

BY CHARIS TORRANCE  
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# SOUL SISTERS

Grab the tissues and call your sibling; these dynamic duos will have you laughing, crying and appreciating the special bond that sisters share.

## Sandra & Nicola Hanekom

**I**s it nature or nurture? Was it in our mom's amniotic fluid?' Nicola Hanekom and her sister Sandra are debating where their creative spark comes from. Nicola, a seasoned freelance actress, director, and writer for the past two decades, has embraced the world of theatre, creating poignant and award-winning works. And Sandra has been a full-time artist since 1994, exploring

various mediums to express visually complex narratives.

'Some researchers believe there might be a genetic component,' Sandra says. 'I think it's both – genetics *and* life. Growing up in a creative family means being surrounded by people who don't find it strange that you think in a specific way.'

Sandra and Nicola remember their parents' divorce as a devastating blow to their family. 'Amidst everything



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Sandra and Nicola  
with Nicola's pet  
rescued bunnies,  
which have the run  
of her farmstead in  
Piketberg.

crumbling around us, what kept us grounded was having each other,' Nicola says. 'Even at such a young age, my sister was the anchor, the stronger one who carried both of us through. There wasn't much capacity within the household for anyone else to do it; everyone was a bit shattered.'

At the time (and within a staunchly middle-class Afrikaner community), divorce was unheard of. 'We attended an Afrikaans school, and there was this sense of being treated like a leper due to the cultural stigma surrounding it,' Sandra says.

With their parents unable to handle everything ('In their defence, they had no guidelines,' Nicola says), the two were forced to lean on each other. When their mother remarried and they relocated to Cape Town, the girls found themselves with four stepsisters... and suddenly outnumbered. 'The situation forced us to be extremely close to each other,' Sandra says.

It also directed them to their interests. 'When life is difficult, you look for things to make it better. This led Sandra to her drawing board and me into the world of play,' Nicola says. 'It bonded us

and focused us on passions that eventually became our career paths.'

They credit their grandmother with their love of storytelling. 'Our grandmother wasn't a performer by profession, but she turned into one when she told stories; it was like watching a whole show,' Nicola recalls. 'She would get so animated in the telling that she'd rise from her chair and act out all the parts.'

Their grandmother always wanted to be an actress, and Sandra says that she was proud when Nicola decided to become one. 'Every time we went to watch a production that Nicola was in, I could see my grandmother come alive completely.

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'When my sister achieves something, I couldn't be prouder. The only time I get upset is when she doesn't win.'

It's great to have someone who is always on your side in life, no matter the situation, Nicola adds. 'It's nice to know that someone really has your back. That's a lovely thing.'

The sisters admit that they don't see enough of each other. 'She's my comfort zone,' Nicola says.

'I see life running out and I would love to prioritise the things that are important, rather than the things that are urgent. Life happens and goes by, but I miss my comfort zone, you know?'

As they get older, their relationship has become more profound. 'I cannot imagine this world without somebody who knows me in their bones, because that's how I feel,' Sandra says. 'My sister knows everything about me, much more so than anybody else in this world.'

They've gone through hardship, sad times and dreadful tragedies, but through it all, 'My sussie was daar.'





# Tebo & Lebo Ndala

**T**ebo and Lebo Ndala are qualified chefs, food stylists, sports nutritionists, owners of a catering company, cookbook authors and – as you may have gathered from the photos – twins.

They grew up in Mamelodi in Pretoria East with their mom Elizabeth, grandmother Koko and two siblings, Dimpho and Kgomotso. They have always been close. ‘Annoyingly so,’ they say, laughing. ‘It was always us against our siblings.’

‘We competed for everything,’ Lebo says. ‘Who gets the remote first, who gets leftovers first...’ Tebo says. ‘Who is seen as the good child by my mom and grandmother,’ Lebo finishes the sentence.

Whereas their siblings preferred sports, Tebo and Lebo found their happy place in the kitchen. ‘Our mom loved to cook. We would watch her and ask if we could help,’ Tebo says. She would let them stir the pot and knead the bread.

They also have their hospitality studies teacher to thank for inspiring them. ‘Mrs Le Roux wasn’t just the cooking teacher,’ Lebo says. ‘The way she taught us and how she explained everything encouraged us to pursue cooking professionally.’

