**A Guide To All Of The Remarkable Women In Kamala Harris’s Life**

Shortly before [Kamala Harris](https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/gallery/kamala-harris-best-quotes) was sworn in as Vice President of the United States – the first woman, the first Black woman and the first South Asian woman to hold the role – she posted a short montage to [Twitter](https://mobile.twitter.com/KamalaHarris/status/1351888479370752002). Alongside the words she spoke at her acceptance speech back in November, were images of women – some that Harris knew personally and some that she did not. She captioned the video with the words: “I’m here today because of the women who came before me.”

And she continues to surround herself with brilliant women, all of whom have captured the world’s interest, too. There is her lawyer sister, Maya (who acted as Harris’s campaign chairwoman during her presidential run) and niece, [Meena – another lawyer and author](https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/meena-harris-interview). Both are great supporters of Harris, while making waves of their own. And as stepmother to her husband Doug’s two adult children, Cole and Ella – and “dear friends” with his first wife, Kerstin – Harris is also putting the modern, blended family front and centre on the world stage. Below, we take a look at the women who continue to inspire Kamala Harris in her political and everyday life.

**Shyamala Gopalan Harris**

When she and Joe Biden were elected in November, Kamala Harris credited her late mother, Shyamala Gopalan Harris, as being “the woman most responsible for my presence here today”. Shyamala was born in Chennai, India, in 1938, and after graduating from Delhi University at just 19, she travelled alone to America to pursue a PhD at UC Berkeley. While there, she met Donald Harris at a meeting of the Afro-American Association – they were married and had two children: Kamala and her sister Maya. After the couple divorced, Shyamala raised the children alone, a working single mother who became a leading breast cancer researcher, making crucial discoveries about the role of progesterone in breast biology and cancer. She died of colon cancer in 2009, aged 70. Looking back on her mother’s life, Kamala Harris noted: “She was all of five feet, but if you ever met her you would think she was seven feet tall. It’s because of her that I was raised in a community where we were taught to see a world beyond just ourselves. To be conscious and compassionate about the struggles of all people.”

## Maya Harris

Three years younger than Kamala, Maya Harris followed in her sister’s footsteps to become a lawyer. She has also been active in politics, including serving as an advisor to Hillary Clinton during her presidential run. While still only 17 and at school, she became a mother to her only child, Meena, and in 1998, she married Tony West, a lawyer who served as the third-highest-ranking official in the Justice Department during the Obama administration and who is now chief counsel for Uber. On [Inauguration Day](https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/biden-harris-inauguration-highlights), Maya [shared a picture of herself](https://www.instagram.com/p/CKRO9ASHq7C/) and Kamala as children, holding hands with their mother Shyamala. She captioned it simply: “Whew, missing Mommy this morning…”

## Ella Emhoff

Kamala Harris is stepmother to Cole and Ella Emhoff, her lawyer husband Doug Emhoff’s children from his previous marriage. Ella, and her brother Cole, refer to Kamala as “Momala” – a mash-up of the Yiddish word “mamelah”, meaning “little mother”, mom and Kamala. It’s a term that Kamala has fully embraced, even using it in her Twitter bio. Ella is neither a lawyer nor training to be one, making her an outlier in the Kamala universe. Instead, she’s a textiles student at Parsons School of Design in New York. A Bushwick resident, she regularly posts images of herself modelling her own knitted and crocheted designs on Instagram, and on Inauguration Day, [her Miu Miu coat](https://www.vogue.co.uk/news/article/ella-emhoff-miu-miu-coat-batsheva-dress) generated thousands (literally) of news stories. Since the inauguration, she has gained more than 130,000 new Instagram followers – although she did not post content from the event itself, perhaps sensing that it would disrupt her regular, more casual aesthetic.

## Kerstin Emhoff

Ella’s mom and Doug’s ex-wife, Kerstin Emhoff, is on very good terms with Kamala and was present at the inauguration, excitedly posting videos and imagery to social media. The 52-year-old is the CEO of an LA-based production company called Prettybird, which has won [Grammys](https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/grammys), [Emmys](https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/emmys) and [MTV VMAs](https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/mtv-vmas-best-moments). Kamala has said that “to know Cole and Ella is to know that their mother Kerstin is an incredible mother” and counts her as a “dear friend”. Ella recently [told The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/17/us/politics/kamala-harris-stepmom-cole-ella-emhoff.html): “It’s a cool dynamic we all have. And I think it is a good model to show that you can have this and this isn’t weird.” Together, they make blending a family look easy.

## Meena Harris

Thirty-six-year-old [Meena Harris](https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/meena-harris-interview) is Kamala’s beloved niece and the only daughter of Maya. Another lawyer, she is also an author as well as the founder and CEO of Phenomenal, a “female-powered lifestyle brand bringing awareness to causes and culture”. Meena has two little girls called Amara and Leela Ajagu, to whom Kamala is a devoted great-aunt.

## The Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority

When Kamala Harris attended the historically Black Howard University, [she joined Alpha Kappa Alpha](https://www.vogue.com/article/kamala-harris-vogue-cover-backdrop-meaning-alpha-kappa-alph), the USA’s first Black sorority, which was founded at Howard in 1908. Black sororities were first established as a way to reject exclusion from mainstream university institutions, and one of the sorority’s key goals has been to develop leaders. On Inauguration Day, it honoured Kamala’s historic achievement by declaring 20 January to be “Kamala D Harris Day”. Speaking about her membership, Kamala has said: “We weren’t just told we had the capacity to be great; we were challenged to live up to that potential.”

## Shirley Chisholm

It is often said that without Shirley Chisholm, there would have been no Barack Obama and no Kamala Harris. In 1972, Chisholm became the first woman and the first African-American to seek the nomination for president in a major political party, facing opposition from some white feminists and other Democrats. When she launched her own bid for the Democratic nomination, Kamala Harris recalled Chisholm’s campaign in her logo, with a spokesperson saying at the time, “Shirley Chisholm’s activism… is an enduring legacy that lives on in Senator [Harris] and to honour that legacy in her own campaign for President was a no-brainer.”