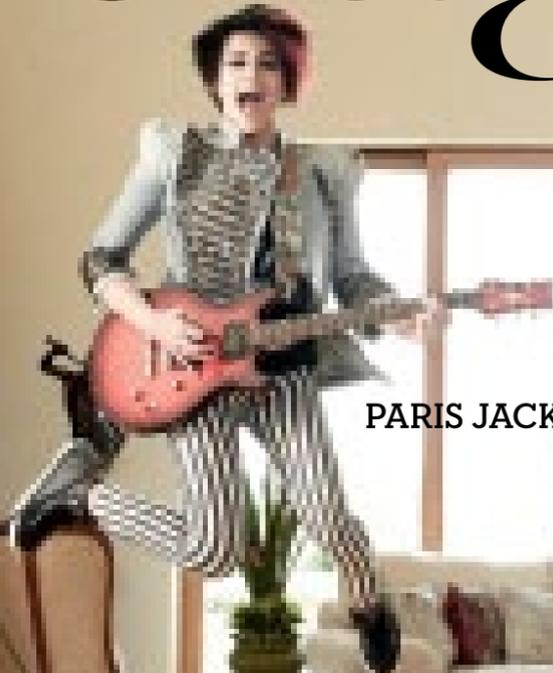


The World's **HER** Stage

WORDS ANNEMARIE LUCK



PARIS JACKSON (1998 -)

SINCE MICHAEL JACKSON DIED, HIS DAUGHTER HAS CHOSEN TO ENTER THE VERY SPOTLIGHT HER FATHER WAS TRYING TO PROTECT HER FROM. NOW, AS SHE RECOVERS FROM HER RECENT SUICIDE ATTEMPT, EVERYONE IS WATCHING TO SEE IF THE 15-YEAR-OLD WILL TAKE A STEP BACK

In the early morning hours of 5 June 2013, Paris Jackson tweeted: 'Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away, now it looks as though they're here to stay.' She then called a suicide hotline and spoke to a counsellor. Shortly afterwards, she took a kitchen knife and slit her right wrist, then swallowed 20 Motrin (Ibuprofen) painkillers. Luckily, the counsellor called an ambulance and paramedics rushed to the Jackson family's Los Angeles home at 2am.

Over the next few days, the media exploded with speculation as to why the 15-year-old tried to take her own life. She allegedly wrote a suicide note, but the contents have not been made public. Reporters looked to her social-networking accounts for insight: in the days leading up to her suicide attempt she had tweeted things like, 'Don't kiss someone one day if you plan on seeing someone else the next day' and 'Don't listen to a word I say,

the screams all sound the same'. There were references to her apparently secret Tumblr page, where she supposedly featured graphic images of self-harming, death and suicide. Stories surfaced about the cyberbullying she was being subjected to, something she herself had spoken about in a 2012 interview with Oprah Winfrey. Back then, she told Oprah that she tried not to let it bother her, but a few months before her suicide attempt, she told *Event* magazine that

she used to take everything personally when people would post negative tweets about her. 'I was very upset. I try not to look at my mentions all the time because there's so much hate there.'

Her grandmother and guardian, Katherine Jackson, told *Entertainment Tonight*: 'Being a sensitive 15-year-old is difficult no matter who you are. It's especially difficult when you lose the person closest to you.' Paris's uncle, Jermaine Jackson, offered his opinion, saying it was a childish reaction to not being allowed to attend a Marilyn Manson concert: 'Paris has to learn there are certain guidelines when you grow up being a teenager. There are rules.' Her mother, Debbie Rowe, who has been by her side in hospital, told *Entertainment Tonight* that Paris 'had a lot going on'.

It's been a while since Paris has had her mom to lean on. Twelve years, to be exact. Paris was only three when her mother gave over all parental rights to Michael Jackson, in exchange for an \$8-million settlement and a house in Beverly Hills. Before that, Debbie had visitation rights – she was allowed to see her children, Paris and Prince, once every 45 days.

Although Debbie and Michael were married in 1996, while she was pregnant with their son Prince, the couple never lived together as husband and wife, and the marriage only lasted three years. They had met in the mid-Eighties, when Michael started receiving treatment at the dermatology clinic where Debbie worked as a nurse. A longtime fan of the King of Pop, Debbie was adopted as a child and grew up feeling lonely, which meant she could probably relate to his feeling of isolation in the world. And like Michael, who was divorcing Lisa Marie Presley at the time, Debbie was recovering from a bad break-up. When Michael confided in her that he was upset at the thought of never becoming a father, Debbie offered to bear his children.

Michael Joseph 'Prince' Jackson Jr was born on 13 February 1997 and the following year, on 3 April 1998, Paris Michael Katherine Jackson arrived. Michael's youngest child, Prince Michael 'Blanket' Jackson II, was born to a surrogate mother on 22 February 2002.

