

TRUE BRIT

Meghan to be baptised,
become a UK citizen - and
start Royal duties on Friday

Daily Mail



WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2017

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NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

65p

PICTURE EXCLUSIVE

Posing in
front of the
Palace, the
15-year-old
who's about
to become
a princess

Picture: SPLASH NEWS



Royal tour: Meghan Markle, left, and her friend Ninaki Priddy pose outside Buckingham Palace during a trip to Europe 21 years ago

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One day I'll make myself at home behind those gates

By Rebecca English
Royal Correspondent

THIS stunning photo shows Meghan Markle's astonishing rise from teenage fan of the monarchy to member of the Royal Family.

Posing outside Buckingham Palace, the 15-year-old American tourist could not have known she would enter its gates 21 years later as the fiancée of a prince.

The remarkable image – taken during a European summer trip in 1996 – emerged the day after the announcement of her engagement to Harry. One person says she saw it coming and has warned the prince to be cautious.

'I'm not shocked at all,' said Miss Markle's childhood best friend Ninaki Priddy. 'It's like she has been planning this all her life.'

She gets exactly what she wants and Harry has fallen for her play. She was always fascinated by the Royal Family. She wants to be Princess Diana 2.0. She will play her role ably, but my advice to him is to tread cautiously.'

In a dramatic series of announcements about the couple's wedding plans yesterday, Kensington Palace revealed:

- Miss Markle will apply to become a British citizen after she marries;
- Harry and the divorcee will wed in St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle in May;
- Miss Markle, whose father is an Episcopalian, will be baptised and confirmed in the Church of England before the wedding;
- The couple say their big day will also be 'fun and joyful' – to match their personalities;
- The wedding is likely to be televised with the

'She gets exactly what she wants'

- public involved, possibly by ballot;
- The Queen and Prince Charles will foot the bill – not Meghan's once bankrupt parents – with the bride and groom in charge of arrangements;
- Miss Markle will undertake her first royal engagements in Nottingham on Friday;
- The couple will carry out their first official walkabout together and meet groups working in the fields of Aids and young people;
- The former actress will then embark on an intensive six-month 'tour' of Britain to get to know her adopted country;
- Separately, Theresa May defended her decision not to grant a wedding bank holiday.

Miss Priddy and 'Meg' Markle met aged two at a prestigious kindergarten in Hollywood and became inseparable.

'We were sisters, everyone knew that,' said the 36-year-old jewellery designer. 'We would be hand in hand, everywhere.'

Meghan's father Thomas was a lighting director on popular US TV shows such as Married with Children and General Hospital.

From an early age, Meghan visited those sets and decided fame suited her, Miss Priddy said – laying the foundations for 'Princess Pushy' as she later became known.

The remarkable picture of Meghan outside Buckingham Palace is part of an exclusive set of images given to us by Miss Priddy and which covers her school days, college life and first wedding.

These glorious pictures can be seen in full in a 24-page glossy magazine given away free with Saturday's Daily Mail.



Royal portent? Meghan Markle, left, and Ninaki Priddy outside Buckingham Palace in 1996

Picture: SPLASH NEWS

Just one of the exclusive intimate photos in a glorious 24-page glossy magazine free inside Saturday's Mail

Daily Mail



**Meghan:
an intimate
album**

Meghan, 15, tries on a diamond ring. Another exclusive picture of a princess in the making

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Daily Mail

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2017

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NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

65p



As a report reveals beaches are getting worse and two supermarket chains back our bottle deposit campaign ...

LET'S TURN THE TIDE ON PLASTIC

Eyesore: Heaps of plastic bottles scar Pembrey Sands in Wales
PAGES 6-7



Daily  Mail CAMPAIGN

Trying diamond rings for size aged 15. All Meghan needed was a prince!



Picture: SPLASH NEWS

By **Emily Kent Smith**
and **Rebecca English**

LONG before she knew she would marry a prince, a teenage Meghan Markle tries on diamond rings in Switzerland.

Aged about 14 or 15, Miss Markle (pictured left) was given a tour of a diamond house with her childhood friend Ninaki Priddy during a summer trip around Europe.

The holiday also included a sightseeing jaunt to Buckingham Palace as well as a stay at a hotel in Kensington.

This picture, from 1996, was taken two decades before the American actress, now 36, met Prince Harry.

Smiling for the camera, the teenager can be seen holding out her left hand to show off a huge diamond ring - not so different from the one Harry, 33, presented her with earlier this month.

The engagement ring, designed by the prince himself, holds three diamonds, two belonging to Princess Diana and a third from Botswana where he and Meghan have enjoyed romantic getaways. But

PICTURE EXCLUSIVE

unlike the piece of jewellery which was revealed to the world on Monday, the young Miss Markle had to return these diamonds after posing for the picture.

Miss Priddy, 36, pictured right, said: 'We went to a diamond house, seeing the stones, putting the eyeglass on to measure dimensions and clarity... The last bit of the tour they brought out a bunch of engagement rings. And being kids, how could we not play dress-up for a second?'

Other pictures of the European

trip, which included a five-day tour of Britain, show Miss Markle grinning outside Buckingham Palace. The full series of fascinating images of the American, who will in May officially become a member of the Royal Family, will feature in Saturday's Daily Mail.