The two of them studied at a culinary school in Stellenbosch before they cut their teeth in the hospitality industry in Cape Town, and worked at the V&A Waterfront food market over weekends, making flatbreads for tourists. Then they moved to the United States for a few months and studied through the University of California, Los Angeles. ‘That’s when we discovered



*‘EVEN NOW THAT WE’RE GROWN-UPS, ALL WE WANT TO DO IS HANG OUT WITH EACH OTHER.’*

**Above:** Tebo and Lebo with their grandmother Koko. **Left:** Tebo and Lebo run their own catering company, With Love From The Twins.



by side running their catering company can make it hard for the sisters to strike out on their own. ‘We’re often treated like one person,’ Lebo says. ‘Some of our friends don’t even call us by our names; they just call us “Twins!”’ She laughs.

So, how do you go about proving that you are your own person? ‘We’re still trying to figure it out,’ Lebo says.

They have no problem with spending so much time in each other’s company. ‘Even now that we’re grown-ups, all we want to do is hang out with each other –and that’s because we like the same stuff,’ Tebo says.

They love drinking coffee in beautiful places, going to bookshops, watching people... ‘We dream about vacations and food,’ Lebo says. ‘We’d rather stay at home and watch soccer than go out,’ Tebo adds. In a nutshell? ‘We’re just nerds and other girls our age don’t get us,’ Lebo says.

our love of travel,’ Tebo says. ‘We started saving up money and went to a few countries... Thailand, China, even Russia.’ They sampled the local cuisine and started taking notes and writing down recipes.

Back home, they began blogging and posting content on Tumblr. ‘And then one day, NB Publishers called and asked if we wanted to do a cookbook,’ Lebo says. ‘We never expected our scribbles to be turned into a book.’ And that’s how *Food Stories: Our Favourite Recipes, With Love from the Twins* came about.

Living together and working side





# Trix & Lea Vivier

**G**rowing up, it seemed inevitable that sisters Lea and Trix Vivier would find their way to acting.

Their mother, Adri Vivier, was an actress and ran a drama school in Melkbosstrand, and when the two girls weren't holding concerts in their parents' living room, their mom would enter them in eisteddfods.

'We were always reciting poems and prose, participating in school dramas and dancing,' Trix says. 'We were constantly expressing ourselves. That was our world, both inside and outside of our family life.'

Lea was most recently seen in the Afrikaans telenovela *Diepe Waters*, and in Season 1 and 2 of *Dam* on Showmax. Trix's latest project, the eight-part miniseries *Juffrou X* for kykNET, will be available on Showmax in April. She also has a role in *The Trek*, an independent Western horror feature film due for international release in June 2024.

Lea and Trix are often asked how they deal with competition in the cut-throat acting industry. For them, however, competition has always been a positive. 'It pushes us to be better, to evolve, to learn more. I find competition inspiring because it makes me want to grow,' Lea says. They love seeing each other get roles

and take on challenging projects, and it inspires them to do more. The two may have a lot of similarities, including their profession, but the beauty of their relationship lies in their differences. 'It's fascinating to see how Trix engages with the industry, which in turn challenges and expands my perspective,' Lea says. 'Growing up with this diversity has made us appreciate the uniqueness each of us brings to the weird and wonderful world of acting.'

It's not a career for the faint-hearted, as Trix points out. 'Acting careers don't progress chronologically; it's more like two steps forward, eight steps back.' Success often depends on timing and the availability of roles rather than acting skill. 'Beyond the borders of our home lay the vast industry, and this has become even

more significant for me as I've expanded my scope beyond South Africa,' Trix says. 'Now, Lea serves as an invaluable sounding board for my work, offering feedback rooted in her deep understanding of both me as an actor and the industry.'

Whereas Trix and Lea embraced the arts, their other two siblings chose different paths. Their sister Meije pursued a medical career, and their brother delved into the world of Bitcoin and NGOs. 'Meije, as a doctor, is dealing with real, serious matters. And my brother is highly intelligent – I mean, his kids speak three languages. Meanwhile, Lea and I are just these plebs playing dress-up,' Trix says, laughing.

