement by a soap manufacturer that suggested women belonged in the kitchen, and it had upset her. As a consequence of this, the company ended up changing the advert: a very impressive result for a little girl from Los Angeles. It really does seem that Meghan was destined for her humanitarian roles from a very early age.

## COLLEGE LIFE

Meghan’s college years were spent at Northwestern University, Illinois, where she opted for a double major in theatre and international relations. She told *Marie Claire* in 2013, “I had

always been the theatre nerd at Northwestern University. I knew I wanted to do acting, but I hated the idea of being this cliché – a girl from LA who decides to be an actress. I wanted more than that, and I had always loved politics, so I ended up changing my major completely, and double-majoring in theatre and international relations.”

While at University, Meghan was part of the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority where she developed tight friendships with other female students. She was even made the recruitment chair of the sorority, in charge of welcoming new girls into the sorority. She was a typical college student on campus, attending classes, partying and going on spring break: although instead of the typical beach destination, Meghan opted to backpack around France and Italy.

When she graduated with a joint Bachelor of Arts degree in 2003, she was the first member of her family to do so, with great pride for her parents. Meghan left university having already made her screen debut in the US soap *General Hospital* and was ready to take Hollywood – and the royal family – by storm. 🎬