

SINGLE AND LOVING IT!

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**Dedicated to the most amazing parents any child
could ask for
Jan Brits & Gertrude Brits**

It's that time of the year again, winter! How many times did I not remind myself not to be single this time of year? And do I heed my own words, no! I strived to be labelled 'single' with such vigour I forgot what season it was. It crept up on me as autumn creeps up on winter. Cool, calm and with such determination as my dog with its sorrowful looks during dinner!

But it did not quite start out this way, as I do recall.....

The sun was shining and I was lapping up the sun at the Lower South Coast. Oh what a glorious holiday. Just what the doctor ordered. Glorious and much need rest, wonderful fresh air and lots of tender loving care for myself.

My boys Steward age 25, Brian age 20, Collin age 16 and my sisters son who I call my other kid, Bernard age 21, are splashing in the surf, and then it's off to the lagoon while I stretch like a lazy tabby cat on windowsill. I take in my surroundings. I notice all the moms and dads chatting happily. I observe the tight family units scattered all over the beach. I smile a little inside, as I am happy for them and happy that I am single. Who wants the restraints of a husband, boyfriend or fiancé? Not me, I am extremely proud to be a single mom and function on all four cylinders.

The sun is setting and my kids start their rounding up of towels, flip flops, hats, surf boards and bags. We gather all of our beach gear and head for the car. All dusted off of the beach sand and off we go. It's time consuming to get back to my sisters flat. The traffic is heavy but the kids start chatting and going over the whole day's events, laughing as they share the day with each other. How wonderful it is to be young.

Finally we made it back. We make turns in the outdoor shower to get rid of the last sea sand before we all storm the kitchen and raid anything left unattended. Well swimming and all that fresh air does get the appetite a good old jump-start before dinner. Chips, cookies, coke, and coffee for me. Yes, sad but true, I got the hang of coffee many years ago; yes I am addicted to the stuff. My sister always jokes - when I die one day and they cut open a vein, the java will flow in abundance!

The kids head off to their rooms and I sit and chat to my mom and sister on the veranda. We sit on the veranda just watching the sun descend on our perfect day at the beach. My sister and mom are having a glass of wine, and with my coffee cup raised we toast our womanhood and the ability to survive without men. And here we sit in contented quietness - one widower and two divorcees. Our lives as we know it is complete, well for today anyway.

The kids are still asleep, we three ladies of leisure get up and as per usual I head straight for the kitchen, my fix for the morning – coffee. We sit in the lounge trying to look half alive. My mom is the only one looking like there is any life on her planet. The good Lord has blessed us with another sunshine day. Trust me, this time of the year, December, at the Lower South Coast you have to take a picture of the sun at times to remember what it looks like. It is usually rainy and very humid!

Now what are we going to do today, the boys were up most of the night playing PC games so they are only going to surface round about noon! Shall we head for the shops and try getting the last Christmas gifts or just stroll around town. We opt for the beach. Driving in this traffic is just utter madness for us today. Tomorrow is another day. We still have a few days left, what is the rush!

We pack our beach bag with towels, sun block, lots of water and our umbrella. Luckily we just have to cross the road, walk a few hundred meters and we are on St. Mike's beach.

Chatting now and making sure we have all we need to go back in the lovely sun we seem to be awake and fully comprehensive to tackle the new day. We lock up and off we go.

So much for that idea, only have one road to cross, yeah right. Half of Gauteng, the Freestate and Mpumalanga are on their way to the main shopping centre in Shelly Beach. You would swear there are no shops in their cities. Such a lovely day and they are all heading for the shops!

We stand next to the road trying to get a gap to dash across the road. The cars are bumper to bumper. My mother makes a comment that they are such idiots, how can they not give us a gap to get across. As she is going off how rude they are, a car slows down and flashes his headlights at us. It's a bunch of really good-looking guys in the car, but quite young and what can I say but just 'yummy' We make for the middle of the road and another car sees our dilemma and slows down so we can make the further dash to the other side. I grab my mom's arm and do the last sprint to safety.

