

# Before they were famous

## Jennifer Aniston



The one in 1983 where a teenage Jen is barely recognisable

# 'I was the school freak'

How Jen went from overweight teen with a mohican – yes, really! – to Hollywood's ultimate girl next door

**W**ith her golden good looks and laid-back personality, Jennifer Aniston's effortless charm suggests that she's always been destined for stardom. But before gaining A-list status the actress spent years overcoming low self-esteem, countless knockbacks and an upbringing as colourful as any of her films.

Jen's father was born John

Anastassakis and was brought from Greece to America at the age of 10 when his parents emigrated to Pennsylvania to open a restaurant. In his twenties, John moved to Hollywood to chance his luck as an actor. There, he met Jen's mother Nancy Dow, who was an aspiring actress.

The pair married and in 1969 Nancy gave birth to Jennifer. But before long her parents' careers had stalled. Deciding to retrain as

a doctor, John took his family back to Greece where he could afford the university fees.

Jennifer, 42, has fond memories of her time in Europe. 'I lived there for a year when I was five and six. We lived in Crete. My family has a beautiful farm,' she says.

However, in the middle of his studies John was beckoned back to the States for acting work.

The family upped sticks to New

TURN FOR MORE ➡

Oozing glamour at this year's Golden Globes, but it hasn't always been this way for Jen





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✦ York, where Jennifer developed acting ambitions of her own. Her half-brother John, now 52, from her mother's first marriage, described her as 'the queen of make-believe' because she would talk her Barbie dolls through imaginary scenes.

Sadly, aged nine, Jennifer's idyllic childhood was shattered when her father left. 'I came home from a birthday party and he'd moved out,' Jen recalls. 'It was pretty crappy.'

Jen rebelled at school in the hope that her parents would be called in to the headmistress's office and reconcile. When that failed, she shaved her hair into a mohican and dressed

head to toe in black in a desperate bid to attract their attention. "'Freak' is the perfect word to describe my behaviour during that decade,' she admits.

Nancy – a former model who later fell out with Jennifer after writing a tell-all book about her – did nothing to build up her daughter's confidence. 'I don't know if I'd have known how beautiful she was if she wasn't always pointing out how un-beautiful I was,' says Jennifer, who also has a younger half-brother Alex from her father's subsequent marriage to actress Sherry Rooney.

Yet behind Jennifer's



Jen (right) with a high school friend in 1984

insecurity lay steely ambition. After leaving school she worked as a waitress while auditioning for parts on Broadway, much to her father's despair. 'I don't think any father who knows anything about this business would be thrilled to have a daughter in it,' explains John, who's best known for playing Victor Kiriakis in the American soap opera *Days Of Our Lives*. 'I wanted her to go to college and she just didn't want to – she was very driven.'

### 'MY AGENT HAD SOME ADVICE – LOSE WEIGHT'

At 20, Jennifer moved to Los Angeles and managed to secure roles in the TV spin-off of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and the sitcom *Molloy*. But not being blessed with conventional beauty and being, in her own words, 'kinda large', she struggled.

In between auditions she worked as a telemarketer and a receptionist. She found cheap accommodation in communal housing and was so hard up in her early twenties she used cardboard boxes for furniture. Yet even at her lowest ebb, she believed she would make it.



In 1990 she won a role in TV series *Ferris Bueller*



Jen playing basketball in a photo from her high school yearbook

One of her housemates, TV producer Kristin Hahn, recalls: 'Anyone who knew Jen then knew that this girl was destined to do whatever she dreamt of.'

Yet despite her comic timing and obvious talent, it was only after the 5ft 5in actress lost 2st – going from 9st 3lb and a size 12 to 7st 3lb and a size 8 – that her fortunes changed. 'When I first got an agent they gave me some advice: lose weight,' says Jen.

The newly slender Jennifer wowed directors with a flattering new haircut and positive attitude. So much so that, when she went to audition for a new sitcom called *Friends* at the age of 25,

she was cast as the dippy but loveable Rachel Green. Suddenly, all the scrimping and suffering seemed worth it.

Jen's latest movie *Horrible Bosses* is out now on DVD

## The hair that launched a thousand cuts



1990

At 19: wannabe actress. Number of people who copied this 'do: none



1995

The Rachel. Number of people who copied this 'do: 20 million



1999

Blonder and longer during her Brad Pitt years



2003

Butterfly clips in hair? Yep, we copied this look too



2004

Newly brunette during her final few months of marriage to Brad



2011

Jen goes for the chop just before she meets current beau Justin Theroux