Daily Mail .com News

EXCLUSIVE Inside 'disco dancer' Kamala Harris's high school years in Canada - and why she keeps tight-lipped about them

- **READ MORE:** Kamala Harris officially condemned for her 'Border Czar' failure

By JOHN R. KENNEDY IN MONTREAL, CANADA, FOR DAILYMAIL.COM

PUBLISHED: 14:00 EDT, 26 July 2024 | **UPDATED:** 18:48 EDT, 28 July 2024

Share 89 shares 307 View comments

She loved disco dancing to **Michael Jackson** and even started an all-girls dance troupe. She was well-liked, known for her laugh and bubbly personality.

But as **Kamala Harris** amps up her presidential campaign it's unlikely voters will hear much from her about how she spent her formative years in **Canada**, a DailyMail.com investigation has learned.

Harris was crushed when her divorced mother told her they were moving from **California** to Montreal – and she remained homesick for the duration of their five-year stay in the late '70s and early '80s.

There is no mention of her Canadian education in Harris's official biography on the White House **website** and in her 2019 memoir The Truths We Hold: An American Journey, she wrote only eight paragraphs about this period of her life.

Harris and younger sister Maya, now 57, moved from Berkeley to Montreal in 1977, five years after their parents divorced, when mom Shyamala landed a teaching and research position at the McGill University-affiliated Jewish General Hospital.

'It was an exciting step in advancing her career,' Harris wrote in her book. 'It was not, however, an exciting opportunity for me.'

KAMA
+12
View gallery

© Getty Images

Kamala Harris cruised to the Democratic nomination for president this week, but most voters are seemingly unaware of her formative years in Canada

+12
View gallery

© '81 Westmount High School yearbook

Kamala's high school friend Hugh Kwok, (right with the 2024 hopeful's arm on his shoulder in 1981), recalled her as having 'something special' at school, and said 'she blended in with everybody'

She shared: ‘The thought of moving away from sunny California in February, in the middle of the school year, to a French-speaking foreign city covered in 12 feet of snow was distressing, to say the least.

‘My mother tried to make it sound like an adventure, taking us to buy our first down jackets and mittens, as though we were going to be explorers of the great northern winter. But it was hard for me to see it that way.’

Harris, who attended four schools in Canada’s second-largest city between the ages of 12 and 17, said moving nearly 3,000 miles away ‘was made worse when my mother told us that she wanted us to learn the language, so she was enrolling us in a neighborhood school for native French speakers.’

That school was École Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, a red brick elementary school within walking distance of Shyamala’s hospital.

‘It was a difficult transition, since the only French I knew was from my ballet classes,’ Harris wrote in her memoir. ‘I used to joke that I felt like a duck, because all day long at our new school I’d be saying "Quoi? Quoi? Quoi?" (What? What? What?).’

Harris was not afraid to be heard, though. When their landlord banned children from playing soccer on the lawn, she and her sister organized a demonstration – and the policy was reversed.

Share 307 View comments Top Home +99

© AP
+12
View gallery

Share 307 View comments Top Home +99

Kamala is seen as a child in January 1970, alongside her younger sister Maya and mother Shyamala, outside their home in Berkeley, California before the Harris family moved to Canada

+12
View gallery

© John R. Kennedy for DailyMail.com

Kamala (front row, third right) in her 11th-grade picture at Westmount High chool

+12
View gallery

© REUTERS

As her campaign for the White House heats up, Harris downplays her time in Canada and makes no mention of it on her official biography

In the fall of 1977, Harris started Grade 7 at the bilingual Fine Arts Core Education (FACE) school in downtown Montreal, which counts singer Rufus Wainwright and actor Jay Baruchel among its alumni.

She took drama classes and learned violin, French horn and kettle drum.

Classmate Vicky Compton doesn't have many memories of Harris at FACE. 'I only remember her as warm and spunky,' she said. 'Nothing more precise.'

For Grades 9 to 11, Harris was a student at Westmount High School, located in an upscale, predominantly English-speaking neighborhood.

'By the time I got to high school, I had adjusted to our new surroundings,' she recalled in her book. 'I still missed home, my friends and family, and was always so happy to return during the summer and holidays ... but I'd gotten used to most of it.'

