



Rochelle Courtenay

What is your favourite part of being a Queenager?

I think my favourite part of being a Queenager is being able to look in the mirror and genuinely like the woman staring back at me.

Oh yes, she's a little wrinklier these days, and the grey roots are definitely starting to shine through, but at her core, I like who she is. And perhaps even more importantly, I really don't care if everyone else does.

I didn't always feel this way.

I grew up not liking myself very much and not seeing my own value. As a result, I spent the first half of my life people-pleasing, seeking approval, and often treating myself far less kindly than I treated everyone else.

Somewhere along the way, that changed.

Being a Queenager has taught me that my worth isn't determined by what others think of me. It's determined by what I think of me.

So if I had to choose my favourite part of being a Queenager, it would be this: finally being comfortable in my own skin and genuinely liking the woman I've become.

Life isn't always kind. If you're happy to share, what has been one of the toughest parts of your journey and what helped you through it?

To be honest, there have been a few tough chapters in my life, but hand on heart, nothing compares to the heartbreak of losing Kai to SIDS.

Kai was my great-nephew, but families are funny things. His mum, Danielle, is my niece, yet she has always felt much more like a daughter to me. Life dealt her some tough cards growing up, and over the years we've shared many of life's biggest moments together. When she was pregnant, I was often the first phone call. Her babies have always felt like my babies too.

I will never forget getting the call from Danielle telling me to come to the hospital because Kai had stopped breathing.

I sat beside her for hours, holding her while she held her beautiful baby boy, and there was absolutely nothing I could do to take her pain away.

I am a fixer by nature. I like solving problems, helping people and making things better.

But in that moment, I was completely powerless.

Even now, it still brings tears to my eyes.

Every birthday, every milestone, every moment that Kai should have been here growing up alongside his brother and cousins leaves a little ache in my heart.

What helped us through was love. The love of family, the support of friends, and simply showing up for one another when there were no words that could make it better.

I cannot begin to understand the depth of the loss that Danielle and Matt carry every day, but I do know this: Kai mattered, Kai was deeply loved, and Kai will forever be part of our family story.

What has been one of the most joyful moments of your life so far?

There is no doubt that after years of trying to fall pregnant, holding my baby girl in my arms for the very first time was one of the most joyful moments of my life. That kind of love is almost impossible to measure against anything else.

These days though, being a Nanny brings me the greatest joy imaginable. I have five beautiful grandchildren and they absolutely light up my world. You genuinely cannot wipe the smile on my face when I'm with them. They make my heart feel like it might burst.

One of my happiest memories happened earlier this year when our whole family travelled to Fiji together.

It started as a simple plan for Shayne and me to celebrate my 55th birthday — all the fives! Then I invited my daughters and their families. I mentioned it in the family group chat and before I knew it, nieces, nephews and their families were booking flights too.

Nineteen of us ended up there together.

Then, just to make it even more special, my niece Danielle and her partner Matt surprised everyone by getting married while we were there.

Having my children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and the people I love most all in one place felt like Christmas Day that lasted an entire week.

There were endless games with the kids, long conversations with my grown-up babies, plenty of laughter, a few pina coladas, and countless moments where I found myself looking around and thinking, "This is it. This is what life is all about."

I was in absolute heaven.

Who are the women (or people) who have made your life better and why?

My family, of course, have shaped who I am, but if I had to choose the people who have made my life better, it would start with my four best girlfriends.

We have been friends for more than four decades and there is something incredibly special about having people who have loved you through every chapter of your life. They have seen me at my best and my worst. They've celebrated the highs, sat beside me through the lows, and loved me unconditionally through all of it.

That kind of friendship is one of life's greatest gifts.

And then there is Shayne.

Fifteen years ago, when I met him, I genuinely believed I would spend the rest of my life alone. The truth is, I didn't think I deserved to be loved.

My experiences with men had taught me something very different.

My biological father was violent towards my mother. He left when I was young and never looked back to see whether his only daughter was alive, thriving, struggling or succeeding. Then came relationships that repeated many of those same patterns, leaving me questioning my own worth. So when Shayne came along, I did everything I could to push him away.

I didn't trust it.

I didn't trust him.

And if I'm being really honest, I didn't trust that someone could love me the way I deserved to be loved.

But he stayed.

Patiently, consistently and without asking me to be anyone other than myself.

The love, safety and security I feel with my husband today is hard to put into words. He helped me see my own value when I couldn't always see it myself. He showed me that love shouldn't hurt, that respect matters, and that I was worthy of being loved exactly as I am.

Between my girlfriends who have walked beside me for decades and the man who taught me what safe love feels like, I am incredibly grateful for the people who helped me become the woman I am today.

What words of wisdom would you share with younger women, and what are you most looking forward to in your own future?

For what it's worth, my biggest piece of advice is this: get a therapist. Cynthia Morton changed my life!

Seriously.

Unpack your shit sandwiches lunchbox before it causes pain for you and the people around you.

I spent decades carrying around things I didn't understand and hadn't dealt with.

Looking back now, I can see how much that shaped my life. It showed up as perfectionism, people-pleasing, eating disorders, workaholism, obesity and a constant feeling that I wasn't enough.

The list goes on.

I often wonder how different parts of my life might have been if I'd done the work earlier.

We are very good at looking after our physical health. We get our blood tests done, we exercise, we take vitamins and see specialists when something hurts.

Why don't we treat our emotional health the same way?

Your mental and emotional wellbeing deserves exactly the same attention as your physical health.

As for the future, I genuinely believe the best is yet to come.

I always joke that I plan on living until I'm 105, but I mean it when I say I want to get there with a sharp mind, a strong body and a heart that is still full of curiosity and kindness.

That's why I walk, lift weights, work on my health and keep learning.

I want the second half of my life to be filled with joy.

Not success. Not achievements. Not more stuff.

Joy.

Time with the people I love. Adventures. Grandchildren. Purposeful work. Lots of laughter. More Wednesdays with Lola. More memories with family and friends.

And perhaps most importantly, I want this chapter to include the kindness I so freely give to everyone else being directed back towards myself.

Because that's something Queenager me is finally learning: I deserve that kindness too.

And one final sentence:

Being a Queenager means...

I deserve kindness too.