



(Don't) MIND THE GAP

BY CHARIS TORRANCE



Can friendships flourish across decades? The answer is an unequivocal yes: these friendships prove that an age gap is no deterrent to finding a kindred spirit.

The Twisted Sisters: Michéle Macleod Smith (57), Glenda Wallace (72), Tina Carter (58), Mariette Parsons (44) and Andrea Paasch (53)

Cape Town is known for its hiking culture, and within this scene a unique friendship has blossomed. The Twisted Sisters, a group of women spanning decades in age, first met through Michéle's walking group, called Big Heart Walking. What started as casual conversations while walking quickly evolved into a deep, meaningful bond. 'You walk several times a week, so you get chatting, find similarities in things you like, and you just click with the people who are right for you,' Andrea says.

The group's dynamic was solidified during a weekend trip to Hermanus that Michéle had organised. 'We drove together, shared a room, and really bonded that weekend,' Tina says. They left Hermanus as a sisterhood, dubbing themselves 'The Twisted Sisters'.

Andrea says she thinks what drew them together was, of course, their mutual love of the outdoors and walking, but also their kind-heartedness and being there for one another during tough times. Michéle has found a special kind of support from the group. 'My mom is going through cancer, and the support from these ladies is incredible.'

Michéle is definitely the ringleader and instigator, whereas Glenda's nurturing nature adds another layer. And Mariette, the youngest, puts a spring into everyone's step. 'It's a beautiful reminder of that stage of one's life, your future and your past,' Tina says.

You'll often find the Twisted Sisters diving into the freezing cold Atlantic Ocean, no matter the weather, or jumping down waterfalls. 'My older friends are more sedentary, while this group energises me and makes me feel younger,' Glenda says. Adds Mariette, 'We're always game to try new things and be spontaneous – it's definitely one of the things that attracted us to each other.'

In this friendship circle, age really is just a number. 'What's age? Age doesn't matter; it just means more wisdom lines,' Glenda says with a smile.

**Amanda Takis (49) and
Thuli Madonsela (61)**

If one day, on a hiking path, you hear two female voices singing hymns, you may be about to come across Amanda and her best friend Thuli... yes, *that* Thuli. A stay-at-home mom and a professor of law (and former Public Protector) may seem like an unlikely duo, but summiting Africa's highest peak is bound to create lasting friendships.

The two met in 2019 while training for Trek4Mandela, an annual expedition that honours Nelson Mandela's legacy and raises funds for the Caring4Girls programme, which provides sanitary products to young girls who would often miss school due to a lack of access to sanitary care. 'I came across an article about the Imbumba Foundation and their hike up Kilimanjaro,' Mandy says. 'Outside of the occasional gym session and

Pilates class, I seldom exercised, but when my husband got home I told him I was going to climb Mount Kilimanjaro.' Imbumba founder Richard Mabaso introduced her to Thuli, who was joining for her second summit, and they started training together.

'When you're climbing, there are times when you get really tired, and I think, instinctively, as human beings, we dig deep into our spiritual core in such circumstances,' Thuli says. They soon discovered they were both raised as Seventh Day Adventists and, during difficult times on the mountain, Thuli and Mandy would find themselves spontaneously singing songs. 'Despite being more than a decade apart in age, we had had very similar experiences,' Thuli says. 'Of course, we didn't meet earlier because we grew up in a South Africa that had many barriers at the time.'

In the end, Mandy was unable to summit the mountain.

Afterwards, the two kept up their weekly walking sessions. 'Thuli is such a positive person and always has something interesting to share,' Mandy says. 'Sometimes we talk about our Pathfinder days [similar to Girl Scouts], we sing hymns or we walk in silence.'

They both feel their friendship was destined by God. 'The walks are a lovely opportunity to relax, engage and talk,' Thuli says. 'As friends, almost like sisters, we open up about everything in

a safe space.'