The photos, given exclusively to the Mail, will show Miss Markle throughout her youth - from singing at a concert as a small child to a night out with friends celebrating her university graduation.

It was reported last night that

Harry had asked Meghan's mother for her daughter's hand in marriage.

An American magazine said Harry spoke to yoga instructor and therapist Doria Ragland about it when she flew from her Los Angeles home to join the couple at the prince's Invictus Games event in Canada in September.

In their official engagement interview on Monday Harry waxed lyrical about his future mother-in-law, describing her as 'amazing'.

He also said he had not yet met Meghan's father Thomas Markle, who divorced Miss Ragland when their daughter was young, but had spoken to him on the phone.

Meanwhile there was mystery over a post on Instagram by Har-

ry's ex-girlfriend Cressida Bonas, from whom he split in 2014. The day after the engagement was announced the 28-year-old actress shared a message with her 6,000 followers which read: 'No matter how educated, talented, rich or cool you believe you are, how you treat people ultimately tells it all.'

Miss Bonas accompanied the quote with the caption: 'Truth #quotestoliveby.'

Internet users questioned whether it was directed at her ex, with whom she split up not entirely unacrimoniously, although it is more likely that it was not aimed at Harry.

How Meghan flunked Britishness test - Page 4

More fabulous intimate photos like this in our stunning 24-page glossy magazine FREE inside on Saturday



Exclusive: Meghan and mum, hours before her wedding (to her FIRST husband, that is!)

SEE PAGE 11



Patients will have to pay for thousands of drugs over the counter

NHS RATIIONS PRESCRIPTIONS

By **Sophie Borland, Ben Spencer and Izzy Ferris**

PATIENTS are to be denied cough medicines, migraine pills and heartburn remedies under sweeping NHS rationing plans.

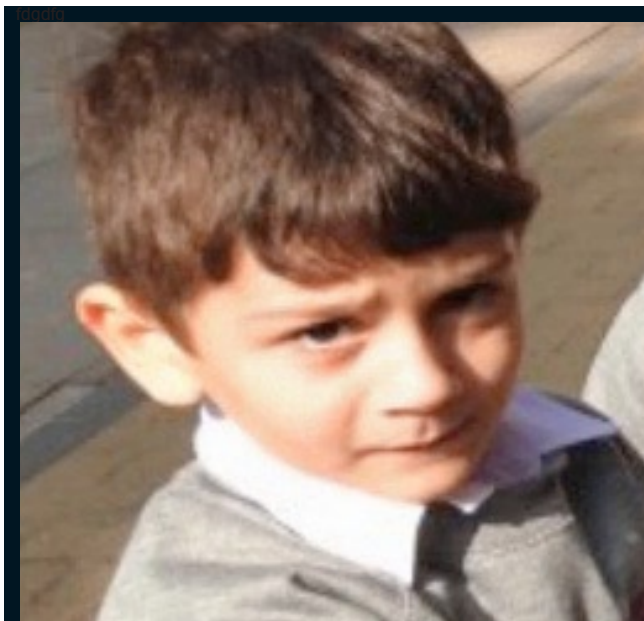
GPs will be told to stop routinely funding thousands of treatments for almost 40 conditions when they can be bought cheaply over the counter instead.

Breakthrough medicines for heart disease and arthritis may also be restricted in future – even if they have been approved by the rationing body Nice. NHS bosses yesterday insisted they could no longer afford to pay for routine prescriptions and major new drugs on current budgets.

Although the health service was allocated an extra £2.8billion by the Chancellor last week, it was only a third of what bosses asked for. As a result, executives yesterday announced a series of drastic money-saving measures to save hundreds of millions of pounds. In the first instance, GPs will be told to 'restrict' the funding of medications from a list of 36 common conditions.

These include items which can be bought cheaply at supermarkets or chemists, such as treatments for coughs and colds, paracetamol and indigestion pills – as well as remedies for dandruff, cold sores and athlete's

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Tragedy: Hakeem Hussain is thought to have died outside his home

Two held as boy aged 7 'freezes to death'

SEE PAGE FIVE

TWO FABULOUS FREE MAGAZINES

Daily Mail



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2017

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FREE INSIDE MIEGHAN an intimate ALBUM

Glossy magazine packed with VERY candid never-before-seen pictures

TORIES AT WAR WITH THE POLICE

'Bitter' ex-Yard officers accused of
'vendetta' over bid to oust May's deputy

THE Tories were at war with Scotland Yard last night after former officers tried to oust Theresa May's deputy. Damian Green's political

By Jason Groves and Chris Greenwood

career is in jeopardy after a retired detective claimed 'thousands' of pornographic images were found on his computer. The Prime Minister's problems

worsened when Brexit Secretary David Davis threatened to quit if she fired Mr Green.

The ex-detective, Neil Lewis, said he was acting to support former police chief Bob Quick, who was heavily criticised over a 2008 raid

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PLUS

PRUE LEITH'S Family Xmas recipes



Inside
Weekend
magazine

The REAL Meghan, by the friend who knew her best



Fun times: Ninaki and Meghan at their High School prom

NINAKI PRIDY is torn between joy and a deep bewilderment when she remembers the blissfully happy day that her best friend, Meghan Markle, married her 'eternal love' six years ago.

