

'Rows with my husband? They're healthy!'

Glynis Barber – now *Hollyoaks*' glamorous gangster Norma Crow – talks ageing, playing the baddie and what keeps her marriage alive...

Glynis Barber is currently delighting fans as gangster grandma, Norma Crow, in Channel 4 soap *Hollyoaks*, but the actress – originally from South Africa – has also had high-profile roles in shows such as *EastEnders* (as Ronnie and Roxy's mum Glenda Mitchell) and, perhaps most iconic of all, as Sgt Makepeace in Eighties BBC police drama *Dempsey and Makepeace*. Here, the star – who is married to fellow actor Michael Brandon (he played her sidekick,

Lieutenant Dempsey), talks about getting older, staying healthy and why it's important to keep laughing...

Glynis, so is playing Norma Crow in *Hollyoaks* as fun as it looks?

Oh, I love playing a super-villain. She's great fun. Before we saw Norma, we knew her reputation as The Undertaker – the last thing you expected her to be was a woman of my age, stepping out of a hearse. When I first turned up, people recoiled in fear, her reputation was so fierce. I enjoyed that. I don't know what that says about me! I decided

not to play her screaming and shouting, but as very calm and well-spoken, with a slight smile. I think it makes her more sinister.

It certainly does! And what's it like working in Cheshire – do you commute from London?

They're honestly one of the nicest bunch of people I've ever worked with. It's quite intense filming on these kinds of shows, but up north people are very friendly, aren't they – more so than in London, I have to say! I do commute, so there's a lot of travel back and forth. It's been a very full-on year for me – I also run my health and beauty website and YouTube channel. But I enjoy it all, I can't complain.

What's your favourite show to watch, when you get any downtime?

I watch a lot of TV, especially when I'm away from home for work, or sitting on a train. I'm obsessed with *Married At First Sight Australia* at the minute. It's so addictive. I've got my husband Michael hooked, too. He was quite worried about me when I started watching it, now I can't get rid of him! I also love South Korean series, *Crash Landing On You* and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*.



As Gangster Gran Norma

Do you ever miss your homeland of South Africa?

I do... I don't get back that often sadly – probably every four years or so. I haven't been since before the pandemic, actually. But I've called London home for so long now, I can't really imagine being anywhere else. I did live in LA for five years and still have a lot of friends there... I love travelling, but England feels like home.

You look amazing, Glynis. Your top tips for looking and feeling great?

You don't have to go to the gym, but always, always keep moving. It will help physically but also keep your mind young and keep you feeling upbeat. If you want to lose weight, change what you eat – you can't exercise it off if you don't also change your diet. If you want to keep your energy, you've got to stay on top of your weight. It's easy for women, especially in menopause, to lose control of their bodies. Self-care and looking after yourself is everything.

How do you feel about ageing, in general?

I think ageism is one of the biggest things we will all have to deal with – for men too, but particularly for women. That's why people dread ageing. I don't dread age itself because there are a lot of benefits to it – the wisdom, the life experiences... what I do dread is getting sick. You want a healthy, happy old age. Getting older is a privilege. It's something we all want to do; the alternative isn't so good!

You and Michael have been together a long time. What's your secret?

I don't have any secret formula – I'm sorry! Relationships are so different for everybody. But Michael and I are like any other couple. We do row – I think rowing is quite healthy! I don't think it's normal not to row. We clash, we tell each other what we think. What's helped us over the years is that we have a similar, quite developed sense of humour. We still have the ability to really make each other laugh, that's key.

Any nice holidays booked this Summer?

We're not long back from France – we did a road trip, between Bordeaux and La Rochelle. We had a lovely time and lots of laughs, driving around, eating cheese, drinking local wine (two of my favourite things). What's hard in a relationship is the mundane. Life is full of boring stuff like bills, taking the bins out, petrol for the car... Getting away – even if it's just the odd daytrip every few months – really stops the daily grind wearing a relationship down. You rediscover yourself, and each other.

● *Hollyoaks* streams first online and airs weeknights on E4 and Channel 4. See agelessbyglynisbarber.com

'I've stopped letting fear hold me back'

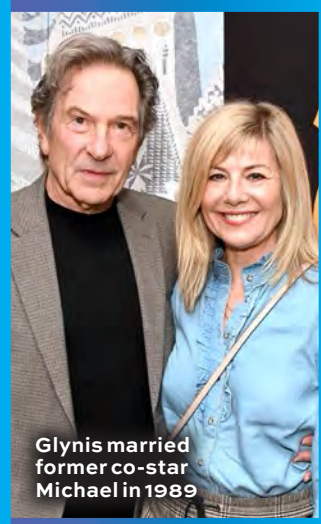
How different does Glynis feel now, we asked, compared to that young actress who moved to London from her native South Africa aged 18, to pursue her dream of acting? 'Oh, I've changed a lot, I think. I look back and I realise how young and naïve and accepting I was – of so many things I... shouldn't have accepted,' she muses. 'By that I mean, being treated, or talked to in a certain way. When you're younger, you also tend to think others have the answers. As you get older, you realise in life and acting, that everyone's just learning as they go. All the answers are inside of us. It's just trusting our gut. That's what I've learned, to trust myself – and not let that fear we all feel to hold me back.'



Glynis in Blake's 7 in 1977



As Glenda in EastEnders



Glynis married former co-star Michael in 1989