



It's an intense, often fraught relationship – a complex mix of closeness and the quest for separation. But, above all, it's about unconditional love. Three famous mums and daughters pay tribute to their unique bond

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS

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BEING A MUM IS THE most important job in the world. International research has found that mothers are the number one influence on their daughters' self-esteem. As psychologist and author Victoria Secunda put it: "Mothers are their daughters' role model, their biological and emotional road map, the arbiter of their relationships." It's a hot topic. In late March, therapist Dr Christina Berton brought her mother-and-daughter self-esteem workshops to New Zealand.

But really, it's the mothers themselves who are the experts. When we talked to three very different mums – businesswoman/philanthropist Rowena Roberts, retired nurse-midwife Janet Brown, and filmmaker Gaylene Preston – some common approaches to mothering daughters emerged. Keep it simple, set fair and clear boundaries, explain exactly why you're doing what you are, and treat her as an individual, not as an extension of yourself. Don't smother, don't try to pull her strings too tightly, don't sweat the small stuff, don't judge, don't be afraid to apologise. But the biggie was unconditional love.

No one's saying that the mother-daughter relationship is, or should be, perfect. Deborah Tannen, author of bestseller *You're Wearing That? Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation* (\$52.99, Random House US), writes in *The Washington Post* that, to avoid pressing each other's buttons, mothers and daughters need to balance their different expectations.

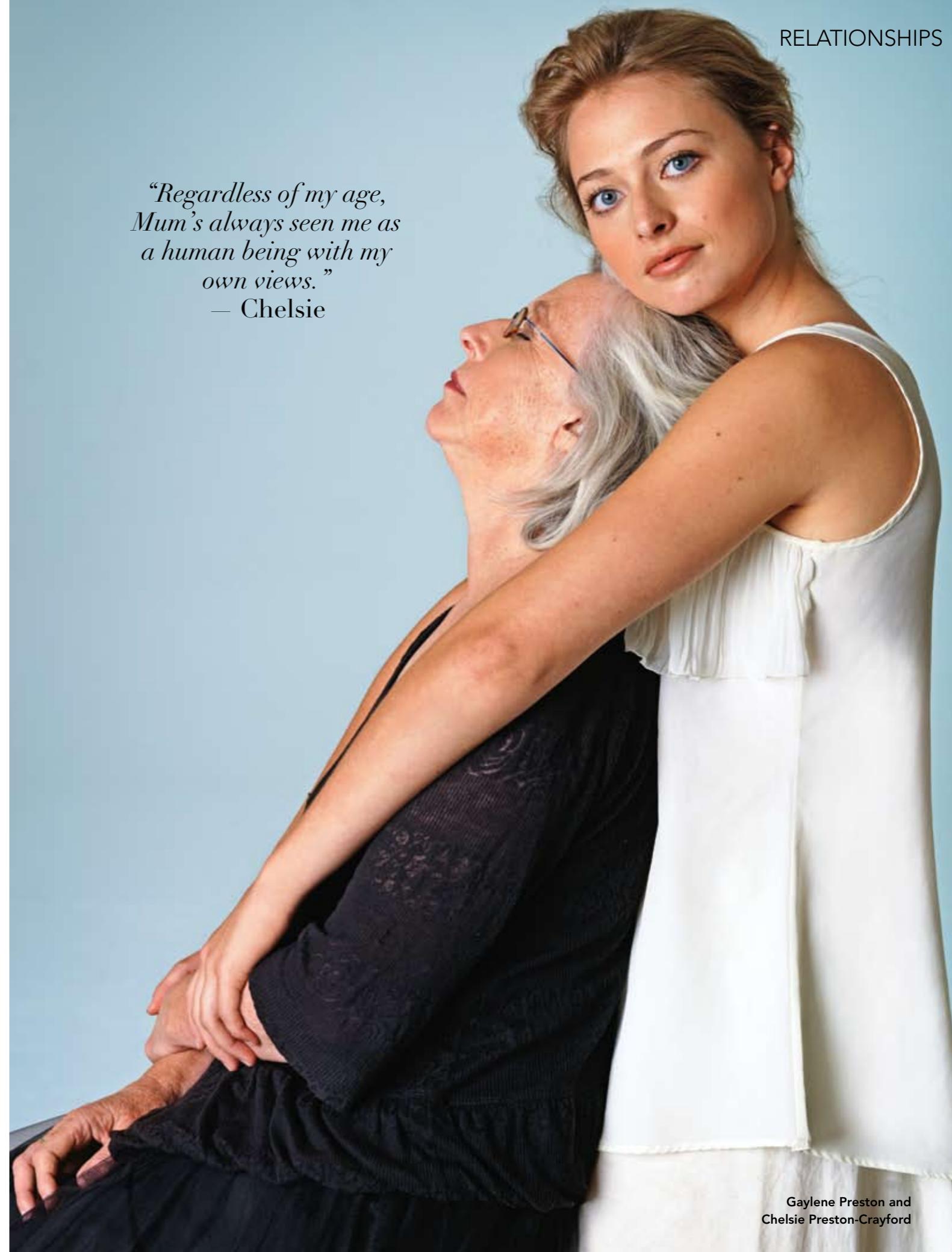
"The power that mothers and daughters hold over each other derives, in part, from their closeness. Every relationship