Once across the hectic road, my sister and I burst out in laughter. 'Did you see those guys, boy they were good looking' I said with utter glee. "You see, I told you we have still got it," replies my very vain sister. We laugh at ourselves as our ego's soar higher than the clear blue skies above.

With this newfound confidence we hold our heads up high and march onto the beach like the new seasons Baywatch girls. We still have it and we are flaunting it!

The beach is packed and alive with people. We head for a spot close to the two safety swimming flags. To control the swimming masses, the life guards put up two flags and the public must keep within the flags to make sure all is safe and no drowning.

We put out our towels and up goes the umbrella and we seat ourselves down and keep the pose of Hollywood stars.

There are all sorts on the beach. The grandpa's and grandmas' are either reading the morning paper or setting out the day's supply of food for the grand kids. The moms and dads with the little toddlers are playing in the shallow waters of the sea, splashing around or trying to get their 1 and 2 year old to brave the water, no luck. The sea looks much bigger and more frightening to them up close and personal! Then you get the ten year olds to fourteen year olds. They have got their boggy boards and trying to get any wave coming their way, while the others are ducking and diving into the waves screeching with pure delight. Then the next age group are the 'know-it-all' teenagers. The boys are all flexing their muscles and looking very brave and strong while the girls act as if the water is this terrible human eating monster, screeching every time a wave heads for them. They

are strutting their stuff up and down the beach hoping to catch the eye of the flexing boys. Now we head on to the older teenagers. The sixteen and eighteen year old. The girls are all tanning and trying to be more stunning and gorgeous than the next group, flicking the hair back and rubbing on more tanning lotion. The boys or shall I say the young lions of the beach are roughing it up with a game of beach rugby or cricket. They are the only ones without a care in the world. Life is theirs to take and they are trying to make a big dent in it today. Tackling each other, laughing and really just enjoying the day. If a girl wants them they can come get him, no running after the girls today. Today is the 'Lions' day – six foot tall and bullet proof!

And here we are, somewhere in this mad crowd, on the beach is us three babes. Where do we fit in? Who knows? Not in one of the groups above. We are single moms, all three of us. My mom, responding to the name -Gertrude, is in her early 60's, young at heart, full of life and old enough to be called granny. My sister, Gertrude, in her early 40's, still young at heart, full of life, and not at all old. And myself just hit 40 two weeks ago. I am not old and if you dare call me that, I will kill. Extremely young at heart, will fight old age tooth and nail, will not go down gracefully but kicking and screaming! I am one of those really gullible people that you just have to say it will fade away any sign of wrinkles and I will buy it! I hate getting old and never will, and this fact humours my family till no end and at my expense. But my sister and I are very lucky in the sense that we inherited my mother's skin tone or whatever you call it. She has hardly got a wrinkle to show for raising 4 kids.

Gertrude and I are the same, I have some frown lines and she only as a few crow's feet. Bless my mother and her genes.

It's hot and time for a dip in the sea. I convince the other two Baywatch babes to join me. We march of very confidential-like into the water. It's absolutely lovely, my mom and Gertrude catch their breaths saying its cold. And that is my gap, turn around and splash them wet. We screech with laughter and my mom laughs as she curses me in the same breath. She does not wonder off to deep and us girl's head for the waves. We see a big wave heading our wave. I scream to Gertrude to catch the wave and we body surf it out. As the wave approaches us menacing we start swimming for all we wroth. We are going to make a statement here today – "We still have it! We used to be good at this; we will show the rest of the youngsters in the water and the onlookers how it is done! The wave catches up with us and roars to the beach. Well the Baywatch babes got a ride of the day. The wave was bigger and stronger than the both of us. It picked us up, tossed us in the air and then very rudely dunked us into the water below. We got tumble like my old washing machine at home. We finally made an appearance, washed out like beached whales. Covered in sea sand and seaweed. We took a look at each other and burst out laughing, that hysterical laugh, feeling very grateful that we are alive and that we did this together. Well it's not applicable to cry in public, no matter how big our humiliation was. Well my mother thought this was just as funny. By the time we got back to our towels my mother had plonked herself on her towel and was rolling with laughter. I sat

down and tried as best I could to get rid of the seaweed and sand. I just gave my mother a look of 'where is the sympathy' and at her next outburst of laughter, lit a smoke and laid back trying to get my head to stop spinning. And that was the end of our body surfing Baywatch babe episode for the day.