Thuli appreciates Mandy's optimism and trust, qualities that balance her own cautious nature. 'As an investigator, I tend to be more suspicious. Amanda helps me open my heart more.'

For Mandy, Thuli's wisdom and life experience have been invaluable. 'Thuli makes everyone feel like they can achieve anything if they put their mind to it. She inspires me to find my own purpose and vision, especially now as my kids are getting older.'

Their friendship may have started with religion, but that was just the catalyst. 'We are both spiritual seekers, constantly exploring what it means to be godly and better human beings,' Thuli says.

Who knows, maybe the two of them will climb Kili again. 'Mandy has incredible determination,' Thuli says. 'I am confident she will summit next time.'



Roxanne Kreutle (45) and Jenny Morris ('Let's just say, young at heart')

In an industry that is often characterised by superficial small talk, marketer extraordinaire Roxanne and Jenny, the celebrity chef known as The Giggling Gourmet, have formed a friendship that is genuine and touching – with a pinch of mischief. It all began in 2009, when, as Jenny puts it, Roxanne ‘used her powers of persuasion to get me to take all my clothes off and get into a bath of milk for charity’. At the time, one of Roxanne’s projects was a calendar featuring famous South African women over 40 (à la *Calendar Girls*). They just clicked from the start. ‘And we never stopped clicking,’ Jenny says. Roxanne attended one of Jenny’s cooking courses... and then another, and another. ‘Eventually I was helping Jenny in her classes as if I worked there.

‘Jenny felt like someone I’d known for a long time. I could talk to her about anything. She’s so wise, so experienced, but also so much fun.’ And Jenny found in Roxanne someone she could trust implicitly. ‘I don’t let people in that easily,’ she admits. ‘But Roxy is like family to us. My kids love her. She’s watched them grow up.’

They’ve also been there for each other in the face of tragedy: Roxanne losing her parents and Jenny losing her husband. ‘Spending my wedding day with Jenny and her late husband David was so special. Jenny’s love language is cooking, so having her cook for our wedding was very meaningful,’ Roxanne says. ‘My dad had died the previous year, so it was emotional, but having Jenny and David there was comforting.’

Roxanne values Jenny’s wisdom. ‘When I need advice, it’s great to speak to Jenny: she’s wise, gives

good advice and knows a lot about me and my situation.’

‘And Roxanne knows mine,’ Jenny says. ‘She knows what I’ve been through since my husband passed away. If I want to share something really deep and intimate, I know I can trust her.’

Even though Roxanne now splits her time between South Africa and Germany, it hasn’t affected their friendship. ‘I certainly cannot make it to Germany,’ Jenny says, ‘but Roxanne always makes a point of visiting me when she’s in Cape Town. And we’re just a WhatsApp call away.’

‘What’s special about our relationship is that it’s genuine and deep,’ Jenny says. ‘It’s not shallow like a puddle; we don’t blow air kisses at each other. We really hug the shit out of each other. This is a proper, real friendship that developed out of a calendar.’

Lucretia Petersen (50) and Ingrid Jones (62)

Ingrid, the co-founder and director of Mikateko Media, and Lucretia, a senior lecturer in audiology at UCT, met at a mutual friend's 50th birthday party. 'We started talking that evening, and I thought, "This person is *interesting*,"' Lucretia says. 'She was talking a lot, as she does now,' Ingrid says, laughing. 'We got along so well that I invited her and her husband to our house for a function a couple of weeks later.'

The next day, they friended each other on Facebook, and Lucretia saw that Ingrid had posted about this wonderful couple she'd met recently. 'The way she described the encounter, I also wanted to meet these two people.' Lucretia had no idea that she and her husband were that couple. 'I'm on record saying I don't like stupid people, so when I meet interesting ones I want the world to know,' Ingrid says.

They have such a similar look and sense of style that people often mistake them for sisters. 'There have been occasions when we would end up wearing exactly the same outfits to functions,' Ingrid says. 'We realised we had similar tastes in style, including our hair and shoes. Over time we started coordinating what to wear to events to avoid matching accidentally.'

