



# Political Posturing

A scion of American royalty opens a yoga studio in L.A.

BY DEBORAH SCHOENEMAN

Yogini Meaghan Kennedy Townsend

**M**eaghan Kennedy Townsend likes to kick off teaching her yoga class by blasting some rock-and-roll.

"I'm going to play some church music for you now," she says on a recent Saturday morning, cranking up the song "Faith" by George Michael.

The irony may have been lost on the sweaty group of about 20, since they're gathered for a yoga class more focused on burning calories than chanting *om*. Only a few students know that Townsend was raised Catholic—in America's most famous family.

Yes, there's a Kennedy among the Lululemonites of Southern California.

The yoga instructor is the oldest daughter of Kathleen Kennedy—former Lieutenant Governor of Maryland and eldest of Robert F. Kennedy and Ethel Skakel's 11 children. Townsend's father is David Townsend, a professor at St. John's College and the Aspen Institute's Senior Advisor on Seminars.

At 32, Townsend has come into her own as one of the city's most successful yoga teachers with a steady base of private clients, including Drew Barrymore, Bob Saget and screenwriter Mike White (*School of Rock*). Having earned her chops teaching for about a decade at various studios and gyms around town, Townsend finally opened her dream studio, Up Dog Fitness, in February. The classes are already full—if not totally packed—with passionate followers who can't get enough of her high-intensity, flow-style yoga.

"It's about giving back in a different way," says Townsend.



Townsend's Up Dog Fitness studio in West Hollywood

"People say to me on a daily basis, 'You changed my life,' and 'Look at this community you're creating.'"

Townsend, for one, certainly improved her life with yoga. The legendary Kennedy curse didn't exactly pass her over. In 10th grade—after taking an educational test, being developed by a family friend, on a whim—Townsend found out that she was severely dyslexic with a kindergarten reading level (though she did have math skills of a college student). She was also diagnosed with A.D.H.D. These discoveries helped ease the pressure she had felt her whole life. After all, her birth announcement in the newspaper said she would usher in a more peaceful time for her family as the

first of a new generation of Kennedys, go to Harvard and follow in her clan's presidential footsteps. (She did attend the Ivy League university, but her college experience was anything but easy.)

"I was a bit of an outcast," says Townsend, who also had major food allergies. "I never learned a good skill-set for having relationships. Maybe it was because I was dyslexic, or maybe because I was a Kennedy, or maybe because I moved around a lot as a kid, but I didn't know how to interact with people very well. I had a hard time."

She discovered yoga while visiting relatives in L.A. during a college break and checked out flow-style vinyasa classes taught by now-yogalebrities Steve Ross, Bryan Kest, Shiva Rea and Seane Corn. When Townsend

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