

CHARLIE'S LITTLE ANGELS

LESSONS IN FRIENDSHIP

Mother-of-two Charlotte Butterfield says when it comes to building bonds and maintaining relationships, adults could learn a thing or two from the little folk



Charlotte Butterfield is editor of InsideOut magazine (insideoutmagazine.ae)

Back when spiral perms were all the rage, and people used phrases like ‘all the rage’, I was one of those hippy teenagers who stuck mantras all over their walls. Things like, “Don’t let weeds grow around your dreams” and in my feminist (single) stage, “A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle” was a temporary addition to the wall of quotes. One stalwart that remained on my inspiration wall for a number of years was, “A stranger is just a friend you haven’t met yet.”

Admittedly, if I had grown up in an inner city and not an outer village then safety may have precluded this from being a sensible school of thought but, as it was, it became my ethos for coping with change. In the transition from school to college, university to strange city, from adopted city to Dubai, I said yes to each and every social invitation and I entered each one thinking to myself, “Tonight, I might meet my new best friend.”

The sad thing is that as you get older, making friends becomes so much more of an effort. If you strike up a conversation with a stranger, it is greeted first with disbelief, then suspicion and then downright panic. When I was heavily pregnant with my daughter and all my friends were still staggering from one brunch to the next, I was stranded on my own little island of overweight loneliness until on one fateful trip to Mothercare to stock up on necessary unmentionables, I found myself standing bump to bump with a warm and friendly looking lady and we started talking about babies. “Joy of joys, yes,” I thought. “Humanity has been restored – I have a NBF and we can go to baby yoga together and commiserate over lost sleep and...”

For one brief moment everything was right with the world. Until I said, “We should swap numbers so we can keep in touch.” At least I think that’s what I said. But judging by her reaction I may well have said, “Let’s start sharing a house and raise our children together in a vegan commune,” because she frostily said, “I don’t think so, we’ve only just met.” And then that was that. She was gone.

I needn’t have worried though because as soon as the epidural wears off, you gather friends without even trying. The key to making good mother friends is to find a common ground

– and nothing bonds you better than comparing bags under your eyes and birth tales. In fact, you can’t avoid making friends when you have children – every school drop off and pick up is accompanied by snippets of small talk and, if you piece them all together, by the end of term you’ve had a proper conversation. (I love small talk. I’m at my happiest chatting away to people I barely know about stuff I barely know about.)

My five-year-old daughter shares my sixth sense about these things. She can sniff out a potential friend about half a kilometre away, it’s quite a gift. On a recent holiday to RAK (yes kids, as in Ras Al Khaimah... never let it be said that we don’t know how to have fun) she would utter the phrase, “Hi, my name’s Millie, shall we play together?” upwards of ten times a day. It was fabulous to see her seeking out girls around her age and seeing friendships blossom over a shared love of sticker books. She even went up to one girl who was eating a croissant, which had obviously been pilfered from breakfast for a mid-morning snack, and said, “Hi, my name’s Millie. I like croissants too. Shall we go down the slide together?” Brilliant. A shared penchant for pastries and a beautiful friendship is formed.

We could learn a lot from watching five year olds interact with each other. Even from the petty squabbles that invariably conclude with the crossly uttered, “You’re not my friend anymore,” because, as heartfelt as this sentence is when proclaimed in the heat of the moment, in the next minute a croissant, a sticker book, or some other reminder of the common ground shared is proudly dangled out between them to save the day. It’s amazing to see. All ill will disappears and they are back frolicking through life together. A life lesson for us all, perhaps? [A](#)

“As soon as the epidural wears off, you gather friends without trying. Nothing bonds you better than comparing bags under your eyes and birth tales”

