

from DAVID
JONES and
HUGO DANIEL

THE new mother's expression will be familiar to every young woman who has just given birth.

It registers an emotional maelstrom mingling unbridled joy with utter exhaustion, relief with sheer awe.

By contrast, perched on her lap just hours after her arrival in the world, her tiny baby girl looks a picture of serenity.

Indeed, she appears so composed as the camera flashes, that it is almost as if she could sense her extraordinary destiny.

Captured by a family member in an austere Los Angeles hospital room, this starkly evocative portrait is the first-ever photograph of the future Duchess of Sussex.

It was taken so soon after Meghan's birth, at 4.46am, on August 4, 1981, that she still wears identity tags around her wrist and ankle, and barely fills out her sky-blue smock, as she nestles next to her 24-year-old mother, Doria Markle.

The remarkable image features among more than 30 photos in a previously unseen family album shown exclusively to the Daily Mail by Meghan's uncle, Joseph Johnson.

Charting the Duchess's happy, though sometimes turbulent, childhood, from her earliest moments through to her teens, the pictures are of particular significance to her family.

For while we have seen many shots of the young Meghan with her father, Thomas, and his side of her family, this collection opens a fresh window on the times she shared with her maternal relatives, particularly her mother Doria and grandmother Jeanette Johnson; the women who most influenced her.

This week, as his niece prepares for the imminent birth of her first baby — albeit in rather different circumstances — Mr Johnson, 69, thumbed through the fading snapshots, reminiscing as he explained why he has chosen to publish them.

'I think this is a good time for the world to see the other side of Meghan's family — the positive side, not the degenerative side — and for them to be part of her story,' he told us, alluding to the constant swirl of scandal surrounding her paternal relatives, including her father and half-brother and sister.

In a wide-ranging interview at his studio in Fresno, California, Mr Johnson, who is a talented artist, also offered a candid insight into many other aspects of Meghan's life, revealing how:

■ Far from being cowed by her new position, Meghan 'loves' the fame and adulation of being a royal, according to her mother.

■ He 'doesn't recognise' the Meghan reportedly branded 'Duchess Difficult' by Palace aides for her high-handed manner.

■ His wife, Pamela, felt 'miffed' that Meghan chose to exclude every family member, except Doria, from her wedding, while he was more sanguine.

■ He was shocked when Princess Michael of Kent attended a Christmas banquet — at which Meghan was present — wearing what some deemed a 'racist' brooch featuring an African figurine.

■ He is proud of Meghan and Harry for breaking with tradition by choosing to celebrate the baby's arrival privately, and choosing their own birthing team instead of royal gynaecologists.

■ He believes Meghan will be quietly hoping her baby is a girl because a boy would present 'more of a challenge' to her.

Mr Johnson and his younger sister Sandra had a different father to Doria, but they shared the same mother, Jeanette, and the three were raised together, first in Ohio and later in California.

The daughter of a hotel bellboy, Jeanette was first married to Joseph Johnson Senior, by whom she had two children — Joseph Junior and his younger sister, Meghan's aunt Sandra. She later divorced and then married antiques dealer Alvin Ragland, Doria's father.

In time, that marriage also ended. However, Meghan's mother, aunt and uncle remained with the matriarchal Jeanette, who raised them for the most part as a single-

parent. Her son says she was 'like the man of the family — and the wife and mother', and describes her as 'quite a pistol'.

With racial segregation still rife in America, their childhood was

marred by poverty, and such appalling bigotry that the family was once hounded out of a whites-only town in Texas, as they drove west seeking a better life.

However, Mr Johnson says these

experiences served only to make Jeanette more resilient and socially aware — traits she handed down to Doria, who in turn passed them on to Meghan, thus inspiring, he believes, her campaigning work for

human rights. Meghan inherited other values from her formidable Granny Jeanette, he says, including her self-reliance, quick wit and wicked sense of humour.

For although Meghan's mother

Can't wait to see the royal baby? Here's...

MEGHAN: THE FIRST PICTURE

Only hours old in the arms of her mum, just one of a gorgeous unseen album of baby Meghan pictures — shared by her adoring uncle...



Bright future: Little did Baby Meghan know that her own child would be a British royal

new



...AND GRANNY MAKES THREE MAGICAL GENERATIONS

Newborn: Meghan in August 1981 with her mother Doria. Right, taking her first steps

and father did not divorce until she was six, Mr Johnson is adamant their marriage was already failing by the time she was born.

Since Doria had to return to work for financial reasons soon after the birth, it meant Meghan spent much of her infancy in the care of her grandmother.

'Doria and my mother lived right around the corner from one another in LA, so Jeanette played a big part in caring for Meghan,' he recalls. 'After the birth, Doria went on with her career [as a make-up artist and later air hostess] and my mother would watch her during the day.'

Browsing through the family album, he picks out various photos that show the bond between Meghan and her granny.

One shows baby Meghan laying across Jeanette's lap, as she pats her back gently to 'wind' her. Another displays her grandmother's adoration as she and Doria hold the baby aloft and gaze at her in wonder.