Just doing nothing all day long was my idea of a wonderful day. I sat watching the families on the beach. And somewhere inside me a little voice was saying – 'that could have been you' but I quickly wiped away that voice in my head with all the trouble that goes with a relationship. Well the little voice got me thinking. I started looking around now to see if I could see someone good looking or at least sort of good looking and my age. Well to my utter horror I saw that most were either married, staring down the eyes of some young dolly that is half their age or they were just too old looking for me. I was looking for someone that still had life in them, not being '40 and acting 60'. You see, I said earlier that I am young at heart. I meant that. I still go swimming with the boys. Jumping down the waterfall at Uvongo beach with them. Staying up most of the night playing pc games and playing beach rugby with them. I intend to stay young as long as possible; there is no word as old in my bones. Like I said, I will go down kicking and screaming. Most men my age are old. They are sitting under their umbrellas reading the newspaper or snoozing. If the boys were here, I would be either running around with them or in the surf trying not to drown myself. Or we would be in the lagoon on a little inflatable boat trying to see who can hold on the longest as someone tries to overturn the boat. So what am I suppose to do with a 40

something old man that likes to snooze and read a newspaper on the beach. I don't think so! And try and find men a bit younger, then they are still thinking of a family or trying to get rid of the family they have. This all seems hopeless. I have already got my kids, still young enough to have fun but can't find anyone to share that with. So the only conclusion is... I am still happy to be single.

It's already lunchtime and us girls are getting hungry and decide to head back home. The clouds are approaching and the wind has picked up. We decide to call it a day, packed up and headed back to Gertrude and my mom's flat. Luckily the main road is not that busy and we manage to get across without waiting too long. Although I think silently Gertrude and myself were hoping for allot of traffic! We looked at each other simultaneously and we understood each other's grins!

Let me first explain the flats to you, where everyone knows everyone. The flats are built above the butchery come bakery come winery. Past that is the laundry and barber. And just outside is a second hand bookshop and estate agent. Now in the butchery is the bakery, some guy from Belgium who knows how to bake breads and naturally sweet things or shall I call them great temptations. We cannot walk past the butchery with all its finery inside. It is just sacrilege. And anyway we are on holiday; we do as we please, well so we think. We head straight for the bakery section and choose some very fine looking rolls and some bread. Boy its smells good. Now there is this

table of sins, it has all sorts of old and second and probably 4th hand magazines and books. You can take whatever tickles your fancy and at the till point, there is the 'honesty box' you just have to put in a donation and the books are yours. So with a good few rolls and breads and magazines to keep us occupied all afternoon we head up the stairs and into the flat.

We make ourselves some divine salad rolls, I make the coffee and we stuff our faces with no shame whatsoever. The boys have just joined the land of the living and preparing to go fishing. Great, this is turning out to be a wonderful day. Peace and quiet as they leave the flat. My mom and sister head for the bedroom and I sprawl myself out on the couch. And in trying to read and catch whatever they have to say on the telly, I drift off to the land of nod where I am Queen, the idle rich, and have the body that came from the Gods.

I stir out of my lovely wonderful dream world to the scrumptious aromas of garlic and fried onions. I was more tired than I thought and slept 3 solid hours! The fresh clean air at the coast was doing wonders to my sleep. You see I am a terrible sleeper, just don't seem to get the hang of it! So, to drift off for 3 hours in broad daylight was a blessing from above and well appreciated. Gertrude is busy with dinner and my tummy rumbles. Not only did the clean beautiful coastal air affect my sleep, but it sure has turned on my appetite. But my strong beliefs, that, whatever you eat on holiday, is non-fattening and good for the soul. My mom is pouring a glass of wine for herself and

Gertrude and I decide to indulge myself and join in for the alcoholic round! Hey I am allowed to splurge, I am on holiday!

