

## 'Being friends with someone from your childhood is precious'

Antoinette Daniel and Andri Benson bonded as teenagers. Now they both run their own businesses, and supported one another through the past difficult year

### ANTOINETTE, 46, SAYS:

As a teenager, I spent a lot of time at Andri's home, which was the most glamorous house I'd ever seen, where we'd have sleepovers, movie days and her family would often throw lavish parties.

Andri's parents owned a clothing factory which sold clothes to high-street fashion stores and she'd bring samples into school, so we always had fantastic outfits for parties. I met my first boyfriend at her 16th - he was Greek and I remember in our lunch breaks calling him from a telephone box while Andri would help translate for us.

Spending time with Andri and her family helped shape who I am today. I was fostered and had a difficult placement during my teenage years, so seeing her parents and siblings together showed me that

families can be functional and support one another.

Although there have been a lot of changes since our friendship began, and we don't see each other frequently, when we do there's never any awkwardness and we just carry on as if we were with one another yesterday.

During the pandemic I had to furlough a lot of staff. It was very stressful to go through and I turned to Andri for advice and support. As another businesswoman, she knew exactly what I was dealing with.

I realise that being friends with someone from your childhood is a precious thing. I have fond memories from every decade of my life with Andri and that's really special. Even now in our mid 40s, I can't imagine her not being in my life. Our friendship's survived distance, job stresses, relationships and even after all that we're still here, 30 years later and still will be in the decades to come.



ANTOINETTE WEARS: DRESS, ANNA SCHOLZ. SHOES, SHOEAHOLICS. EARRINGS, BIG METAL LONDON

ANDRI WEARS: DRESS, BOMBHELL. SANDALS, FREEMANS. EARRINGS, NEW LOOK PHOTOGRAPHY, LIZ MCAULAY. FASHION STYLING: RACHEL FANCONI. MAKE-UP & HAIR, CAROLINE PIASECKI, LINDSEY POOLE

## 'Our friendship isn't measured by texts and phone calls'

### ANDRI, 46, SAYS:

When I was 13, I was ostracised by my group of school friends. It was called 'the elite' and full of tall blonde netball players (I was short, Greek and brunette). Antoinette saw me on my own and welcomed me into her circle of friends with open arms.

There were six of us in our group, but Antoinette and I became particularly close. She spent a lot of time at my house and, after we left school, we went island hopping around Greece together where she met my extended family. We were away for four weeks and it was a wonderfully carefree time.

We kept in contact even when our lives took different directions. I met my husband, Ed, and our son, Lysander, was born 2006. I set up my bespoke wedding planning business in London, taking on a small number of clients each year. Antoinette, meanwhile, taught PE in Kenya for three years before returning and launching a cleaning agency.

Good friends are often defined as someone you talk to all the time or see really often, but Antoinette and I don't need that. We can go for months without speaking to each other but that's fine as our friendship isn't measured by texts and phone calls and we understand that we're both busy - we can always pick up just where we left off.

Both our businesses were badly affected during the pandemic; all my weddings were postponed and Antoinette couldn't send her cleaners out. It was a scary time for both of us but we were at the end of the phone for one another and understood what the other was going through. When I felt I was struggling mentally, I was able to talk to Antoinette about it, which I really appreciated as I struggle to open up to a lot of people.

When restrictions were eased last summer we met up in Worthing, where Antoinette lives, and went for a walk along the beach with some fish and chips. We don't need to plan activities or lavish days out to have a good time, for us it's all about great conversation and food!

I'm not one of those people that has a lot of friends, but I have a few really important ones. I know I can call Antoinette when I need to and utterly rely on her strength and support.

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