

paris berelc

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Glam by EMILY DAWN







BORN AND RAISED IN THE suburbs of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Paris Berelc's unique moniker was inspired by Michael Jackson's daughter, born earlier that year. "So I got my name from Michael Jackson, kind of," she laughs. Not unlike the Motown star, Paris was filled with a creative spirit from a young age, finding her passion for gymnastics at 4 and adding both modeling and acting to the mix in elementary school.

At first, Paris strictly prioritized the gym over the stage. "I would do a few auditions here and there, but I never really dove into it myself completely because I was so focused on gymnastics," she notes. Over time, Paris's interest in acting grew, as did the need for in-person auditions. "I never tried pilot season because that was always my gymnastics competition season," Paris recalls. Even in elementary school, Paris was a promising gymnast with collegiate dreams and was afraid to lose her edge with recruiters.

At 13, she decided it was time to take the risk. With reassurance from her mother that gymnastics would still be there upon her return, Paris flew to Los Angeles to audition for a guest role on Disney's *A.N.T. Farm*. Though she didn't book that part, "the casting director for that show sent my headshot and resume to one of the executives at Disney," she remembers, which opened important doors in her career. "I started auditioning for a bunch of pilots, different recurring roles,

and then I booked *Mighty Med*, which was my first show ever," she explains.

So 14-year-old Paris was thrust into Hollywood with no prior experience but plenty of passion and heart. The journey from Milwaukee to Orange County "all happened so fast," Paris remarks. Once she landed the role of Skylar Storm, *Mighty Med*'s resident superhero, Paris had time only to fly home and pack her things before her family moved permanently to Laguna Niguel. "It was really interesting going from my life as a little gymnast in Wisconsin to moving to California and starting a Disney show," Paris shares. "I wouldn't know certain things [on set] because I was so new. I was fresh off the boat, but I had good castmates to help me out whenever I was lost or confused." In addition to the cast, Paris's parents and three younger sisters were her support system during the hectic transition.

After *Mighty Med*'s finale in 2015, the cast combined with fellow Disney show *Lab Rats* to become *Lab Rats: Elite Force*. Between the shows, Paris filmed *Invisible Sister*, a sci-fi DCOM, and after the conclusion of *Elite Force* had a small part in *#SquadGoals*, her first role outside of Disney.

Paris's most recent project is upcoming Netflix comedy *Alexa & Katie*, to be released March 23. The show follows Alexa Mendoza (Paris) and Katie Cooper (Isabel May), two childhood friends entering high school when Alexa is

diagnosed with cancer. Despite the difficult topic, the comedy stays light, showcasing another side of teens with cancer than is often depicted in the media. "They're best friends and they're just living their normal lives," Paris says passionately about the titular characters. "They're liking boys, and they're going to dances, and they're dealing with girl drama at school, and they're going through all of this together with an underlying factor that Alexa has cancer. And even though she does, it doesn't affect [their friendship]. It doesn't change who they are."

When Paris first auditioned, it was for both Alexa and Katie. She liked both roles but felt more connected to Alexa, with whom she has more in common. "Katie is more of the cute, kind of awkward personality, but Alexa is a little more outgoing, which is how I am in real life," she acknowledges. "She is strong, and she's not afraid to be herself, and she doesn't really care about what other people think about her." Although Paris is similar to her character in most ways, she teases that Alexa is "maybe a little more rebellious than me, but you guys will have to watch the show to see."

Because the show emphasizes the girls' high school experiences over Alexa's cancer, Paris found that stepping into her mindset was easier than people often expect. "The truth is that it's not always so crazy. It's not always so intense," she reveals. Paris did some background

research on Alexa's cancer, but the insight she found most valuable came from a teenager named Katie. "We met her at Children's Hospital, and she was telling us about her story, and she was telling us, yeah, she had cancer, but she would still go to high school and she went to her prom. She has a boyfriend," Paris recounts. Katie's story inspired the way Paris approached Alexa, which she hopes will translate through. "One thing I love about this show is that it will show people that even though someone has cancer, they're still normal," Paris adds. "They still live a normal life."

Although the story will focus on Alexa rather than her circumstances, *Alexa & Katie* will also tackle the serious side of her life, making the set "a rollercoaster" of emotions. "We have really funny moments and really good jokes, but then we also we get really emotional," Paris remarks. She sensed the show was special at the first table read, when she witnessed a room of adults overcome by emotion at a script aimed at adolescents. "Everyone was laughing really hard, and then they would be crying, and then be laughing again," Paris recalls.

While she has remained in young roles, Paris has matured a lot over the last five years. "When I was on Disney, I was playing my age, and on this show, I'm playing four years younger than me," she comments, and with age comes experience. Unlike many child actors, Paris enjoyed her early

career, noting gratefully that "Disney was great to work with. They were my first show. They were my first company that I ever worked for." When Paris began acting professionally, it was hard to leave gymnastics behind, but the role of Skylar allowed her to combine both talents. "I got the best of both worlds," she reflects, "because I got to act and I also got to flip around and do fight scenes and stunts." Although that unique balance is lost with Alexa, who plays basketball, Paris has not abandoned her passion. She continues to train, hoping to star in an action movie one day. Additionally, her younger sister Joelle is a gymnast as well, "so I get to kind of live through her," Paris mentions, her voice lighting up with enthusiasm. "She's way better than me and how I was when I was her age."

There is one additional difference between Paris and Alexa. When she first stepped on set, Paris traded her sisters for a brother. The cast dynamic was instantly familial, and "we all got along really, really well right when we started filming," Paris shares. "I knew Emery Kelly, who plays my older brother, for a while already before we started this show, so it was cool to be able to work with [a friend]." She also formed a close bond with her on-screen parents, played by Tiffani Thiessen and Eddie Shin. Most importantly, Paris harbors nothing but admiration for costar Isabel May, whom she was most worried to meet. "She's very, very sweet," Paris

gushes. "She doesn't act like she's 16. She's really mature for her age. Everyone gets worried about working with another girl because, you know, girls can be girls, and I'm really happy that I have her because it wasn't like that at all. There was no hostility, there was no drama."

Expectations are high for the series, which is the first multi-camera comedy produced by Netflix. Rather than nervousness or pressure, Paris feels sheer excitement for the March premiere. "I have a good feeling that the show's going to do well, and I think that a lot of people are going to be able to relate to it," she adds. "I know my sisters always watch Netflix now. Hopefully their friends and people around the world will be able to enjoy it."

Familiar with the expectations accompanying a young fanbase, Paris embraces the responsibility admirably. "I definitely want to be a good role model, but I think the important thing to remember is that I'm still a 19-year-old girl," Paris imparts. "But it's very inspiring, and it helps me stay grounded, and it helps me keep a good head on my shoulders for sure." Paris hopes Alexa, showing incredible strength in the face of adversity, will serve as an inspiration for younger generations. "There hasn't really been a show like this, especially when it involves a heavy topic like cancer," she expresses, but "I would love for little girls to watch this and look up to it." NKD

