



Kate: 'My very happy childhood'

The Princess of Wales on how her idyllic early years shaped her

Our early childhood shapes the adults we become," says Kate Middleton, who places the importance on children's early years in her work. And, the Princess of Wales' "very happy" childhood has helped her become a devoted mother of three, a loving wife and perfect future Queen.

The eldest of Michael and Carole Middleton's three children, Kate, born Catherine Elizabeth, grew up in leafy Berkshire. She had a safe and secure family unit – her parents have been married for over 40 years – and she gets on well with younger sister Pippa, 39, and brother James, 36. "I had a very happy childhood. It was great fun and I'm very lucky I come from a very strong family," she has said, adding that the "quality of relationships" with her nearest and dearest made her who she is today. "My parents were hugely dedicated. I really appreciate now, as a parent, how much they sacrificed for us. They came to every sports match, they'd be the ones on the sideline shouting and we'd always have our family holidays together." This is something she has carried through with her and husband Prince William's kids – George, nine, Charlotte, eight, and Louis, five.

From a young age, Kate was open to other cultures. When she

was two, the family moved to Jordan for her dad's work with British Airways. During her two years in Amman, she learned English and Arabic, having enrolled at a local nursery. Her short stay there helped develop a respect and appreciation for people with different backgrounds and religions.

She had a special bond with her grandmother, who instilled a love of creativity in her. "I had an amazing granny who devoted a lot of time to us, playing with us, doing arts and crafts and going to the greenhouse to do gardening and cooking with us, and I try and incorporate a lot of the experiences that she gave us at the time into the experiences that I give my children now," she told *Giovanna Fletcher* on her *Happy Mum, Happy Baby* podcast. "Also environments they split their time in –

having a happy home, a safe environment."

As a child, Kate was in the Brownies, and she and Pippa would go on field trips, play sports and do needlework to earn badges. Spending time in nature is important for the Princess. "As

children, we spent a lot of time outside and it's something I'm really passionate about," she said.

'I had an amazing granny'



Enjoying being outdoors as a toddler

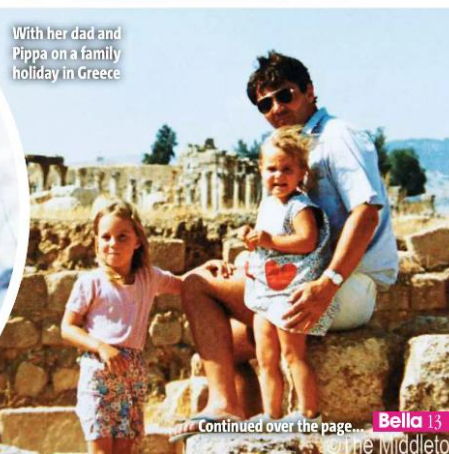


Baby Kate with her dad, Michael



All smiles: a young Kate

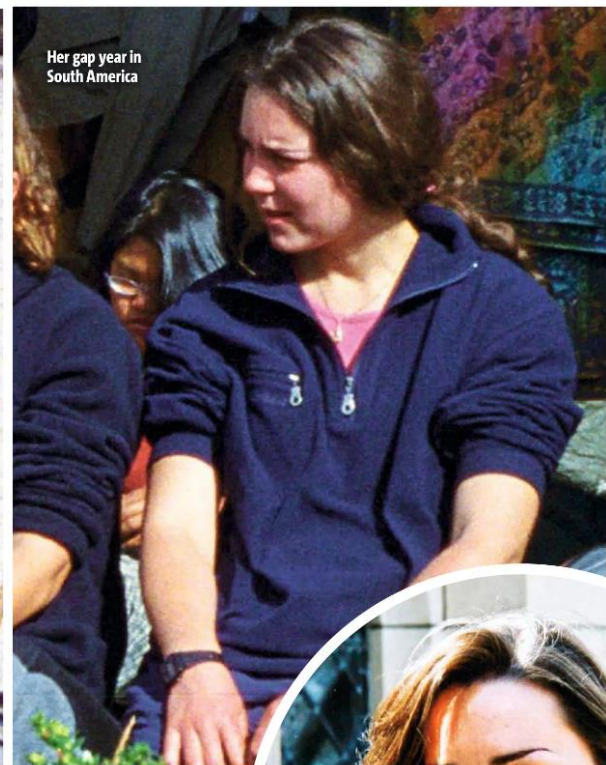
With her dad and Pippa on a family holiday in Greece



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Working as a deck hand



Her gap year in South America



At St Andrews University

A keen swimmer and athlete, her emerging talent in sports was apparent while she was at school. She thrived at St Andrew's Prep school, where she attended from age four to 13. She was captain of the school's hockey team and the swimming team. She was once named the highest scorer of the season in rounders and set new records in the long jump and high jump, all of which led to her being awarded a cup for outstanding overall sporting achievement. Her former teacher Kevin Allford recalled, "She was a hard worker and very conscientious. She was a tremendous athlete and swimmer."