Though you might confuse them for each other at first glance, they're also very different in some ways. 'People who know Ingrid know that although she's quite outspoken, there's a lot of thought that goes into that before she speaks,' Lucretia says. 'I'm the type of person who

just speaks my mind.' Ingrid, on the other hand, describes herself as a listener. 'I normally listen to everyone else's opinions and then state mine, which might or might not agree with everyone else's. With Lucretia, sometimes I'm like, "Yoh! She did not just say that!" She will just shoot and then wait for it to explode.'

Their bond has grown stronger through mutual losses. 'Lucretia lost both her parents, as did I,' Ingrid says. 'When her mom passed away, we were there immediately at the hospital, assisting where we could. I become very protective of her, almost motherly, and I always defend her.' Ingrid's husband, anti-apartheid activist Peter Cyril Jones, passed away last year. 'I could not have asked for a better support

group than the people around me. Lucretia will sometimes appear at my house unannounced with a bottle of wine and a basket of something. If I called her or her husband in the middle of the night, they would probably get up and come.'

'It's about having another presence that aligns with how you move and behave in the world, a certain aura that matches,' Ingrid says. 'It's not conflicting auras, and that's key in any friendship. I know a lot of people, but very few are in the inner circle. Not many people have seen me shed a tear like Lucretia has.'

'My world is better with Ingrid in it because she brings a different perspective, expands my horizons and broadens my way of thinking and being in the world,' Lucretia says.





**Sam Hogg (53)
and Kayla Els (30)**

When Sam joined Kayla's Pilates studio, she had no idea she was about to form a treasured friendship. 'I remember saying to her, "You don't like hugs, do you?" I could sense she was going through a lot and wasn't much of a hugger'. Sam was spot on. At the time, Kayla was embarking on a challenging fertility journey. 'Months later, Sam shared that she too had had fertility struggles. She kept me grounded during those tough times,' Kayla says.

'Kayla's age made our friendship unique,' Sam, an entrepreneur and writer, says. 'I could offer her wisdom and support as a friend, not as a parent, like her own mom.'

Their friendship quickly grew beyond the Pilates studio. 'We started talking every single day, and I would attend her classes regularly, always making her laugh,' Sam says. The two grew to rely on each other's

support, especially during moments of emotional turmoil. 'When my friend died, Kay brought Amelia, her little daughter, over,' Sam says. They've become family, Sam says. She feels like a grandmother to Amelia and Kayla's son, Asher, and Kayla feels like a sister to Sam's two daughters.

Both women deal with chronic illness, a factor that has strengthened their bond. Many people find it hard to explain to others what they're dealing with on a daily basis when it comes to chronic illness because you cannot 'see' it. 'Finding someone else who gets it is like a breath of fresh air because you don't have to explain yourself,' Kayla says. 'Having someone who says, "I get it; I understand; you're not crazy; you're not making this up," is invaluable.' They can also offer help and support. Sam says, 'I have a tendency to push myself beyond my limit, probably because of how I was brought up – I need

permission to rest. Kay tells me to rest.'

Sam is a creative, outspoken wild child, whereas Kayla regards herself more as someone who toes the line. 'I'm still at a phase in my life where I try to keep everyone happy all the time,' she says. 'Sam has that life experience where she now knows that you don't have to live life that way.' That's the beauty of age-gap friendships, right? 'You break those generational curses, those bad habits.'

Sam has moved from Joburg to Hermanus, but their friendship remains strong. 'Honestly, it hasn't changed much. We still talk all the time,' Kayla says. 'When there's a genuine bond, it doesn't fade.'

Kayla says that unlike people her own age, Sam just gets her. 'Sam says I'm an old soul. She has always accepted me. I've never had to prove myself to her.' In turn, Sam cherishes their bond. 'Kay is a quiet and unassuming strength and a delight for me. A forever friend.' ❖

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