'Our upbringing emphasised choosing a career that brings daily happiness. It was something that our dad instilled in us because he never had the opportunity to make that choice himself,' Lea says. 'So when Trix decided to pursue a career

in the performing arts, it wasn't surprising. And when I accepted that acting was my calling, it felt comfortable and made sense.'

Today, the two sisters find themselves separated by international borders. Lea and her husband, André Wilkens, have settled in Lisbon, Portugal. 'I am in the throes of finding my feet in a new country with a new language and a brand-new television and film industry,' Trix, meanwhile, splits her time between Dubai and Amsterdam, while 'commuting' to South Africa for work.

'The incredible aspect of being sisters who are also friends is that it isn't seasonal. It's a relationship I know I can depend on for the rest of my life,' Lea says. 'Even if I were to remove my career and contemplate who I am beyond it, I am, at my core, a daughter and a sister. This, to me, is exceptionally precious.'



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Trix and Lea on the beach in Camps Bay – taking a short break from the 2023 kykNET Silwerskermfees.

## Siyoli Waters & Msaki

**S**iyoli Waters, once a trailblazing black squash champion, and Asanda Lusaseni Mvana, known professionally as Msaki, a soul-stirring composer and singer, share a unique bond that developed later in life. They grew up in East London, where their parents started out as teachers but later changed careers, with their father making the move from headmaster to lawyer. 'Our parents worked hard and sacrificed a lot to provide the best for us because those opportunities weren't available to them,' Msaki says.

They sent Siyoli, Msaki and their younger brother, Luvuyiso 'MB' Lusaseni, to boarding school. Although it helped them to succeed later in life (Luvuyiso is a former lock/flanker for the Sharks and Lions), December and January were pretty much the only times

they spent together as siblings. 'We didn't see each other all the time,' Siyoli says. 'So we got on with our lives, and during school holidays we would come back together.'

'That's if you weren't touring,' Msaki says. 'Sometimes, it really felt like finding out about your favourite sports star from a distance.' At the time, Msaki says, she saw Siyoli mainly as a prefect and a training buddy rather than a sister.

Msaki grappled with comparisons to her accomplished sister in a school environment that emphasised conformity. 'I felt like I had to rebel against my own name,' she confesses. 'They would actually call me "Siyoli's little sister".' When she tried out for the choir, they

told her that her voice was weird. Her peers would tell her that the only reason she even made it into the choir was because her sister Siyoli was the choir leader. 'I was so proud of her but at the same time frustrated that people weren't seeing me.' In Grade 10, Msaki moved to a new school, and it was only then that she could flourish beyond her sister's shadow.

As they came into their own, Siyoli conquered the squash court, becoming the first black woman to secure South Africa's national squash title. And, after leaving her

ambitions for a law degree behind, Msaki nurtured her passion for music and built a career as an artist.

Now navigating adulthood and motherhood, the sisters have rekindled their connection. 'It feels like it's all happening now,' Msaki says. Despite their differences growing up, the sisters have discovered that they are more similar than they thought. 'I'm so proud of all that she has achieved. I really am a genuine fan,' Siyoli says.

Siyoli made the decision to retire from professional sport in 2016. 'It just felt like it was time. I had

just got married and wanted to start a family, which is difficult to do when you are touring.' Now working in the NGO sector as project director for Connect Network, Siyoli is navigating the transition to civilian life, and is looking forward to devoting time to some music projects. Not surprising, as music runs in the family. Besides Msaki, their father worked as a DJ while he studied at the University of Fort Hare and he led choirs throughout his life.

Their grandfather was a composer.

'It's nice to see her give that a bit of time – though it's not that she didn't want to give it time; it just happened this way,' Msaki says. As Siyoli explores her musical talents, she is honoured that her sister sees potential in her and is embracing this life with her encouragement. 'This year is a year

in which I'm saying yes,' Siyoli says. 'I'm taking the steps and accepting the help.'

'My dad's dream is to see us sing together, and he's not far off,' Msaki says. ♦

*DESPITE THEIR DIFFERENCES GROWING UP, THE SISTERS HAVE DISCOVERED THAT THEY ARE MORE SIMILAR THAN THEY THOUGHT.*

Msaki gets pointers from Siyoli as they play a quick round at the Atlantic Beach Estate & Golf Links.