

INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY SANDY COFFEY

# the allure of the older woman (as a best friend)

FRIENDSHIPS WITH A BIG AGE GAP CAN BE FABULOUS. AN OLDER FRIEND IS WISE, IRREV-ERENT, MORE FUN – AND NOT IN COMPETITION WITH YOU. IN OTHER WORDS, SHE'S PERFECT.

**T**here's a special magic that happens between two friends who are a generation apart, and we wanted to celebrate that. An older friend is your confidante and your mentor, your shoulder to cry on and the wise woman you show off. There are few things you can't talk to her about, because she has the wisdom of experience: whatever you've been through, chances are she's been through something similar - and she's got the crib notes you need to survive. An older friend is more patient (your problems are different from hers, so there's more time to listen), and she has the wisdom to understand that her advice, when given, will be carefully considered. So she chooses her words better, invokes more understanding, listens more carefully.

An older friend is not a substitute for a mother. In fact, older friends are usually completely unlike mothers: they don't expect constant gratitude, nor are they as likely to take the moral high ground. But they nurture you in exactly the ways we need.

One of our favourite interviews we did was with Bongiwe (37) and Bunny (25), where Bongiwe told us: 'There's a Xhosa saying: "A woman gives birth to a child for another woman".' In the spirit of universal motherhood and friendship, we'd say this sums up the age-gap friendship perfectly. Enjoy!



*'She's my business sounding board and she offers me emotional guidance.'*

**CHERYL-ANNE LEE (28) & MICHELLE BROWN (50)**

Michelle and I met when she was my lecturer at Damelin College. Our whole class adored her and she was accessible to everyone, but I always knew that she would be very important in my life. We cemented our friendship when I became Miss PE a few years ago, and I am not sure I could have survived the year without her. In fact, I am not sure how I have ever survived without her.

She is my mentor without being patronising; she is my business sounding board and offers me very wise emotional guidance. Through her example, her message is clear: that as a woman, I can be anything I want as long as my value system is in place. Hers is. She is incredibly focused on her family and yet her work ethic and delivery is impeccable.

She brings to our friendship a wiser perspective, a sense of stability (which I often need!), and emotional maturity (which I always need). And yet, in the midst of all this, her honesty is unfailing. She has saved me from a lot of pitfalls. She helps me find something inside of me that gets me to the end point.

Most of all, she has given me wings by making me believe in myself, despite some very real setbacks that I have recently experienced. Our friendship has become stronger since I became a mom, and our age gap is completely irrelevant.

My wish for Michelle is that she gets recognised for what she does. In PE she is an icon, but the rest of South Africa needs to know what she does.

**MICHELLE:**

As I get older, I treasure, even more, the friends who are close to me. Cheryl Ann is one of those people. Her gift to me is one of enthusiasm, energy and passion. She always sees the positives in a situation (despite some very difficult circumstances). As a young businesswoman, she keeps me in touch with the younger generation. My wish for her is to realise her dreams, in both her

*'She has taught me not to take myself so seriously.'*



**LINDA HARWOOD [39]  
& KARIN FOURIE [51]**

**LINDA:**

I didn't even know how old Karin was...

I suppose that's a true measure of this beautiful friendship. Karin was a friend of my older sister and she was always around, but it wasn't until a few years ago when we met up through work (we are both in the service industry), that our friendship grew. We started having lunch every month (with two other friends as well), and it was one date that none of us ever missed. Our friendship is based on humour, honesty and respect, and she gives so much to me it's difficult to articulate.

It's a low-maintenance, high-reward friendship. She has taught me to calm down

and to follow my own truth and mind. She has shown me the value of 'me-time', and taught me not to take myself so seriously. Mostly, she gives me a different perspective on things, and that is so valuable, isn't it? It's like having wisdom in your pocket.

I wish for Karin that she has time to wind down. I wish she would retire! May her health remain good and may she enjoy continued happiness – oh, and more overseas trips...

**KARIN:**

Linda is like a flower in full bloom. I get so excited for her and her life ahead, and I feel so lucky to have met her. She teaches me to listen, not to judge, and to remain

**BUNNY HLALUKANA [25]  
& BONGIWE MTSHALI [37]**

**BUNNY:**

'You can have a relationship with your mum, and many younger friends, but it is not the same as having a friend who is older. She comes with great experience and overflowing, unconditional love. And yet there is absolutely no competition or jealousy. When I am with Bongwiwe, I am 100% Bunny. She is my safe haven.'

I met Bongwiwe when we were both working at VW and we were in the same lift club. That daily journey from PE to Uitenhage became fertile ground for a magnificent friendship. We clicked immediately and I knew we would be friends forever.

When my heart was broken her advice to me was so life-changing –

one of those pearls of wisdom that I will apply to everything in my life. She said: "Life IS about tribulations and difficulties, but know that you are beautiful, strong and enduring, not matter what. Keep your pride and honesty close to your heart at all times. Men will hurt us, but as women, we can survive anything."

My wish for Bongwiwe is that her kids grow up and inherit all of her kindness and wisdom.'

**BONGIWE:**

'Bunny is extraordinary, really! I love being with her. Her youth and her energy and her zest for life are fantastic. We have such a beautiful friendship. In Xhosa we have a saying: "Umfazi uzalele omnye mfazi"

*'Men will hurt us, but as women, we can survive anything.'*