And as per tradition, we haul out the dices for a few rounds of Yum. It's basically five dices you roll and it's nearly like playing poker, but of course just with dices. Competition runs strongly in our blood. My mom just enjoys the game and Gertrude and I compete heavily under the table! We get it from our late father. If it was monopoly, or gin rummy or golf, we had to win!! Strange how you think you are so different from your brothers or sisters, or even your own parents. But if you had to sit down and write down a few of their traits or likes and dislikes, you will be amazed at how very similar you are to them. And when you catch yourself, the first thing you say when someone asks you if that is your sister or brother what do you reply, 'Yes she or he is, but we are so different!' go figure and you wonder why your kids seem a bit screwed up at times. All this confusion, it's bound to drive someone bonkers! Back to the game and my mother has beaten the pants off the both of us. See, you need all the concentration when you are up against the family. We decline gracefully with excuses that we must finish dinner. Always works in our house!

Dinner was good as always, and we have cleared the table and the kitchen is back to spotless. Now it's party time. My kids have gone over to some friends to 'lan' on the computers and I am in the mood for 'Party'. Now let me inform you a bit here. I am not quite the party animal that is Gertrude's department. I am more of a movies, beach and nature kind-of-gal. Don't get

me wrong, I do enjoy a good party every now and then. How does my mother put it, 'Let the hair down' so we opt to go down to the local pub. Not too far from where Gertrude and mother lives.

We get all dollied up and off we set in our red Ferrari (my mother's Citi Golf). We get there and the place looks very lively. It's an' Irish Pub Night' at the local Tavern. Just what we needed. We walk in with the music playing all the good old Irish tunes and most of the bar is singing happily with. We find some seats at the bar and order ourselves a drink each. My sister gets the giggles as I battle to get my behind on the bar stool. I am not short, just vertically challenged! So with a hop skip and jump I am on the bar stool. It's so nice to be out with Gertrude, she knows how to have a good time and I am here to learn all her methods. We sit and chit chat and observing all the people in the tavern. What a happy crowd. Some are having dinner, some are attempting the dance floor, small but sufficient. And the rest are singing and laughing. Why can't every day be like this? No one is complaining about their crappy jobs, all the debt, sick relatives or how unjust life can be. Everyone is relaxed and enjoying the moment. That is how we are supposed to live. Don't stress about the next day, just enjoy the one you are in.

Just then the door of the tavern burst open with the oddest looking chaps. Quite loud and in very good spirits. They are younger than my sister and myself. The one chap is tall and as skinny as a bean pole. The other chap is much shorter and a bit stocky. They head straight for the bar an order some draught with

this very broad Irish accent. Gertrude and I both look at each other and smile. On my mother's side her family came from Ireland. And here we are, in an Irish pub and who walks in... two paddies from ol' homeland Ireland. These two paddies's just about greeted the whole pub personally. They came up to us and introduced themselves. Told us to make some space for them and we got to chatting. Now trying to understand a broad accent is one thing, if the person speaks a bit slower, you can more or less figure out what they are saying. But if you are half inebriated and loud and talking fast, well they lost us on the 4th word! And with that I can say the same for the poor bartender and the rest of its customers! But did that hinder the conversation. No way, we kept on smiling and laughing as they did and we had our say to them and vice versa, and till today I still wonder what we actually spoke about. The only thing we managed to figure out was that they were missionaries from Ireland who volunteer to teach in the lesser African schools. The taller chap had this funny little black hat on. He started playing a game with all who sat at the bar. As the music starts he places the hat on top of the first person at the bar, he then puts the hat on the second person at the beat of the music. When a chorus starts or the song end, you have to take a swig of your drink. Plus we all had to sing heartily along. After a few rounds and everyone buying everyone a round of drinks, my cheeks were blood red and it had nothing to do with the weather. I was quite tidily with my sister close on my heels. Now our problem here was that these two Irish gentlemen wanted a place to sleep for the night. Now just imagine the expression on my mom and my children's faces, if Gertrude and I waltzed into the flat