The actress was 30 years old and riding high on the success of the first series of the American TV drama *Suits* when she vowed to love and cherish film producer Trevor Engelson in front of more than 100 guests on a beach in Jamaica.

Such was the jubilation at the chic colonial-style hotel that the celebrations lasted several days.

'Meg literally shone with happiness,' says Ninaki, who was maid of honour. 'We'd been like sisters since we were two years old, so I knew she'd always wanted to get married.'

'To see her finally doing that was... well, it was a big deal. It was such a moving wedding. I started crying the moment I saw her in her dress. We had the ceremony on the beach.

It was so beautiful to watch, beautiful to be a part of. They each wrote their own vows. They loved each other so much.

'Meg had just finished the first series of *Suits* [in which she played the bewitching paralegal Rachel Zane]. It was a big part for her — her first full-time role.

'She'd hustled for years to get there, so that was huge. Trevor was so supportive. He travelled back and forth [from Los Angeles to Toronto, where *Suits* is filmed] and there was a lot of Skyping and FaceTiming going on.

'It was an exciting time. This was the man she wanted to have children with.'

Past forward six years. That marriage is over and Meghan has just become engaged to Prince Harry. Many of the friends who celebrated with the newlyweds on that beach are no longer speaking to Meghan.

Ninaki says her own falling out with Meghan came after she disapproved of the manner of Meghan's break-up from Trevor.

But there is no doubt Ninaki misses Meghan as she tells the story of their friendship.

The girls were inseparable from their first days at Hollywood's private Little Red School House, which they both joined at the age of two, before moving on together at 11 to the immaculate Heart girls' high school in Los Angeles.

Their extraordinary bond spanned 31 years of sleepovers, a holiday in Europe as 15-year-olds — including a picture opportunity for Ninaki and Meghan outside Buckingham Palace — and road trips across the United States.

THEY supported each other through their parents' acrimonious divorces and their own love affairs. Together, they shared their secrets and dreams as each of them set out to make their mark upon the world.

Ninaki runs her fingers over a photograph of Meghan in a tiny yellow polka dot bikini taken the day before she made those wedding vows to Trevor, now 41.

It's one of many from Ninaki's revealing album that charts a 31-year friendship and is published exclusively in today's *Daily Mail*.

'Look at her. She was so ecstatic,' Ninaki smiles fondly. Then her face hardens. 'The person I knew is not

by **Rebecca Hardy**

there any more,' she says. 'Meg used to tell me she couldn't imagine a life without Trevor. She said if anything were to happen to him she wouldn't be able to go on.'

'He cherished her, too. You should have seen the way he used to hold her face in his hands. We all felt he was her eternal love.'

'It was such a shock when she told me they were getting divorced. After about three seasons of *Suits*, she called me and said she wanted me to know because it was going to come out in the papers.'

'I knew they fought sometimes, but it wasn't anything huge. The only obstacle was the distance because she was living in Toronto and Trevor was based in LA.'

'But I thought that they were manoeuvring through it as best they could. Trevor would take his work to Canada to be with her and run his office remotely.'

'I wasn't aware there were any problems in the marriage.'

She shrugs. 'I had to accept what she said, but then...'

Ninaki hesitates. She has loved Meghan dearly for most of her life and is not the sort of person to easily betray somebody.

Choosing her words carefully, Ninaki says she no longer recognises the girl with whom she shared her childhood.

More to the point, she feels desperately for Trevor, for whom the ignominy of seeing his former wife now lovestruck with her very own Prince Charming is almost too much to bear. He truly believed they would grow old together.

'A month after the divorce, I wanted to see how Trevor was doing,' says Ninaki. 'We met and talked. It's not up to me to speak for Trevor, but I know he was travelling to Toronto every few weeks to make their marriage work.'

'I don't believe she gave him enough of an opportunity. I think there was an element of "out of sight, out of mind" for Meghan.'

'The way she handled it, Trevor

They were inseparable from the age of two and Ninaki was maid of honour at Meghan's first wedding. But in this brutally honest interview, she describes how fame changed her friend — and reveals why she blames HER for the mysterious end to that marriage ...



Pals: Ninaki and chum Meghan, aged nine, at a birthday party

definitely had the rug pulled out from under him. He was hurt.'

Meghan reportedly began dating dashing celebrity chef Cory Vitiello who also lives in Toronto, in 2014, a few months after her separation from Trevor.

'I tried to get details from her, but she wouldn't tell me. What came to light after Trevor and I spoke ended my friendship with Meghan. I think everybody who knew them both was in shock.'

'All I can say now is that I think Meghan was calculated — very calculated — in the way she

handled people and relationships. She is very strategic in the way she cultivates circles of friends. Once she decides you're not part of her life, she can be very cold.'

'It's this shutdown mechanism she has. There's nothing to negotiate. She's made her decision and that's it.'

Ninaki says this not with malice, but sadness, for she and Meghan were 'like sisters' for decades.

Her earliest memory is 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.'

Ninaki smiles as she thumbs through photographs of the two of them on stage at an age when they were too young for joined-up writing, let alone to sign autographs.