Being raised by such a high-profile celebrity, both hailed and hated, could not have been easy for the Jackson children. But Michael tried his best to give them a 'regular' childhood. In her interview with Oprah, Paris said, '[Dad] told us that when he was younger he didn't really have



From left to right Michael Jackson and Debbie Rowe visiting Champ de Bataille Castle, Normandy, France in 1997; Paris Katherine Jackson at Michael Jackson's memorial service at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, July 2009; Michael Jackson with his children on a shopping trip at Harrods in London, October 2005.

Paris was three when her mother gave over all parental rights to Michael Jackson, for \$8-million and a house

a childhood. He would always be stuck in the studio singing while the kids were out playing. He wanted us to have [what he didn't]. She gave further insight into life with the pop icon as father in her interview with *Event*. 'He was an incredible father. He had that good energy where you just didn't want to leave,' she said. Michael also chose to home-school his children and made them wear masks when they went out in public with him. 'I was really confused. I didn't get why I was wearing a mask,' Paris told Oprah. 'But I understand now why my dad would want our face to be covered. When we went out without him, we wouldn't be recognized.'

The children grew up at Neverland, Michael's famous 3 000-acre ranch in Santa Ynez, California. The family left the ranch in 2005, after the second bout of child-molestation charges against Michael. The pop star was quoted as saying it no longer 'felt like home'. When Paris returned to visit her childhood home two years ago she was devastated to find it in ruins. 'I cried and cried,' she told *Event*. 'It's beautiful there. It still has good energy.' The teen says she is determined to restore Neverland to its former glory so that underprivileged children can enjoy it, as her father intended. And renovation work has already begun, with one Neverland security guard telling *The Daily Mail* that the ranch 'has been completely revitalized. There's a full set of staff and people in charge who care about the place.'

It seems that Paris has inherited her father's desire to do good in the world. 'I want to help

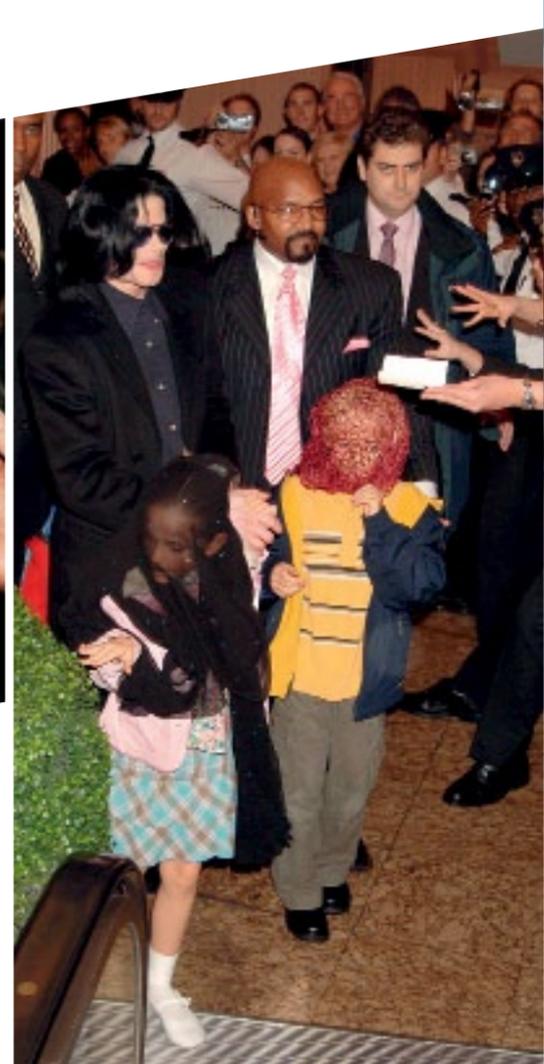
people,' she told *Event*, expressing her desire to be a heart surgeon one day. She's also inherited his love of being on stage, and says she would like to be an actress before going to medical school. 'I love acting,' she said in her 2011 interview with Ellen DeGeneres, adding that she wanted to be like her dad in the 1988 film *Moonwalker*. She already has one starring role lined up, in the modern fantasy movie *London's Bridge and the Three Keys*.

Paris's decision to take on the role caused some friction in the Jackson family. Her aunt Janet is reportedly furious about it, telling *Prevention* magazine last year, 'We've spoken about the fact that you're only a child once,' Janet said. 'I think there's a time for everything, and now is not the time [to act in films]. I told her I thought she should enjoy being a kid, possibly go to college – or not – but wait till she turns 18. She's a very tough, smart girl. But it's a cutthroat industry. I wouldn't want my child to do it.'