with two drunken strangers. My children would never talk to me again. As for my mother, she would give us one of those “Drop dead in your tracks” look. So it was time for a plan. When they proceeded to ask us again for about the fifteenth time if they could go home with us, we replied, “no problem, me casa su casa” now just to get the timing right. We watched them with hawk eyes. The minute they decided to go to the men’s room, we grab our bags and tried as best to get the hell out of there without attracting too much attention. Now, that alone, 7 was a bit of a mission. We both had the giggles and could not quite walk straight. We both tried simultaneously, to go through the door and got stuck, and in our very ‘happy’ mood, packed up again in fits of laughter! With allot of pushing and shoving we managed to get ourselves out the tavern. We ran or shall I say stumble along and around the corner. We had to sober up so that we could drive home. The centre, which is where we shall go. There is a very quaint coffee bar there, and that is what we need right now. The only problem was that on the way to the coffee bar is a huge flight of stairs we are going to have to manage. Now I must add that I was in a better state than my sister. So we hooked arm in arm and took a big breath and started the decline on the stairs. A couple, who was, by the looks of it, very much in love, passed us on their way up. We got this really dirty conceited look from the two of them, shaking their heads with a ‘tut-tut’. Well you can just imagine what that did to us. We looked at each other and the laughter roared out of us. We laughed so much, just thinking what we look like. These two 40 something woman, hanging onto each other as if we were trying to cross on a fifty foot high hanging bridge! We had to

seat ourselves down to calm our outburst. Another 10 minutes later we attempted the last set of steps down. With a sigh of relief we walked the last distance that would take us to some heavenly sobering up coffee. As we approached the coffee bar we could already smell the wonderful aromas brewing in the coffee pots. We straightened ourselves up and tried to look as sober as a drunken person can look! We ordered a huge pot of coffee and drank as much as we possibly could. The cookies they gave with the coffee went down just as well. After an hour and a half we were quite sober and ready for our journey home.

Thank goodness I am on holiday, I had chance to sleep off the wear and tear of last night. My mom was up early and Gertrude and I only emerged from our rooms at nine o'clock. My mom, our angel, had a cup of java ready for us. How I do love my mother! We sat down and started to tell my mom the night's events. She laughed with us and said in a manner of fact that at least we only do this 'sort of thing' once a year. Now don't get me wrong, my mother is a very fun loving person. I can still see that mischievous twinkle in her. I remember when I was about fourteen years of age; I had fallout with my mom. You know how you get at that age, you know it all and the whole world is against you and they just don't get it! I called up my Aunt Tess, my mom's sister, and asked if I could come spend the weekend with her as my mother hates me. She agreed and asked my mom to drop me off. My aunt stayed in a 3 story apartment. The moment my mom stopped, I said goodbye, very half heartedly I must add, and ran up the 3 flights of stairs as fast as I my short legs could carry me. I burst into her

apartment and immediately told her how cruel and heartless my mother is. I was very much a free spirited child and like to express my freedom to my poor parent's utter horror and sometimes disbelief. My mom had chastised me over one of these 'free spirited' expressions I had. After I had completely cried out all my pitiful tears she told me some stories I carry gleefully in my heart till today and happily share it with my boys. My dear mother who I thought to be so innocent and a real old goodie- two-shoe's was indeed not.

You see my granny, on my mother's side, was a very loving woman but very strict. She ran the whole family up until she became very old. She lived to a good old age of 101! So I was under the impression that my mother and her 6 brothers and sisters were little angels. Granny had two sets of twins, my mom being one of them. No wonder she was so strict, I would have gone off my rocker if I had so many kids! Well my darling Aunt Tess told me that she and granny were walking in the street doing a bit of shopping. The next minute a boy comes flying past on a motor bike. Granny looks in utter disgust and declares, 'Is that not Gertrude on the back of that motorcycle?' Aunty Tess shakes her head very convincingly at granny and says with a very straight face, 'No mother, Gertrude is in the library' till today my mom has the exhaust pipe burn on her right calf muscles! Then there was the story of how they used to travel by train to school and back. As far as I can remember the story, granny accompanied all her kids to school. The train trip was long and tiring. Granny got up to get a bit of fresh air and opened the window. She poked her head out a

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