Following her successful near-decade at St Andrew's, Kate had a brief stint at the exclusive all-girls boarding school Downe House in Berkshire, where she soon discovered that it wasn't for her. Unlike the happy years she had at

St Andrew's, life at Downe House wasn't as she had hoped and she withdrew after two terms, because she was bullied. Former head Susan Cameron said, "I think it's fair to say she was unsettled and not particularly happy. There would be teasing. Girls are cliquey by nature and they can be rather cruel."

'She had a certain presence'

She enrolled at independent co-ed boarding school Marlborough College in Wiltshire to study for her GCSEs and A-Levels. She found her place there, much like she did at St Andrew's, and her sporting prowess re-emerged, as she went on to become captain of the hockey team, which Pippa was also in. Former pupil Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore revealed that the Princess was "ordinary, hard-working, athletic and easy-going".

After leaving Marlborough armed with two A's and a B, Kate decided to take a gap year, turning

down her place at the University of Edinburgh. She studied Italian and art history for three months at the British Institute of Florence in Italy, before travelling to Patagonia in Chile to volunteer in a Raleigh International youth expedition ten-week programme to help communities living in poverty. Eschewing home comforts gave her a taste of the simple life, with Kate adapting easily to her new way of living. Coincidentally, William had also done the same trip, three months prior.

"She was definitely one of the fitter and stronger members of her group. At times it was physically demanding. She was pretty easy-going," said expedition leader Malcolm Sutherland, who led the two royals, adding, "There are no hairdryers, and there are very few showers to be seen." Rachel Humphreys, another expedition



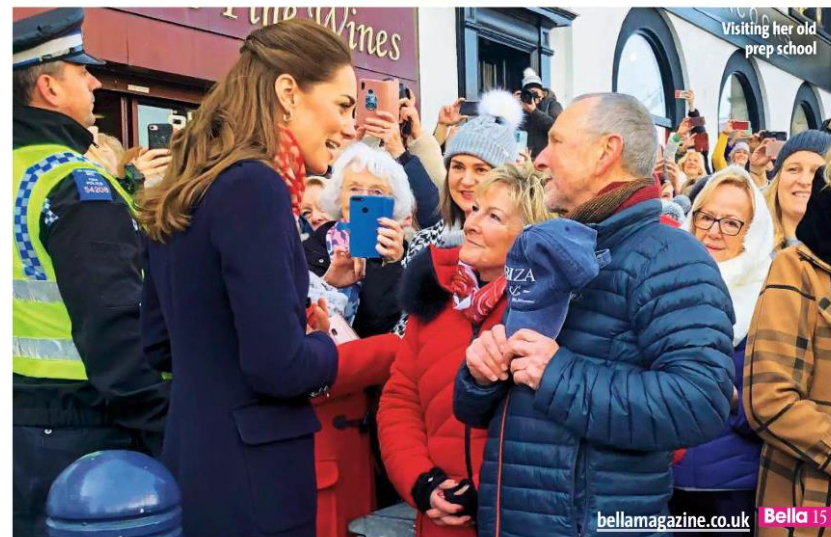
At St Andrews University

leader, said of the Princess, "She had a certain presence." Kate also worked as a deckhand in Southampton during the summer of 2001.

In September 2001, she started at St Andrews University, briefly studying psychology before focusing solely on art history. She worked part-time as a waitress during her studies. Dr Brian Lang, the university's former vice chancellor, said, "Kate was a very

mature girl. She was a very attractive girl, she was a very popular girl, particularly with the boys. But she was always very in control of herself and impeccably behaved."

It was at St Andrew's that she first met Prince William through mutual friends. "[I was] feeling very shy about meeting him," she admitted. Despite her initial bashfulness, they became friends for over a year before their relationship turned romantic – according to rumours, the royal's feelings for her grew after he saw her modelling a sheer mini-dress for a charity fashion show. The rest, as they say, is history...



Visiting her old prep school