requires a search for the right balance of closeness and distance, but the struggle is especially intense between mothers and daughters."

Teenage rebellion and boundary-pushing is undoubtedly one of the biggest mother-daughter hurdles. My mum Alexandra Lang (now Smith after marrying Speaker of the House Dr Lockwood Smith last year) had to worry about my going out at the age of 15 in teeny skirts and barely-there tops to swig life-threatening amounts of alcohol. That was after navigating my angry, awkward adolescent stage. Now, as a school guidance counsellor who runs the occasional parenting workshop, Mum's turned the experience to example. →



"Regardless of my age, Mum's always seen me as a human being with my own views."
— Chelsie



Gaylene Preston and Chelsie Preston-Crayford

“Mum always looks on the bright side, helps others and sees both sides of the story.” – Jaquie



Jaquie and Janet Brown

She said to me one day: “One of my most important learnings as a mother was the quick swap between neediness and independence. One minute you were a vindictive child swearing at me and putting me down, and within seconds you were a mature, logical girl saying ‘Mum, I need you.’”

And we don’t stop needing our mothers when we move out of the family home. Writes Tannen: “The adoration they [mothers] feel for their grown daughters, mixed with the sense of responsibility for their wellbeing, can be overwhelming.” But each pair navigates the ever-changing tides of their own relationship, especially as loved ones die and grandchildren appear.

With a full-time job, a farmlet, a household to run and a Masters to finish, my mum never compromised on mothering her three daughters and son. Even when she was exhausted; even when she did in her back; even when her father died. Still a mother hen even now, she calls every few days to check in, swap stories and offer advice.

In the modern era of the supermum – juggling jobs with Junior – there is, arguably, less time and more pressure than ever to be a good mother. Not just doing the school pick-up but ferrying the kids to endless ballet, drama and tennis lessons, or any of the other do-it-right pressures that, on March 14, saw *The New York Times* run a multi-contributor article about judgmental, one-upping mothers, Who’s The Best Mommy Of Them All? It’s not a competition – at least, it shouldn’t be.

As the phenomenon of childlessness escalates – by 2040 one in four New Zealand women will be childless – is it time to reaffirm the importance of motherhood? Not just as the ushers of a new generation of taxpayers, but at the micro level too.

A shoulder to cry on, a pillar to lean on and a supporter to cheer on – a mother is like no other. And the mother-daughter bond is unique, if always different.

Hence our portraits of three mothers and their daughters who support, admire and inspire each other:



Janet and baby Jaquie.

Chelsie and Gaylene Preston

Mother and daughter became director and actor when Chelsie Preston-Crayford eventually agreed to star in her mum Gaylene Preston’s new doco-drama *Home By Christmas*. Chelsie, 23, plays her late live-in grandmother Tui in the stirring, secret-filled story of Gaylene’s parents’ separation during WWII (read our movie review on page 148).

