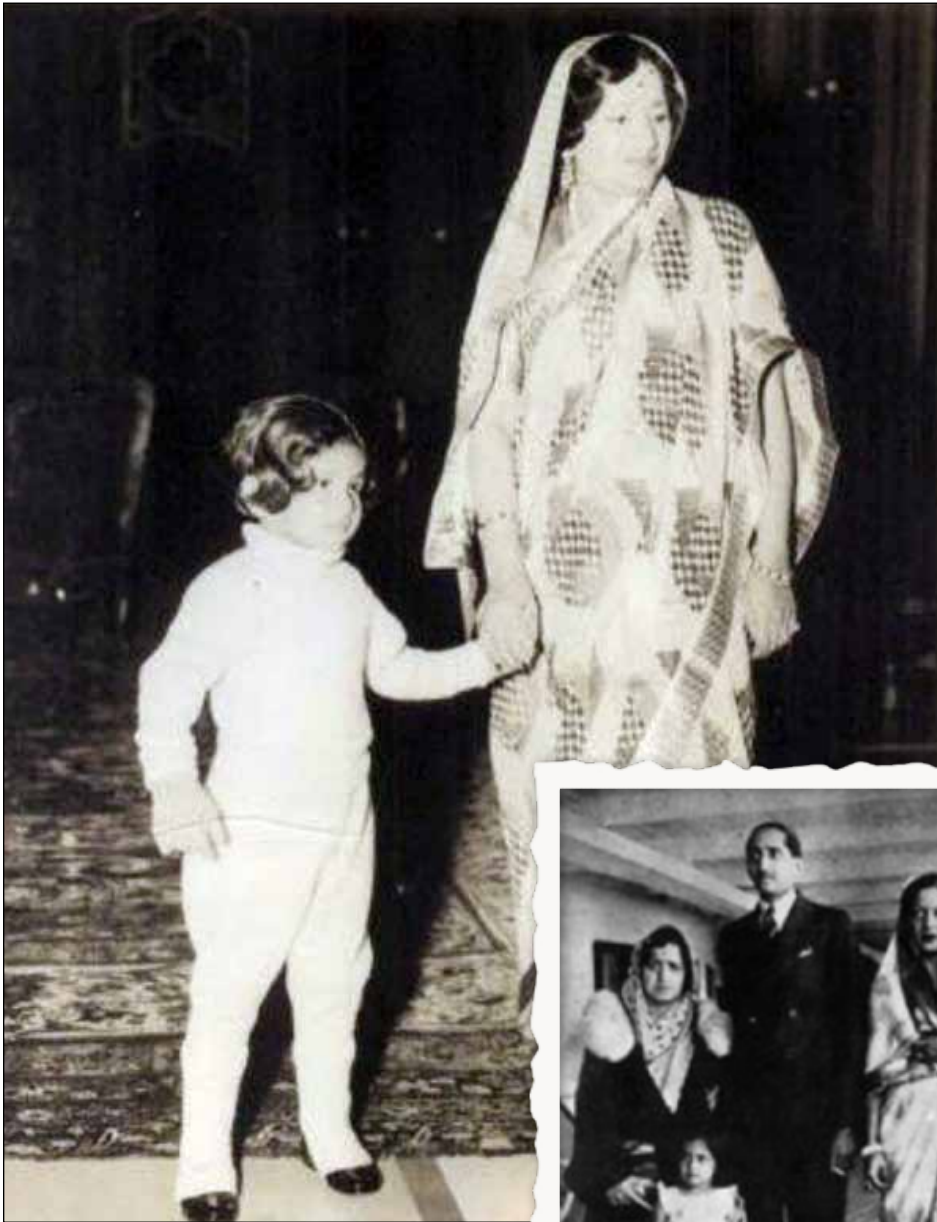


# THE PRINCESS OF HELIOTROPE DRIVE

## the story continues *by Dylan Almendral*



ABOVE clockwise: Maharani Usha Raje Holkar with her paternal grandmother, Maasaheb Maharani Chandravatibai Holkar; with her parents, Maharaja and Maharani of Indore and paternal grandmother in 1936; with her father the Maharaja in 1937.

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s an addendum to last issue's article about the Maharaja of Indore, Yeshwant Holkar, I felt it was fitting to share more about the person who actually lived in the palace on Heliotrope; the little girl who, when not yet 4 years old, lost her mother to a botched appendectomy; the girl who grew up in an Art Deco palace in a city thousands of miles away from her ancestral home; the little girl who attended Hoover Elementary School; the little girl who would become a queen.

