

FAMILY TIES ARE WINS

Style and sport go hand in hand for Janet Gretzky and Paulina Gretzky Johnson

BY MICHELE MEYER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTHONY PARMELEE

Janet Gretzky and daughter Paulina Gretzky Johnson often have been mistaken for one another. Even after Paulina cut and darkened her hair recently, friends assumed they'd spotted Janet, not Paulina, clad in a shimmering black turtleneck and matching stiletto mules in New York City.

But it was Paulina, who'd just appeared on an episode of Bravo's *Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen* and celebrated at The Polo Bar with her siblings afterward.

Paulina and Janet's similarities are more than skin deep. Both based in Palm Beach Gardens, they share a confidence, focus on family, and competitiveness worthy of their surname.

"We're like an old married couple in that we know each other so well that we know what the other will do and what words will come out of the other's mouth," says Janet, an actress, dancer, model, and the wife of

hockey great Wayne Gretzky. "Sometimes we think we're not alike, but we are so alike."

Even so, "like mother, like daughter" holds true only to a point. The pair has been known to diverge, especially while Paulina was growing up as the eldest and most independent of the Gretzkys' five children.

These days, though, they accept each other's differences, and Janet has become Paulina's confidante. She's also Paulina's babysitter of choice for young sons Tatum and River. This type of help enables Paulina to make quick trips, as she did to New York, or accompany her husband, LIV champion golfer Dustin Johnson, on his tours.

"She's not only a fantastic mom but an even greater grandmother," says Paulina, a model, actress, and fashion entrepreneur. "I don't know what I'd do without her."

Honey and Papa—as their grandkids call Janet and Wayne—often pick up Tatum and

River from school. But that's just for starters. They'll do anything for their grandchildren.

"The adage that grandparents have grandkids for two days, spoil them, and give them back, that's not us," Wayne says. "We love having them around us all the time, and they love staying with us."

The senior Gretzkys' Palm Beach Gardens home has become family central—and a hive of activity. If you're looking for any of their five grown children or five grandchildren, start there.

And it all began with *Dance Fever*.

Janet and Wayne met on the syndicated musical variety series in 1980 when both were 19 years old. She was a cast dancer, and he was among an episode's celebrity judges. Yet Janet and Wayne didn't truly connect until seven years later, when they ran into each other at a Los Angeles Lakers game.

In the interim, Janet was briefly engaged



On Janet: Sheer black dress, Dolce & Gabbana, [dolcegabbana.com](https://www.dolcegabbana.com); diamond necklace, stacked diamond bracelets, Provident Jewelry, Palm Beach, West Palm Beach, Jupiter, [providentjewelry.com](https://www.providentjewelry.com).

On Paulina: Jacket, Balenciaga, Saks Fifth Avenue, Palm Beach, Palm Beach Gardens, Boca Raton, [saksfifthavenue.com](https://www.saksfifthavenue.com).



Sequin mini dress, Valentino, Palm Beach, valentino.com; stacked heels, Prada, prada.com.

to tennis star Vitas Gerulaitis, through whom she met Andy Warhol.

“We got along great,” she says of the legendary Pop artist. “At one of his parties, he said to me, ‘I’ve got to sign you.’ He literally went down on his knees and signed the back pocket of my white jeans. *People* magazine was at the party and took a picture.”

That photo now hangs on the Gretzkys’ staircase wall next to a shadow frame of the white jeans and another photo of Warhol with Wayne at a studio session.

“Andy fell crazy for Wayne and wanted to paint him,” Janet says of that friendship. “We were having our own Andy Warhol relationships at the same age but through different people.”

In the mid-1980s, Janet made the leap to

the big screen, not just as a dancer but also as an actress in *A Chorus Line*, *A League of Their Own*, and *The Flamingo Kid*. She’d also appeared on magazine covers, including *Life*, and in many commercials. But Wayne’s fame was on another level. Already known as “the Great One,” he was busy icing his status as the best hockey player of all time, setting records that remain unrivaled.

Their July 1988 nuptials at St. Joseph’s Cathedral Basilica in Edmonton were over the top—as was the reaction in Wayne’s native Canada, where the “royal wedding” was televised live across the country. More than 700 guests attended, and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra performed. Canadian Mounties stood guard outside as fans celebrated.

A month after the wedding, the Gretzkys

moved to California, as Wayne had been traded to the Los Angeles Kings after winning four Stanley Cups with the Edmonton Oilers. Paulina arrived at the end of 1988, the first of three children within four years. “Paulina was the oldest, and we took her everywhere we went, whether it was dinner or Disneyland,” says Wayne, who often gave post-game interviews with Paulina on his lap.

Before she’d even turned 14, Paulina had curtsied before Queen Elizabeth II on her 2002 royal tour of Canada. “She grew up in the limelight and has seen so much that it takes a lot to intrigue her,” Wayne adds. “She’s just as happy staying home with her kids.”

Paulina’s love of children became clear when Janet had her youngest child, Emma, in 2003. “Paulina held her first,” Janet recalls.



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—Wayne Gretzky

Red dress, lace bralette, lace briefs, Dolce & Gabbana, dolcegabbana.com



Sequin net dress, Dolce & Gabbana, [dolcegabbana.com](https://www.dolcegabbana.com); heels, Saint Laurent, Palm Beach, [ysl.com](https://www.ysl.com); diamond necklace, stacked diamond bracelets, Provident Jewelry, Palm Beach, West Palm Beach, Jupiter, [providentjewelry.com](https://www.providentjewelry.com).