'That's my mother and her grandbaby, and she's just smiling away,' laughs Mr Johnson. 'Oh, she was happy! [when Meghan arrived] Just crazy, wild with joy.'

Meghan saw less of her grandmother after she went away to university, but the pair remained close until Jeanette died after

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Bond: 'Granny Jeanette' adored her granddaughter, and helped raise her while Meghan's mother went to work

'A daughter would be

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

suffering heart disease and stroke, aged 71, in 2000. She gladly sacrificed her weekends to be at her bedside towards the end.

It is because she enjoyed such a formative relationship with her granny, her uncle surmises, that Meghan is so keen for Doria, now a yoga teacher, to play a major role in her own baby's life.

Her mother is expected to make regular transatlantic trips after the birth, and have her own quarters in Meghan and Harry's new home, Frogmore Cottage, at Windsor.

'I think [Doria] will be a big part,' he says. 'I think she'll be hands-on, just because of Meghan's time constraints. She'll have to be around.'

'I think she'll be a great grandmother, if she helps raise that child anything like Meghan was raised.'

Doria, he adds, instilled in Meghan 'love and kindness, and a sense of self', and taught her the importance of 'helping others and having a lot of courage'. He expects these values to be imbued in the baby.

Looking again at that beautiful first picture of Doria and Meghan, he recalls the enormity of the occasion. 'I think it was taken the day she was born, or it could have been the next day,' he says.

'Doria has still got her gown on, and she sure looks as though she's just had a baby! We were all happy, over the moon. It was like a new world.'

'Before the birth of Meghan, Doria was just like a teenager running wild and fancy-free. This was such a settling moment, in comparison to her life before that, in Hollywood, and at the TV studios [where she temped as a make-up artist] with Tom [Meghan's father, an award-winning lighting director]. This was bringing her into the real world.'

He turns back to the album. Here is Meghan at four months old, enjoying her first Christmas, laying on an unmade bed beside her presents which are stashed in a crimson sack marked 'Santa Claus'.

There she is taking her first, tentative steps on the path outside her house; playing peekaboo with Doria; licking an ice-cream cone and getting it all over her cheeks; tasting her first spare-rib at a barbecue; helping her mother to feed the pigeons; opening her presents at her alfresco second birthday party. They are truly magical mementos.

Meghan is seen having fun with her cousins, including two of Mr Johnson's three sons, Shawn and Jason; and enjoying one of the rare functions where her mother and father's families came together.

The backdrop to many of these photographs is, in itself, highly revealing. At Doria's house, a rusty-looking bike is propped against the bare wall, and the surroundings are spartan and homespun.

AND though Meghan was always smartly turned out — and already seems made for the cameras, with her sparkling doe-eyes, retroussé nose and cutesy-pie curls — it is clear her family lived frugally. Her own baby's background will be light-years away from these make-do-and-mend beginnings.

Putting the album aside momentarily, Mr Johnson recalls how his family received the astonishing news that 'their' little Meghan was dating Prince Harry.

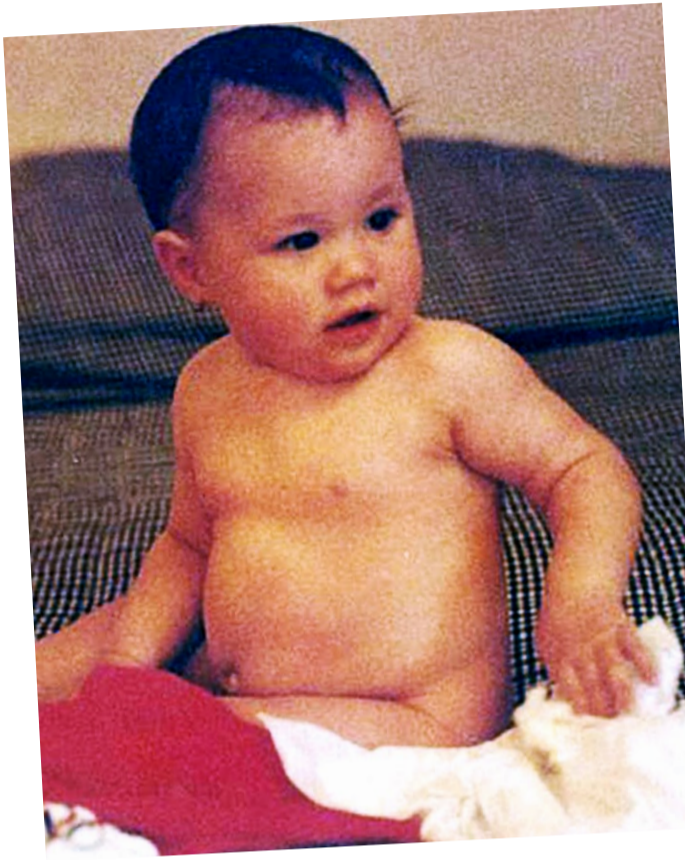
'All of us were just really, really stunned. Shocked. Especially Doria. She was so excited.'

'She was just saying "My little Flower!" [Doria's nickname for Meghan]. 'How can this be true? This is unbelievable.'

She said: 'My Flower's going to be a Princess, wooh-wooh-wooh!'