As Paris's legal guardian, Katherine Jackson is ultimately the person in charge of steering the teen through life. It can't be easy trying to juggle the demands of raising three kids along with dealing with the legal wrangles that have

arisen since her son's death in 2009 – first there was the lawsuit that sent Michael's doctor Conrad Murray to prison, and now there's the wrongful-death lawsuit against AEG Live, the concert organizer being sued by Katherine and the Jackson kids for billions of dollars because they believe AEG watched Michael waste away while pushing him to continue with his string of comeback concerts. (Paris's video testimony was played during the trial while she was in hospital recovering from her suicide attempt.)

Despite all she's had to deal with, Paris comes across as a happy, well-adjusted, confident and creative character. She has spoken in interviews about enjoying attending the exclusive Buckley School, where she takes part in football and cheerleading. (Her grandmother supported Paris's and Prince's desire to switch from home-schooling to attending a regular school in 2010, as well as Paris's desire to reconnect with her mother earlier this year.) She told *Event*: 'I want to have a normal high-school experience. It's hard to have a normal childhood when you have security with you all



Left Paris Jackson at the Michael Jackson Handprint Ceremony in Los Angeles, January 2012. Below Paris Jackson, Prince Jackson, La Toya Jackson and Prince Michael Jackson II at the Mr Pink Ginseng Drink Launch in Los Angeles, October 2012.



the time. I'm on a tight leash and I feel if that leash was loosened a little bit I would definitely have a chance at a normal childhood.'

If you watch her 20-minute ad hoc make-up tutorial on YouTube, you see a typical teenager, flitting between putting on green eye shadow, answering text messages, showing off her new, edgy haircut, and singing along to Journey's 'Don't Stop Believing'. Sure, she's slightly self-deprecating (she calls herself weird), but there are no overt signs that she was suffering from severe depression, as news reports are now claiming.

However, in the months leading up to her suicide attempt, she's had an extra burden placed on her shoulders – the rift between her and her brother, because Prince does not want anything to do with their mother, while Paris has been forging a relationship with Debbie. Then there are the nasty comments directed at her on Facebook and Twitter, such as 'ugly bitch' and 'your dad touched little boys'. These must have hit home even harder than usual when, in May this year, Wade Robson spoke out about his alleged child abuse by the pop

icon. Robson, who testified in the 2005 trials and denied any abuse, is now claiming he was manipulated into lying about what happened.

On top of this, Paris has had to deal with the question of her paternity. One of Michael's close friends, Jason Pfeiffer, recently told the *Sunday Mirror* that the pop star confided in him that his children were fathered by former child star Mark Lester. Lester has responded by confirming that Michael did once ask him to donate sperm; and in an interview on ITV show *Lorraine* he said, 'Michael brought those children up, whether or not he was the biological father, he was their father from day one...'

As Paris recovers, she and her family are in talks about what's best for her. Will she transfer from Buckley to a performing arts school? Will she move to her mother's Palmdale ranch, where she can enjoy some respite from bodyguards and paparazzi? Hopefully she will carefully consider the various paths life is presenting. After all, the door she chooses next will make all the difference in whether she can look back on her childhood one day and call it 'normal'. **mc**

CELEB WATCH

Hollywood is no stranger to the kind of drama Paris Jackson caused when she attempted suicide. Luckily, she had a moment of clarity and called a suicide hotline, which is ultimately what saved her. But this was not enough to convince authorities that she was mentally stable. The state of California placed her under a 5150 hold, which means she was held involuntarily because her behaviour was judged as potentially 'a result of a mental disorder or a danger to others, or to herself'. Later, she was moved to a youth residential treatment centre. Here are other stars who've been placed under a similar hold...



BRITNEY SPEARS

In 2008, Spears was at the height of her breakdown and custody battle with Kevin Federline. After some bizarre antics, including shaving off her hair, Spears locked herself and one of her sons in a room, refusing to hand him over to Federline. The hold led to her father being given legal control of her affairs.



MISCHA BARTON

The *OC* star told *Tatler* that she was placed under hold because she overreacted to nurses who were trying to inject her with painkillers to treat a tooth infection. 'I am terrified of needles and they wanted to pump me full of drugs, so I got into a fight with the nurses,' she said.



AMANDA BYNES

The actress has been showing signs of a breakdown for a while now (car accidents, drug abuse, lashing out at fellow celebs), but when she allegedly started a fire in a neighbour's driveway in July this year, police took action and put her under hold for evaluation.



DAVID HASSELHOFF

In 2009, Hoff ended up having a seizure after days of alcohol abuse. He had been hospitalized for alcohol abuse five times previously and therefore was considered a danger to himself and placed on psychiatric hold.

PHOTOGRAPHS GREATSTOCK/AUGUST IMAGE/BRIAN BOWEN SMITH AND REX FEATURES