“She was kissing and snuggling with her. It was so endearing. When Paulina’s babies were born, I was doing the same.”

At the time of Emma’s birth, the family was still living in California, having settled in Westlake Village, outside L.A. proper.

“Deep down we’re a regular family,” says Wayne. “We had dinner together at the same time every night. We taught them right from wrong, and Janet was the disciplinarian. If she’d said, ‘Wait till your dad gets home,’ they’d have laughed.”

When Paulina’s beautiful singing voice became evident, her parents pushed her to perform. She was just 15 when she sang Sarah McLachlan’s “I Will Remember You” to 57,167 spectators in Edmonton and another million-plus on TV for the first Heritage Classic, a rare outdoor hockey game.

“It was so cold—negative 22 degrees Fahrenheit with windchill—that she sat with Janet in the car, only getting out to sing,” Wayne recalls. “She was nervous because she didn’t want to let anyone down, but Janet was her rock, telling her, ‘You can do this.’”

Paulina went on to appear in such films as a 2009 remake of *Fame* and on the covers of *Maxim* and Canada’s *Flare*.

Paulina also showed an aptitude for sports at an early age. As soon as she could hold a racket and a club, she played tennis and golf. By 5, she was outscoring fellow hockey players—despite playing on a boys’ team.

Second place was of no interest to Paulina. Nor was it for her mother, who grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, and would often play baseball and other sports with the boys who lived on her street. “Whether it’s golf, cornhole, charades, bowling, or playing gin, we’re very competitive—and we’re not afraid to show it,” Janet says. “If our family was on *Family Feud*, it would be crazy. If we didn’t clobber the other team, there’d be no end to the grief we’d give each other.”

As did her mother, Paulina married a famous athlete. While a top golfer on the PGA Tour, Dustin won the U.S. Open in 2016 and the Masters Tournament in 2020. “I’m intrigued by men who want to be the best,” Paulina says. “I love that energy. My dad is so good at what he does, and I look for that.”

The couple met when Janet invited Dustin



Jacket, Balenciaga, Saks Fifth Avenue, Palm Beach, Palm Beach Gardens, Boca Raton, [saksfifthavenue.com](https://www.saksfifthavenue.com); satin bralette, satin briefs, Dolce & Gabbana, [dolcegabbana.com](https://www.dolcegabbana.com); silver boots, Schutz, [schutz-shoes.com](https://www.schutz-shoes.com); diamond and gold necklace, Provident Jewelry, Palm Beach, West Palm Beach, Jupiter, [providentjewelry.com](https://www.providentjewelry.com).



Sheer black dress, gloves, shoes, Dolce & Gabbana, [dolcegabbana.com](https://www.dolcegabbana.com); necklace, Caviilou, [caviilou.com](https://www.caviilou.com); diamond cocktail rings, Provident Jewelry, Palm Beach, West Palm Beach, Jupiter, [providentjewelry.com](https://www.providentjewelry.com).

to dinner after he'd played golf with Wayne at their country club. "I couldn't relate to his Southern manners at first," says Paulina, who was 21 at the time. "I can be very opinionated. But at our core, Dustin and I are the same and have the same values."

Paulina and Dustin were the first in the family to move to Florida—for the golf courses—in 2015. Already engaged, they didn't marry until seven years later, a delay that allowed Dustin to focus on winning the Masters. "The moment he won, I said, 'Okay, we can get married,'" Paulina recalls. "The wedding became the priority, and everything fell into place."

She turned to her mom during preparations for her April 2022 nuptials at Blackberry Farm in Walland, Tennessee. Over the wedding weekend, mother and daughter wore a series of stunning designer dresses, with Paulina marrying in a custom Vera Wang beaded, sheer gown and Janet wearing Valentino and Dolce & Gabbana that night.

"We have very different tastes, but I know what looks best on her," says Janet, whom Paulina often checks in with for garb guidance before public appearances.

"I love fashion and all things glam, and my mom does too," says Paulina, who switched into a Naeem Khan minidress post-vows.

Janet notes that it was a natural fit for Paulina to marry an athlete, as she grew up seeing the partnership that the senior Gretzkys share. "There's a lot of knowing when to let them have the big light and when to walk beside them and be their support system," says Janet. "It's called support and protect. It takes a very strong and confident woman to be able to handle that. They're being pulled in every direction, and you've got to know how to swim through it."

Now that Tatum and River are older, Paulina feels ready to launch a new venture. "It will definitely be in fashion, but you'll have to wait and see," she hints.

You can bet that Janet will be there to help if needed—especially as babysitter to her grandkids. "I just emptied the nest, and boom: I'm doing it all again," she says. "And I love it. Once a child is in my life, I must take care of and protect them forever." ◀◀



Fashion editor: Katherine Lande
Fashion assistant: Stephanie Gates
Janet's hair: Matthew Yeandle, [@beautybymatt](https://www.beautybymatt.com)
Janet's makeup: Burton Gazzara
Paulina's hair: Hayley Heckmann, Blended Strategy, Los Angeles
Paulina's makeup: Hailey Hoff, The Wall Group, Los Angeles
Digital tech: Mike Capellan
Photography assistant: Lukas Parmelee