© John R. Kennedy for DailyMail.com

'I felt like a duck, because all day long I'd be saying "Quoi? Quoi? Quoi?" ' Haarri ssaid of her time at French-speaking Ecole Notre-Dame-des-Neiges

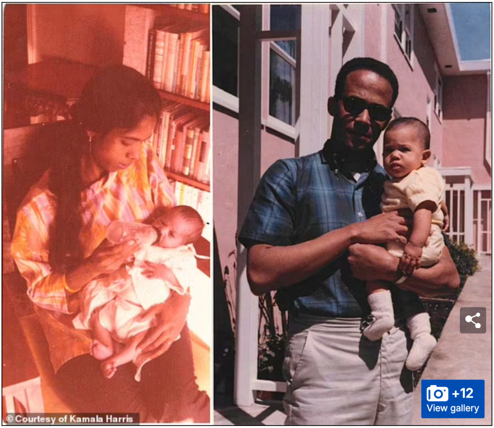
At Westmount High, Harris joined the Pep Club, worked on the yearbook committee and started an all-girls dance troupe, Midnight Magic, that performed at the school and in the community. Classmates remember how she loved to dance to Michael Jackson hits and Diana Ross classics.

'She fit right in,' Dean Smith told Daily Mail. 'She got in with the right crowd. Everybody accepted her easy.

'She was always a nice person. Always a fun person.'

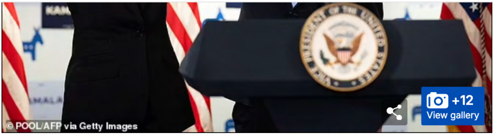
Smith, who was a grade above Harris, remembers watching her dance at school and seeing her hanging out in the halls with other girls.

'No boyfriends! She was a total academic,' he said. 'She and her sister came here to go to school.'


© Courtesy of Kamala Harris

Kamala seen in the arms of her parent Shyamala and Donald when she was a baby

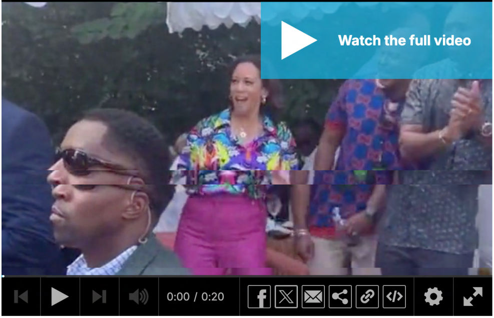
Share
307
View comments
Top
Home +99



© POOL/AFP via Getty Images

The presidential candidate's former classmates remembered her as a 'sweet, kind person' and 'very happy, very social'

Kamala Harris shows off dance moves at White House hip-hop party



Her best friend in high school, Wanda Kagan told **CTV Montreal**. how Kamala helped her during their junior year.

'I was in a very physical, and sexually abusive situation and she took me in to live with her,' Kagan, 60, said. She was being abused by her stepfather.

'We were very close in high school as best friends so I felt comfortable enough to finally tell her what I was going through.

'Her immediate reaction was "then you'll have to come and live with us" without even asking her mom.'

Kamala and Wanda ended up sharing a room in the Harris house. 'Her mother and sister embraced me,' Kagan said. 'I am still so grateful.'

Kagan also recalled how Harris made plans for girls without prom dates to celebrate together. 'That just goes to show how long back she fought for equality,' Kagan told CTV Montreal.

WESTMOUNT HIGH
+12
View gallery

Share 307 View comments Top Home +99

© Facebook

Kamala's best friend in high school, Wanda Kagan told CTV Montreal how she helped her during their junior year. 'I was in a very physical, and sexually abusive situation and she took me in to live with her,' Kagan, 60, said

© Lawrence Jackson/White House
+12
View gallery

Kamala and Wanda, pictured reunited when Kamala became VP, ended up sharing a room in the Harris house. 'Her mother and sister embraced me,' Kagan said. 'I am still so grateful.'

'That shows to me her true character.'

In the 1981 Westmount High School yearbook, Harris is pictured resting her arm on Hugh Kwok's shoulder. He told **The Canadian Press** in 2020 that Harris was a popular student.

'She had something special, she blended in with everybody,' he remembered.

Kwok told **The Toronto Star** in 2018: 'She was a sweet, kind person. Very happy, very social.'

In her graduating yearbook, Harris thanked her mother, urged her sister to 'Be cool' and listed her favorite expression as 'Naw, I'm just playing!'

After graduating from Westmount High, Harris enrolled at Vanier College.

Randee Rosenthal Glassman recalled becoming fast friends with Harris.

'I remember her laugh,' Glassman told Daily Mail. 'She was pretty but I don't really know if she was popular with boys.'

In The Truths We Hold, Harris said of her time in Montreal: 'What I hadn't gotten used to was the feeling of being homesick for my country. I felt this constant sense of yearning to be back home.'