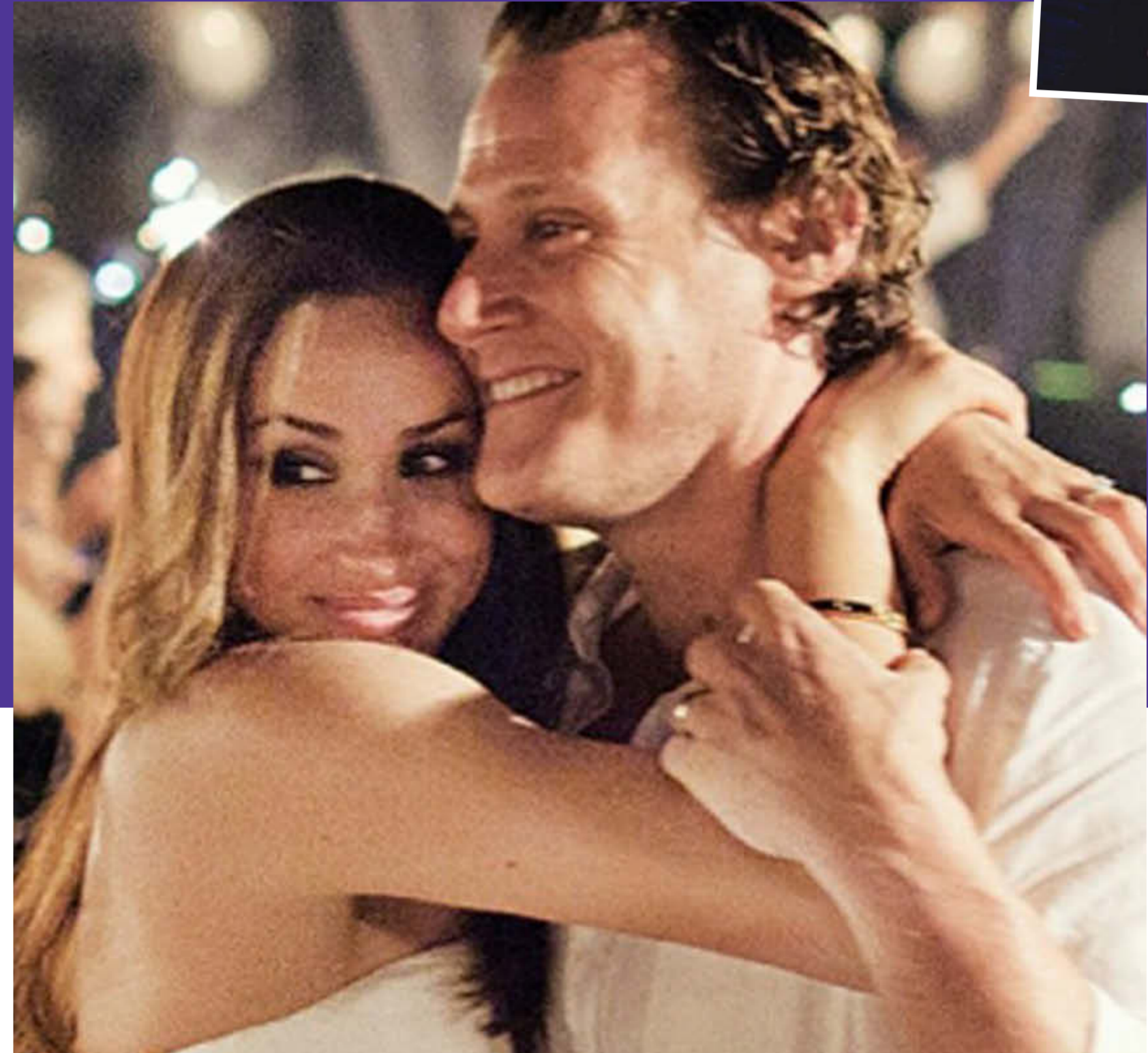
'Meg always wanted to be famous,' says Ninaki. 'She just loved to be the centre of attention. We used to imagine her receiving an Oscar. She used to practise announcing herself.'

'In a way, she was nurtured on a stage. She knew no other life. Her dad, Tom [a lighting engineer], was a great coach in that respect. He'd take photos of her on stage right from a young age.'

HER MUM, Doria, was very cool. She was this free spirit who'd dance around the house telling Meg to loosen up. She'd say: 'You've got to have fun, but keep working at it.' Meg was the star with her parents.

'She was tough, too. If you rubbed her up the wrong way, she'd make it known with the silent treatment. There was a time, when we were about seven, and I'd collected a bunch of insects. She didn't want to play with them.'

'We spent two hours sitting at opposite ends of the garden with our backs to each other in silence. I'd always be the first to apologise. I just wanted to be besties again.'



Her first love: 'Meghan said she couldn't imagine a life without husband Trevor Engelson,' says her former friend Ninaki

She was stubborn. She digs her heels in the ground.'

Today, Ninaki is a stylish young woman who works as a designer in LA. She oscillates between raging against Meghan and feeling a deep visceral hurt.

'We had the kind of love you have for a sister. The end of our friendship was like a death,' she says. 'I mourned it for quite a while.'

'Even now I'll pass by a magazine stand and see a face staring out at me that was such a big part of my life.'

'It was always Niki and Meg. We were so close-knit we came as a two,' says Ninaki. 'We were both honorary daughters in

each other's homes. We were like family.'

'Family' is a word that crops up throughout this interview, which provides the most revealing insight to date into the woman who's captured Prince Harry's heart.

