

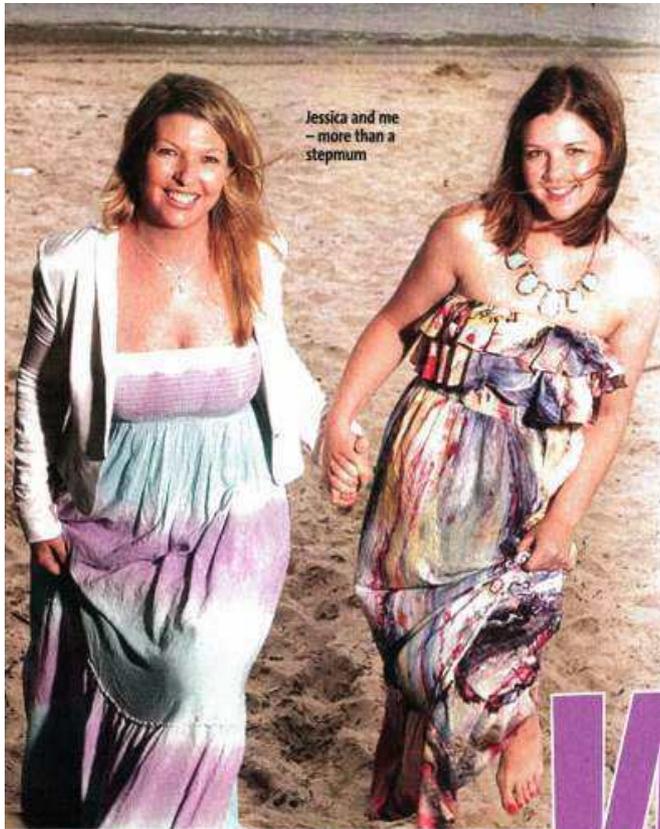


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Jessica and me
 - more than a
 stepmum

AGE-GAP: 19 YEARS Best mates with Dad's ex!

Marnee May, 23, Coogee, NSW

When my dad told me he had a new girlfriend, I was really nervous! He and my mum divorced when I was two and when Dad met someone 11 years later, questions filled my mind.

What would she be like?

At the time I was living in Melbourne with Mum and my two younger siblings. Travelling to Sydney to meet Dad and his new partner Jessica, then 32, butterflies swirled inside.

I shouldn't have worried. 'It's nice to finally meet you!' Jessica smiled at the airport, making me feel at ease.

She was a school teacher and that weekend she took me shopping. We had a blast trying on outfits and from that moment we spent lots of time together in the school holidays.

To me it never felt like Jessica was a stepmum. She was more like a big sister!

In the years that followed I turned to her for advice about

AS TOLD TO SMITIA MISTRY PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

AGE-GAP: 20 YEARS We're mothers' group mates

Phoebe Jamieson, 34, Port Melbourne, Vic

Cradling my eight-week-old daughter, I glanced around the room. At 22, I'd just had my first baby, Lucy, and I decided to join a mothers' group for support.

But as I met the other mums, I worried I was one of the youngest. How would I fit in?

But then I noticed another lady, Debbie, who looked a little uncomfortable, just like me. 'This is my daughter Isabella,' Debbie smiled, and we got talking.

Her girl looked the same age as Lucy and after a few meetings, we realised we only lived seven doors apart.

One night it was pouring with rain, so we shared an umbrella on the way home.

I was worried at first about joining the group because I'm

so young,' I confessed. 'My age also made me anxious,' she said.

When Debbie revealed she was 42, I was speechless. She certainly didn't look it!

Debbie told me how most of her friends had teenage kids, and as many of my mates weren't mums yet, we could relate to each other because we both had newborns.

The more time we spent together the more we realised we were alike. We both love music, trying new food and wine and have similar fashion sense.

I'll never forget the time we met for coffee and the girls were dressed in the same pink

I not only gained a great mate but a second family

What's between

Close female relationships make us happier and healthier, as these true gal pals show...

dress. What a coincidence!

Over the years this kept happening. Sometimes, we'd be the ones in similar outfits!

As our daughters grew, they became as close as sisters - going to the same school and even starting a band together.

Two years ago when I had a second girl, Scarlet, Debbie was there every step of the way.

When we asked Lucy, 12, to choose a middle name for her little sibling she didn't hesitate in saying 'Isabella'.

'Because she's our sister too,' Lucy smiled. It's very true!

Thankfully my hubby Ron

and Debbie's, Pete, get along well and we often take weekend family trips together.

We've supported each other through life's difficulties, from fashion disasters to parenting problems.

I'm so thankful I went along to that mothers' group because when I met Debbie I not only gained a great mate but a second family.

This friendship will last a lifetime.



We bonded over our babies



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school, boys and the future.

Sadly Dad and Jessica split after seven years together.

But believe it or not, that didn't put a dampener on our friendship. Dad was happy we were still in touch and Mum was pleased I had such a supportive mate too.

