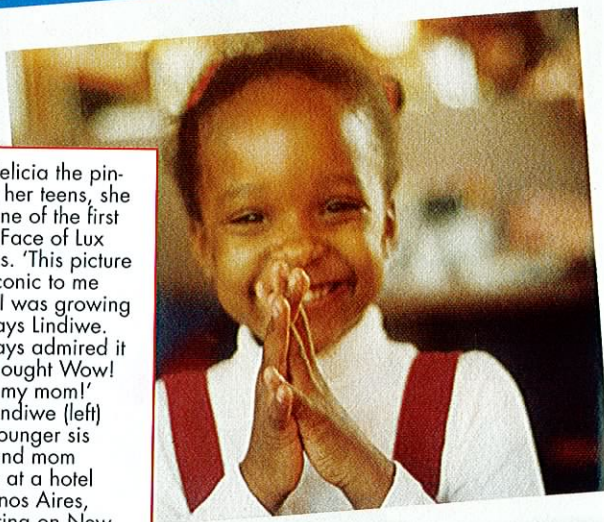




My Mom, My SHero



TOP Felicia the pin-up. In her teens, she was one of the first black Face of Lux models. 'This picture was iconic to me when I was growing up,' says Lindiwe. 'I always admired it and thought Wow! That's my mom!' **LEFT** Lindiwe (left) with younger sis Zani and mom Felicia at a hotel in Buenos Aires, Argentina on New Year's Eve last year. **RIGHT** A gleeful four-year-old Lindiwe. Felicia says, 'That is my favourite picture of her.'



As a teenager, Lindiwe Suttle couldn't understand why her mother chose South Africa over her family. Felicia Mabuza-Suttle's first-born writes for Babe about growing up and daring to dream

I was supposed to be Thabile, meaning 'the one who brings joy'. However, on 24 June, the day I was born, I was only bringing my mother pain and suffering. She was in labour for 24 hours and almost died giving birth to me. I was her first child and it was then that my name was changed from Thabile to Lindiwe, 'the one we've been waiting for'. We stayed in the hospital for a month so that my mother could recover. She tells me they called me "senior citizen" in the newborn ward because I was the only baby that could lift her head above the crib.

"Ambition", "self-confidence", "positive attitude", "determination", "self-love" and "respect" were words that echoed throughout the house when I was growing up with my sister, and those words became an integral part of our lives, shaping us into who we are today. My mother made it very clear that even though we grew up in America and my father was American, we'd be raised with the same strict African morals she was brought up with as a child in Soweto.

'So we were South Africans growing up in America. While our American friends were given a quick bowl of cereal before school, we sat together as a family and ate a full breakfast. While my friends could stay out all night, I had a strict curfew and was expected home not a minute later, and if we ever tried to disrespect my mom or her rules – in any way – we would be sure never to try it again. She'd scold us, "Not under my roof and not while I'm alive!"

I was a teenager when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990. But I still remember the call he made to all South Africans living abroad to come back to their country of birth and help rebuild a new South Africa with their skills. I didn't understand how that call touched my mother till she sat us down and told us that she was going back to South Africa. My sister and I were left with my father and the separation was hard on all of us. There were many late nights of crying over the phone, because we missed each other deeply. My poor father suffered directly through my rebellious teenage acts and my mother had to listen to the stories from my father. I had no idea of the pain she constantly had to deal with, wondering

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if she'd made the right choice between her beloved country and her beloved family.

I wasn't sure either, until we started visiting her in South Africa. We'd walk the streets of Jo'burg, Cape Town and Durban and I'd watch as people thanked her for her work. Old and young South Africans would tell her that she was the reason they graduated, got out of an abusive relationship, or never gave up despite their circumstances. *The Felicia Show* was the first talk show on SABC and it was completely touching and such an honour to see the small impact she made in her own country. If you ask her about her passions, she'll always say "my children, my country and my husband".

'Even though my mom missed many of our school activities like tennis tournaments, pageants, cheerleading events and proms, she never missed a graduation. Education is very important to her and she's the reason I pursued my MBA. She always told us that our beauty, money and worldly possessions can be stripped away, but our education is the one thing that'll stay with us for ever. It's the one thing we can take to the grave, she'd say.

'The older I get, the more I realise that I'm very much like my mother. Sometimes it's like looking into a mirror. She's the one I look to for advice, the one I look to for support and the one I look to for acceptance. She always tells us that the role of children is to magnify their parents' success tenfold. My sister and I have big shoes to fill and we're up for the challenge. I can only hope to make her as proud as she has made us proud, because she truly is my shero!'

Writing this article has brought back so many fond memories. I cried during most of the writing. Thanks,

Babe, for helping to remind me of what a fantastic mom I have and how lucky and grateful I should be each and every day of my life. To the readers, I will leave you with what she always told us: 'Dare to dream and then dare to live your dream!' •

GOT A SUPERMOM STORY?

Supermoms come in many different guises, and often we only understand what makes them 'super' once we've grown up. Here at True Love Babe we're great fans of mothers. That's why we've created this page – so Babe readers can write and tell us about theirs. What we want is a story (true, of course) of no fewer than 500 words, and a picture of you and your mom together. If your story is published in a future issue of Babe, you and your mom will each receive a Clinique Happy Heart fragrance. If we receive more stories than we have space for, we'll still publish yours – on our website www.truelovebabe.co.za