'The idea of having a family was something Meg very much wanted, particularly because she was from a family that felt very disjointed,' says Ninaki. 'I think when you're an only child in that situation your friends do become your family.'

Trevor became part of that family, too. For this was no brief, marry-in-haste-repent-at-leisure fling, but a committed ten-year relationship; one that also gave

Meghan something of a helping hand in her acting career.

Meghan and Trevor met within 18 months of her graduating from Northwestern University with a degree in theatre and international studies. She was 23. Trevor, a tall, handsome man, was five years her senior and already flourishing in the film industry.

'They met on a night out in LA. He was managing film industry writers,' recalls Ninaki. 'At first, I didn't like him because it was that thing of, "Oh my God, he's stealing my best friend". I met him at a birthday party he threw for her — her 24th, I think.'

'Meg had beautiful handwriting

and was supplementing her income as a freelance calligraphy artist. He was very focused with great connections.'

'It was an opportunity for her to establish relationships with agents. She loved it — being at his side and going to those dinners.'

'Trevor was big for her. She loved him. He was very doting. They were a great support system for each other through difficult times, like the death of her grandma, her father's mother, Grandma Markle. Meghan was really close to her.'

Within a year, Meghan and Trevor were living together. 'She was definitely a curator of a beautiful life,' says Ninaki. 'She

liked to throw dinner parties with beautiful menus that complemented flavour profiles with amazing wines.'

'She had a very specific style. She loved her hotel-style bedding — beautiful, contrasting black piping detail on crisp, white duvets. She loved everything white. Meg was a perfectionist.'

As well as keeping all things domestic well ordered, Ninaki says Meghan possessed incredible powers of diplomacy. She says Meghan learned from a young age to keep the peace between her parents following their divorce.

Ninaki continues: 'She is very poised. A natural mediator. For almost as long as I knew Meghan, her parents weren't together. It could be hard for her. Sometimes she felt she had to pick sides. She was always trying to make sure each of them was happy.'

Ninaki says she has always admired Meghan for handling her parents so skilfully from such a young age.

'She'd have to relay messages. It was literally stuff like, "Tell your mother..." or "Tell your father..." Controlling her emotions is something she learnt back then.'

MEGHAN has always maintained her parents' separation was about as easy as a divorce can be for a child. But Ninaki, who spent many childhood weekends with Meghan, recalls things differently.

'Sometimes, one parent needed a little more attention, so Meghan would devote herself to that parent,' she says.

'When she was younger, she spent most of her time with Doria. Doria used to dance around the house and have girlie evenings with us. Then, when Meg got to Junior High — around 13 or 14 — she began living with her dad.'

'Tom allowed her more space. Doria was very mothering. She set very boundaries. Tom let us get away with things. He provided a less strict household.'

'As a teenager, who doesn't want that? But as Meg got older she had to parent Tom a little more and she couldn't do that.'

Ninaki refuses to elaborate further on Meghan's father or their relationship. Today, he lives in Mexico and has not featured in the story of her romance with Prince Harry.

'I think she's protecting him,' is all Ninaki will add.

Despite being the child of divorced parents, Ninaki says Meghan always wanted a family of

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her own. 'She was definitely looking forward to having children. She really wanted to be a mum. She'd see a baby and just...' Ninaki hugs an imaginary child to her breast.

She continues: 'Trevor asked her to marry him the year before Suits. They were on holiday in Belize, I think. She called me immediately. She was ecstatic and sent me some beautiful pictures.'

'Meghan came to show me the ring when she got home and was so excited. She asked me to be maid of honour. We were hugging each other and crying.'

'Then, after the wedding, it was like a light switched off. There's Meghan Before Fame and Meghan After Fame. After three seasons of Suits, she called me to say the marriage was over.'

'Maybe she had started to change before then, but I was refusing to see it. The tone of her voice, her mannerisms, the way she laughed didn't seem real to me any more.'

'Even by season two of Suits, she was turning down lunch with us because she said she'd be recognised. I felt if I questioned her behaviour, I'd be left on the outside. Sometimes the truth is not always what you want, is it?'

'Her time became increasingly important. When she was in town, she'd want you to drop everything to see her. If I was busy, it would be, "Why don't you want to see me? I'm here. Let's hang out!"'

'There were instances when I felt she developed a sense of entitlement because she was on the show. The breaking point for me came when she wanted to adopt a dog.'

'She'd fallen in love with it, but found someone else wanted the dog, too. So she emailed the pet adoption people and explained how she could provide a great life for it.'

'She spoke of what a great time the dog would have in the Suits Family. I felt that she was playing the Suits card to try to get what she wanted.'

'She included me and the other bridesmaids in the email chain because she wanted our moral support, I think.'

'I didn't respond to it. It left a sour taste in my mouth. We began to talk less. It was shortly after that I spoke to Trevor about the divorce.'

'I phoned Meghan to speak about it, but she wouldn't confide in me. It was obvious to me she wasn't the friend I'd grown up with any more. She had a new circle of friends.'

THE FRIENDSHIP ended before Meghan began seeing Prince Harry. All Ninaki has heard about it is gossip. But she has her own views on the life path that Meghan has chosen.

'I think it's a very fanciful dream to believe that you just walk into a Prince Charming.'