When I relocated to Sydney to study in 2008, it was only natural I hang out with Jessica.

Moving to a new city was daunting, but she made the transition so much easier, showing me around town and introducing me to her friends.

I even took my first overseas trip with her to New York.

Then, after I'd finished my course, I was having trouble

finding a job. But thankfully Jessica came to the rescue!

'Why don't you come work for me?' she suggested.

She had set up a charity that supports vulnerable teenage girls called Life Changing Experiences Foundation.

Offering me a casual office role, I couldn't wait to start.

While we're at work, we have a professional relationship but after hours, we're just two girlfriends who love to gossip over a glass of wine.

She may be 19 years older, but when we're together we don't notice the age gap and we have lots of mutual pals.

In 12 years we've made some amazing memories together.

AGE-GAP: 40 YEARS

My bestie is double my age!

Helen Collier, 41, Healesville, Vic

I was unpacking the last box when I heard a knock at the door.

'Hi there, I'm Flo,' a sweet white-haired lady beamed when I opened it. 'I live next door.'

Having just arrived back in Australia after working overseas, I'd moved into a new neighbourhood.

I was so grateful when Flo, then 78, offered to make me dinner that night.

She prepared a delicious stir-fry and left it on my doorstep, not wanting to intrude. She even brought cutlery, worried

mine would still be wrapped up. How thoughtful!

A few days later we bumped into each other and I couldn't thank her enough. Flo was so warm and open, we got chatting.

She said that she lived alone, having lost her husband 25 years ago, but she still had an inspiring enthusiasm for life.

Flo told me how she loved being a grandma, playing tennis and going to music concerts.

Despite being double my age I knew I'd made a special friend and from that day on, we regularly had each other round for dinner.

She also introduced me to Terry and Pauline, who are in their 80s, from across the road and we would all meet up for a good chat over dinner.

When my 40th birthday rolled around, of course I invited Flo and Pauline along to celebrate.

'Here's to many more,' we cheered, smiling as we clinked our glasses of champagne.

My younger friends adored Flo and we even discovered many of them had already met her, as she is such an active member of the community.

We were there for each other through all the ups and downs.

When I was sick, she'd come over with hearty soup and I took out her bins and collected her mail when she was away.

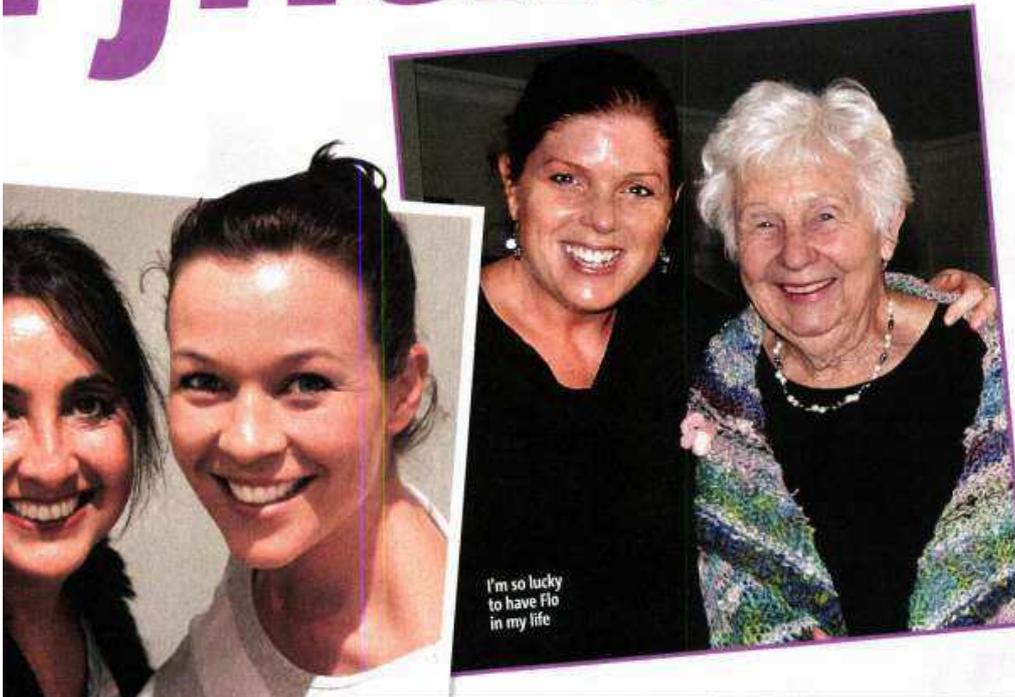
Sadly after two years of living next door to my dear friend, it was time for me to find a new place to live.

Saying goodbye to Flo was really hard but I knew I'd made a mate for life.

I've only moved 15 minutes away, so Flo and I still go to concerts together and have regular dinner dates where we try out new recipes.

We only met three years ago but it really feels like I've known Flo my whole life. Age is nothing but a number for us!

40 years in friends?



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