This is the story of the young Maharani Usha Raje Holkar – the Princess of Heliotrope Drive.

Princess Usha was born in the American Hospital in Paris, France on October 20, 1933 to the Maharajah and Maharani of Indore. The daughter of the presumed wealthiest man in the world and Indian aristocracy, Usha was destined to lead a charmed life. Between 1933 and 1937, Princess Usha travelled the world with her mother, trotting around the United States making friends with movie stars. The princess knew nothing but paradise... and the Pan-American Clipper. In July 1937, her mother, Sanyogitaraje Holkar, became suddenly ill and an emergency appendectomy was performed in Switzerland while the Maharajah was away in England on business. She did not survive.

The Maharajah took his daughter, the final vestige of his first crush, first love and first wife, and planned to make a second home in America.

The Maharajah became ill from grief in Los Angeles and was attended by the woman who would become his second wife, his nurse Marguerite Lawler. It was at this same time that the Maharajah set his eyes on Santa Ana's Floral Park neighborhood as his home away from home. He built an Art Deco fortress to protect Princess Usha; it was a building designed both for its beauty and utility, fresh on the heels of the tragic story of the Lindbergh baby kidnapping just a few years prior.

In 1940, the fortress was complete and life began anew with Marguerite acting as wife and stepmother to Princess Usha with the help of Usha's paternal grandmother. The house was also staffed with a governess, Mary Louise Thallier (a college graduate born in New York in 1910) as well as Mr. H.A. Shan, international man of mystery, body guard and a personal friend from the Maharajah's days at Oxford.

The staff was rounded out with Blanche LeSage-Famechon (1871-1963) and Anne B. Famechon (1904-1978), mother and daughter, and house keeper and cook respectively. They would also become the foster family for the new Mrs. Holkar.

Throughout 1940, Princess Usha traveled with her stepmother, spending much time in Hawaii and other Pacific islands that were not yet under the control of Japan. This was the life that the princess was used to. She even had time to play in a local piano recital at the YMCA. But this was all to change.

With war brewing in the east with imperial Japanese forces attacking British colonial Indian shipping lanes and colonies, the Maharajah was called home. He took Marguerite and two other members of staff with him and returned to Indore in July of 1941. Pearl Harbor wouldn't happen for another five months and Princess Usha was left in the care of her governess, house staff, Mr. Shan and her Floral Park friends and neighbors.

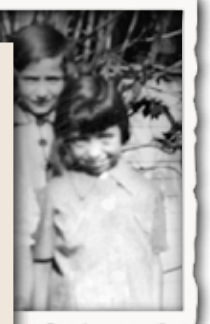
The city of Santa Ana treated the princess like any other kid. She attended local birthday parties, and went to public school at the now

defunct Jefferson Elementary on 17th Street. She could even be seen playing outside on Heliotrope now and again, but always under the watchful eye of her governess. Here, the princess lived a typical American life.

From July of 1941 to July of 1943, the princess was without her father and stepmother, whom by all accounts

was a decent person. However, in July of 1943, the Holkars filed for divorce. The day of the divorce, he married another Los Angeles divorcé whose divorce from her husband finalized the same day. The Maharajah gave custody of Princess Usha to Marguerite, who legally adopted the now 6 year-old girl. They would split their time between the palace on Heliotrope Drive and their home in Laguna's Emerald Bay. In 1946, at age 9, Marguerite decided to return her stepdaughter to her ancestral home, India. Once again single and without child, Marguerite joined the WAVES (*Women Activated Volunteer Emergency Service*), the female portion of the United States Navy. She died in 1963 and is buried at Fairhaven Memorial Park.

The Maharani never returned to Santa Ana and upon her father's death at age 53, inherited his title and rights. Today, at age 86, she is a pillar in her country and is celebrated for her love of the arts and architecture.



ABOVE (clockwise): Her parents in traditional dress; at a birthday party in Santa Ana in 1940; at "The Modern Maharajah" exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris in September, 2019; newspaper clipping from 1933 announcing Usha's birth in Paris; (center photo) with her mother, Sanyogitaraje Holkar. To read the previous article, "The Maharaja of Indore: When Royalty Lived in Floral Park", go to [FloralPark.com/history](http://FloralPark.com/history), then scroll down to articles.