'I know the Royal Family was something she found fascinating. She had one of Princess Diana's books [Diana: Her True Story] on her bookshelf, and even when she was with Trevor she told me she wanted to go and stay in London for at least a month.'

'I can't remember exactly when this was, but she was married to Trevor and starring in Suits. She mentioned about wanting to go to London a couple of times.'

'I wasn't shocked or even surprised to hear about Prince Harry. I know she used to love The Princess Diaries — films about a commoner who becomes part of a Royal Family. She was very taken with that idea.'

Our interview is reaching an end. Ninaki must head back to work. Before she goes, I wonder what's happened to poor Trevor.

'It took a long time, but he's put it in the past now,' she says. 'Of course, everyone's looking at him to see how he's reacting since the engagement has been announced, but I think he's handling it quite well.'

So well, in fact, he is reportedly working on a film about a girl who is whisked away by a handsome prince. True? Ninaki smiles enigmatically. 'Trevor is my family now. We're still friends.'

VANISHING without trace can't be easy in this all-seeing, information-driven age — particularly for a pivotal figure in the romance that has captured the world's imagination.

Curiously, however, though more than a year has passed since Meghan Markle's relationship with Prince Harry was revealed, there has been neither sight nor sound of her father, Thomas.

While we are becoming familiar with Meghan's yoga-teacher mother, Doria Ragland, 61, who has already been photographed with the couple and is regularly seen strolling around her affluent Los Angeles neighbourhood, Mr Markle (whose 6ft 3in, 20st frame must make it difficult to melt into the background) has gone to inordinate lengths to avoid being traced.

The 73-year-old retired TV lighting director has changed his phone numbers, avoided using social media, concealed his address even from members of his family, and urged the handful of trusted friends who know where he is living not to betray his whereabouts.

Indeed, when Harry and Meghan gave their candid first TV interview this week, to mark their engagement, perhaps their most surprising admission was that the Prince has not come face to face with his future father-in-law.

'He's talked to my dad a few times; hasn't been able to meet him just yet,' said Meghan, a touch awkwardly without explaining why her fiancé has yet to hop across the Atlantic to become acquainted with the father she adores and who has had such a major influence on her life.

The mystery deepened when it was revealed that Harry had asked Mrs Ragland for her daughter's hand in person, but requested her father's permission over the phone.

It gives rise to a number of intriguing questions. Where is the elusive Mr Markle? Why has this enigmatic man concealed his whereabouts so determinedly? After all, placed in his position, many fathers would be singing their joy from the rooftops.

MORE pertinently, can we expect Mr Markle, a once gregarious Hollywood party-goer who now shies away from social occasions (and has an aversion to wearing a collar and tie) to emerge from the shadows and walk Meghan down the aisle at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, next spring?

If we believe a 'world exclusive' story published in a racy Australian magazine, he has removed himself to Sayulita, a remote surfer's paradise, midway down Mexico's Pacific Coast.

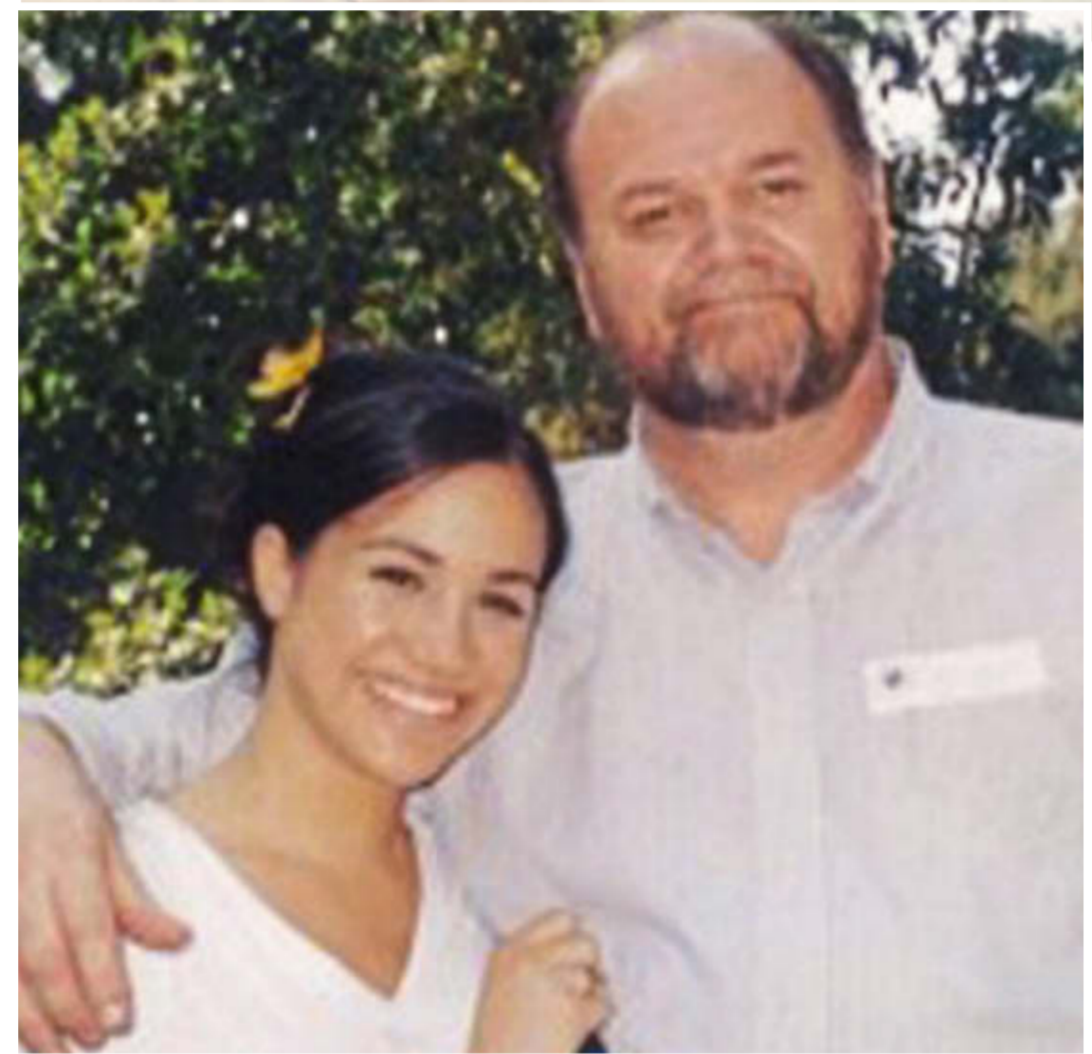
Quoting a local businessman who claimed to have seen him in the resort a few days earlier, looking older and thinner than he appears in photographs, its reporter even claimed to have located the complex where he rents an apartment.