With Gaylene, 62, in Wellington and her only child in Auckland, they’re not the incessantly-phoning-or-texting sort. “But Mum does suspiciously turn up for ‘work trips’,” Chelsie laughs. They’re both voyeuristic and verbose, fiery and frank. “But Mum’s more tactful.”

Says Gaylene: “Chelsie’s a deep-river sweetheart: Loving and generous but very much her own person. I’m inspired by Chelsie’s courage – on a creative and personal level. She’s really got it. And only she can tell that I appear to have it more than actually I do. Once she gave me a matchbox spell for courage.”

A courage that inspires her daughter: “Mum doesn’t subscribe to things just because most people do. She knows what she thinks is important, what she wants to do, and doesn’t let the bastard stop her. And she’s immensely generous and interested in others.”

“Regardless of my age, she’s always seen me as a human being with my own views. When I was a teenage girl butting up against authority, even if Mum didn’t agree, she’d try to understand, and always helped me think about the bigger picture. I just... I love her. Once, at eight, I said ‘Mum, I like you.’ She said ‘Wow. You have to love me, but you don’t have to like me.’”

Jaquie and Janet Brown

When Jaquie Brown shaved her own eyebrows at 10, her mother Janet didn’t notice. Now they fall about laughing remembering how a teacher had to tell her.

Her mum brings out a softer side of Jaquie, the reporter-turned-actor who makes fun of herself Ricky Gervais-style in the award-winning TV comedy *The Jaquie Brown Diaries* and laugh-out-loud book *Jaquie Brown’s Guide to Everything (and Recipes and Quizzes)*, (\$34.99, Random House).

A retired nurse and midwife, Janet says her daughter is nothing like her neurotic on-screen persona. “Jaquie brings laughter and light into the day. Her hard work, friendships, positivity, conscientiousness and thoughtfulness inspire me,” she says. “For my 70th she made me two cakes because I had two parties!”

The English-born, Auckland-based pair, who frequently email, text and meet for coffee, got through the most trying time of their lives together in 2002.

“It did bring us closer when Dad died and I moved back in with Mum for six months,” says Jaquie. As they speak, tears well up and they grab each other’s hands.

“So much inspires me about Mum. She always looks at the bright side, helps others and sees both sides of the ➔

story. Mum gave me such self-confidence – always said 'you can do that' – that I felt I was able to do anything. That's why I've got the confidence to be on TV.

Recently married, she adds, "In this next chapter of my life, I know I'll turn to Mum a lot. She's taught me so much I'm looking forward to passing onto the next generation."

Bex and Rowena Roberts

"Bex nearly died at 15." Another tear threatens to fall as Rowena Roberts, 57, remembers her daughter's run-in with meningitis. "It was absolutely touch-and-go for days." Says 28-year-old Bex Roberts: "I only wanted Mum. That's always the same, no matter how old you are. Even when I fell down the stairs the other day, Mum came from work."

Working together, they see each other every weekday. Rowena is the founder/managing director of Auckland-based Red Honey Cosmetics, which owns two MAC cosmetic stores and a Jo Malone fragrance store with Estée Lauder. Red Honey operations manager Bex also does part-time PR for Ogilvy.

A former model who lends Bex her 1960s outfits, Rowena also has two sons with advertising guru husband Kevin. The family country-hopped six times before settling here when Bex was eight. "Starting over together brought us closer," says Rowena, her rounded English vowels colliding with her daughter's Kiwi twang. "My approach was being there for her, never judging," Rowena adds, as Bex nods.

You might think philanthropy's something Bex got from her charity-champ mum. "But it's the other way round," says Rowena. Following overseas charity posts, Bex now works with youth-development charity Turn Your Life Around. In turn, Rowena's empathy, honesty and business success inspire Bex.

"She's taught me to work hard and have fun, but also make time for family. To be independent but still close. My friends always said, 'You've got such a cool mum.' If I have kids, I hope I'll be just like her." ▀



Rowena with baby Bex.

"Mum's taught me to work hard and have fun, but also make time for family." – Bex



Bex and Rowena Roberts