Of course, Meghan's absorption into the Royal Family has not been entirely straightforward. In December 2017, Princess Michael of Kent caused an outcry after she wore a blackamoor brooch, in Meghan's presence at a Christmas banquet at Buckingham Palace.

She quickly apologised but the unsavoury episode did not sit well with Mr Johnson, who had first-hand experience of racism as a child. 'When it's something that blatant and just in your face I'm



Bonny baby: A chubby Meghan at a few months old

always shocked, even at this age, and even though I've experienced racism a lot.'

Mr Johnson is a mild-mannered man who lives quietly with his wife in a detached bungalow in sleepy Fresno. However, he becomes animated when the conversation turns to the more negative publicity Meghan has received.

'What you hear in the Press — I don't even recognise that person,' he says. 'Meghan is a really wonderful person. I really admire Doria for the way she has raised her. She is not afraid [to be herself] and I think she gets that courage from her mother.'

By the same token, Mr Johnson readily admits that Meghan is relishing her elevation from TV star to globally recognised icon.

'She likes that attention, she's had the schooling, and then being in Hollywood, which is a good type of preparation, so she can handle that,' he says. 'I have read that some of Harry's old girlfriends couldn't handle all the scrutiny. But from what I hear, from what Doria says about Meghan, she loves it.'

'That is great, because that's certainly a huge part of it [her new role]. The public eye.' Smiling, he adds: 'I couldn't handle it.'

He says he used Doria, now 62, as a role-model when raising his own children. And having been smacked by his parents, perhaps the most important lesson she

taught him was that smacking causes a child immense harm. 'Meghan was never hit, or hollered at,' he says. 'I've seen both sides — the way we were raised and the way she was raised.'

The conversation turns to Meghan and Harry's wedding. When he and his family failed to receive an invitation, Mr Johnson remarked caustically that it had perhaps been 'lost in the post'.

Today, he is still unsure why Meghan snubbed even her most loyal, level-headed relatives.

HIS WIFE, he said, felt 'really put off' by the exclusion, and others were similarly annoyed, yet he just felt 'kind of sad'.

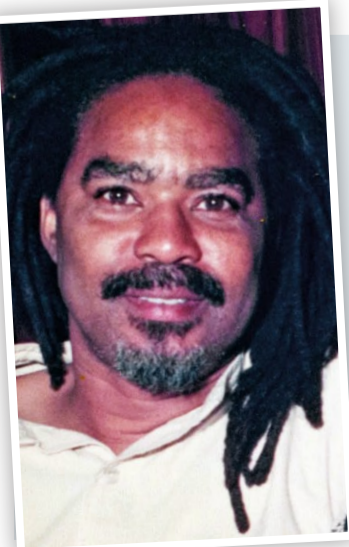
With a shrug, he went on: 'My wife was kind of miffed. You know — 800 guests. But I said, 'Right, we're not having that kind of close relationship right now.'

Without any hint of bitterness, he added: 'Meghan has her own set of friends now. They were the ones she invited. I guess you could say they are Hollywood royalty. People in the spotlight, and that's what her life is about.'

He and Pamela watched the event on TV, and he took photos of the screen on his mobile phone. 'I got it almost frame by frame,' he chuckles. 'It was the biggest thing



Ready for fun: As an 18-month-old in one of her smart outfits



'The world should see the positive side of her family'

MEGHAN'S UNCLE JOSEPH JOHNSON

that's happened in our lives. Wow! I, for one, was thrilled despite the fact I wasn't invited. I aim to do a painting of that ceiling of the chapel, and the floors.'

For reasons of her own, Meghan is no longer in touch with the Johnsons, as with almost everyone in her family, including, of course, her father. However, Mr Johnson has a hunch that 'they might get back together'. For the new baby's sake, at least, he hopes he is right.

Since the wedding, he has been following Meghan's progress closely via newspapers and magazines, and he even keeps a scrapbook of her life and times as a duchess.

He applauds the couple's reported decision to bring in their own birthing team, and limit publicity on the baby's arrival, saying: 'They want to do things their own way, which is fine.'

As for the baby's gender, remembering how Meghan was raised in a

household dominated by strong, independent women, he says: 'I think she probably wants a girl.'

'I'm sure Harry wants a boy. A daughter would be a real comfort to Meghan. A boy would be... more of a challenge. She might be a little more comfortable with a girl.'

Given Meghan and Harry's strong desire to use their positions for the public good, Mr Johnson has high expectations of their child, suggesting he or she could 'take on their passions' and make a positive impact on the world.

Meanwhile, he is excitedly awaiting the first photographs of his great-niece or great-nephew. 'I'm wondering whether he will have curly hair, or red,' he laughed. His curiosity is shared by millions.

Yet whatever the royal baby looks like, he or she will surely be just as beautiful as the little girl resting demurely in the crook of her mother's arm, 37 years ago.

such a comfort for her'



Family life: Little Meghan playing with her mother Doria, top, trying her first spare rib at a barbecue in the park and, right, enjoying the outdoors

ON MONDAY MEGHAN: THE ADORABLE TODDLER YEARS