Given that Meghan once waxed lyrical about this hippie outpost in her now-closed blog ('Ah sweet Sayulita, with your beautiful beaches, relaxed surfer vibe, and boho-chic sensibility. You are Mexico meets Malibu.'), it seemed convincing.

However, according to Mr Markle's 78-year-old brother, Michael, it isn't true. Confirming my own research, he told the Mail that Meghan's father is 1,400 miles north, in Rosarito Beach, the seaside town to which he decamped after retiring several years ago.

Meghan's uncle Michael said he imagined Thomas had moved to Mexico 'because the cost of living is better down there'. He was sure he still lived in Rosarito because he saw him only a few weeks ago, when Thomas drove hundreds of miles up the Pacific coast to visit him in Oregon.

Giving his first interview, Michael, a retired U.S. diplomat, said he last spoke to his brother shortly before the engagement was announced. 'I think he's very pleased with the way things are



Devoted: Meghan paid tribute to her father 'who believed in me and my dreams'

by David Jones

going,' he said. 'Who wouldn't be? It has ensured the Markle name will go down in history. That's for sure, isn't it?'

Asked why Meghan's father was going to such lengths to avoid being found, he gave a reply that will doubtless please the suits at the Palace: 'Tom is trying to comply with the royal directive to keep a low profile, so that's where he's coming from. He doesn't want to upset the Royal Family.'

We'll explore Thomas Markle's life in Mexican purdah shortly. To place his importance to Meghan in context, however, it is worth recalling the unbreakable bond they formed in her childhood.

A bond Meghan movingly described in this Father's Day tribute, from her shut-down blog: 'I think of so many moments with my dad. Our club sandwich and fruit smoothie tradition post my tap & ballet class — classes, which by the way, he religiously took me to on Saturday mornings after working 75+ hours a week as a lighting director.'

'The fishing trips along the Kern River and Big Bear Lake to catch catfish or trout and cook it up for dinner, and the commitment he made to lighting my high school

musicals so that they felt as grand as a Broadway Show.'

'The blood, sweat and tears this man (who came from so little in a small town in Pennsylvania, where Christmas stockings were filled with oranges, and dinners were potatoes and spam) invested in my future so that I could grow up and have so much.'

'He helped me turn my bathroom into a darkroom when I was 12 because I wanted to be a photographer... he put gas in my car when I went from audition to audition trying to make it as an actress. He is the person who believed in this grand dream of mine well before I could even see it as a possibility.'

'He taught me to write thank you notes, to always arrive early, to drink Arnold Palmers (a non-alcoholic cocktail of lemonade and iced tea popular in the U.S.), to find my light when I'm on camera... and beyond. And that, right there, is my point: my dad taught me to find my light.'

So Mr Markle was clearly a wonderful father to Meghan, or 'Bean' as he affectionately called her (another pet-name he used was 'Buckaroo', a Californian-Spanish word for cowboy).

Yet according to his first wife, Roslyn — who was married to him for seven years before he met Mrs Ragland in the early Seventies — he wasn't nearly so attentive to their children, Samantha, now 53, and Thomas Junior, 51.

In those days, his career, and hectic showbiz social life, came

first, she told me, adding: 'He wasn't a family person.' When Meghan was born, in 1981, he was 'a changed man', as Thomas Junior puts it. He would hold his baby daughter up to the mirror so she could see herself in his arms, and took tens of thousands of pictures of her. He has stashed this archive, which must now be worth millions, in a Los Angeles storage unit.

Though Meghan frequently alludes to her happy childhood, their closeness made her half-sister Samantha intensely jealous and created domestic friction, says Meghan's half-brother Thomas Junior.

Mr Markle's devotion to his beautiful, gifted daughter didn't waver after he and Mrs Ragland were divorced in 1987. He obtained shared custody, and would look after her while her mother worked, taking her to film studios and paying for her expensive education.

Meghan also credits her father for instilling a fierce work ethic in her, and for helping her to overcome early difficulties caused by her biracial ethnicity and learn to embrace her background. (She also strongly resembles him and has inherited his distinctively upturned 'Markle nose'.)

According to friends from those days, however, he was prone to bouts of melancholy, and when Meghan went away to university, in Illinois, he missed her so badly that his dark moods worsened. He filled the void by throwing



Loving dad: Thomas Markle with Meghan as an infant

perfectly suits Meghan's solitary father. 'You can hide in Rosarito, definitely — especially if you want to escape attention!' laughed one resident, Manuel Mendez, 60. 'Mexicans don't pay attention to the British Royal Family, so even if they knew who Thomas was, they wouldn't bother him.'

When Mr Markle first moved there, his son told me, he lived in a complex beside the landmark Rosarito Beach Hotel, which was once favoured by Hollywood stars such as Rita Hayworth, but has seen better days.

However, Thomas Junior says, his father guarded his privacy fiercely even before Meghan met Prince Harry, and when Thomas Snr discovered that a neighbour had also worked in the LA film industry he quickly moved to a clifftop a few miles down the coast. By the time I went there a few months ago, it was empty and derelict. For reasons unknown, Mr Markle had again done a flip.

Father and son are believed to be estranged, at least partly because Thomas Senior disapproves of Thomas Junior talking about Meghan to the Press.

I am also told Mr Markle is not in contact with his daughter Samantha — who is writing a tell-all book called *Diary Of Princess Pushy's Sister* — although she was at pains to suggest otherwise in a TV interview this week.

BEFORE this fractured family came to prominence, however, Thomas Junior says he visited his father in Mexico, and gave me a glimpse of his lifestyle. His dad, he says, often sleeps until the afternoon, spends his days reading, watching TV news and old films, playing slot machines or ambling around. His son says he has gained weight by his junk-food diet.

He doesn't swim, fish, sail or surf like many on that coast: his only hobbies are photography and travel. He has a fascination with Asian culture, he says, and has visited Thailand and Vietnam.

Though Meghan's father declared himself bankrupt in California last year, with credit card debts of £24,181 and savings of just £160, and has been the subject of four legal claims in the past 20 years for unpaid tax bills, his son says he has a good-sized pension and is by no means on his uppers. Yet the overall impression is of a sometimes baleful and lonely man.

'It has been hard for him,' Thomas Junior told me. 'Dad is not taking to his retirement well. He has not only lost his work. He has lost his status and whole social circle. That takes a big adjustment. (But) my dad is the strong, silent type. There is no way in the world he'd talk about it.'

According to Michael, one of three Markle brothers (the other, Frederick, 75, is a bishop, in Florida) Thomas Senior suffers some 'minor' ailments, but nothing more than one might expect for a man of his age. Certainly nothing so serious that it might keep him from giving Meghan away in front of a TV audience next year that could run into billions.

During their recent conversations, Michael said Thomas had left no doubt that he would escort Meghan down the aisle.

Thomas Junior is also sure his father wouldn't miss the big day, saying he will be 'the proudest man in church'. Mr Markle's first wife, Rosalyn concurs. 'He'll be there in the chapel with a tear running down his cheek,' she assured me.

As we await our first glimpse of the elusive Mr Markle (and Prince Harry does likewise), this is heartening news indeed.

So why IS Meghan's dad determined to hide from the world?

himself into his work, for which he won acclaim and a string of awards. Mr Markle must have been delighted when — after a brief spell as an intern at the U.S. embassy in Argentina — Meghan returned to LA to begin an acting career; then, in her early 20s, settled down with Trevor Engelson, a hotshot producer who would become her first husband.

But the marriage was short-lived, and in 2011 her starring role in the soap series *Suits* forced her to spend much of her time in Toronto. She saw her father as often as possible, but LA is five hours away by plane, and a demanding filming

schedule — not to mention a social whirl with a new circle of high-powered Canadian friends — limited their time together.

Meghan's new life in Toronto began in the same year that she lost her much-loved paternal grandmother, Doris, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. For many months before she died, in a nursing home, she and her father would visit her together every weekend.

Her move to Canada also coincided with her father's retirement. So, with little to detain him in Los Angeles, he sub-let his shabby apartment opposite a film studio,

arranged for his mail to be delivered to a PO Box address, and went down Mexico way.

Rosarito Beach is home to a good many retired American ex-pats, and they move there for a variety of reasons.

Spacious beach-front houses can be rented for £800 a month; food and drink are remarkably cheap and the weather is balmy all the year round.

However, a sizeable number of Americans disappear to this sprawling city, half an hour from the U.S. border, to escape debts, criminal charges or other problems. Since official record-keeping is lax,

many don't register for a residency card and live there anonymously. With its glorious beaches, glitzy bars, restaurants and casinos, it might seem like Shangri-La — but behind the main strip there is a dangerous underbelly.

For the past decade, Rosarito Beach has been gripped by a bloody war between rival drug gangs which frequently spills over into supposedly peaceful residential areas. Last year it had one of Mexico's highest murder rates, with 60 victims in a population of only 60,000.

It means people tend not to pry into the business of others; which