

Forever friends

No matter how high you fly, there's one person who will always keep your feet on the ground. And that's what makes her special – as three celebrities reveal

Interviews by Pam Francis

Channel 5 newsreader Emma Crosby, 37, met her best friend Joanna Parsons, 36, when both were children in Newbury, Berkshire. Emma says:

"I can remember playing in the street when I was 11 and this little smiley blonde girl bounded over and said, 'Hi, I'm Joanna.'

I'm an only child and Joanna arrived at the perfect time, when I needed a buddy to hang around with. Her home was always a mad house of fun, and her mum is lovely and quite eccentric. As soon as I walked through their front door, I knew that Joanna was going to be special. They used to look after animals and had a lamb called Chops in the garage and loads of dogs and chickens, with horses in a nearby field. My house was so boring in comparison.

Growing up, we did everything together. At lunchtime we'd bunk off school and pinch the keys to my dad's car. Then we'd go haring up and down the lanes in the grounds of Highclere Castle – now better known as Downton Abbey. We'd egg each other on to go faster, and once we drove the car into a wall.

When we were 17, Joanna started getting really close to her boyfriend, Robert, who is now her husband. I was a bit jealous as I didn't have a long-term boyfriend. But when she got married at 26, I could have done the same – with the boy who was the love of my life. I didn't though – I decided to take a different path. It was never my ambition to be

on the telly – I wanted to be a journalist – but I needed someone to keep my feet on the ground, and that person was Joanna.

There's not a thing that she doesn't know about me – the good stuff and the bad. She knows all my secrets and she is the voice of reason. Not that I have led a particularly wayward life but she has always been there when things went wrong, like when GMTV ended and we all lost our jobs. If I've had a really bad morning, for whatever reason, Joanna will call out of the blue. It's weird.

She is really supportive but she'll also tell me if I'm being too picky about men. Over the years I've had so many relationship disasters. I fell head over heels with this guy once and the first thing she said was, 'This will end in tears.' And it did. She doesn't beat about the bush.

Joanna has the most wonderful, stable, roses-round-the-picket-fence life. I know life isn't like that all the time, but she married Rob, her childhood sweetheart, who I adore, she lives in this wonderful house



Joanna and Emma (right) were childhood friends (inset) who are every bit as close today



and has three beautiful children. When I go round, everything is home-cooked. It's chaotic but it's a house of love.

I'm very lucky – I have a great city life in London, so we are very different in that respect.

There was a time in my twenties when Joanna and I didn't get together much. I was travelling a lot and being wooed by nice guys, taking me on great holidays. I never had a night in and would jet off to Bermuda or New York. Now that has definitely changed, and we're back together more. I'll be this old spinster and living with her and her family, or coming round to their house every Sunday for lunch.

Everybody loves Joanna. She is über-friendly and has this lovely, bubbly personality so it's hard not to. I can't imagine my life without her."

Joanna says: "From the day my family moved into the house opposite, Emma and I became inseparable. We were always getting into scrapes. Emma's bedroom was opposite mine, so one evening we decided it would be a good idea to talk through yoghurt pots and a bit of string from bedroom to bedroom. It didn't really work, so we ended up screaming

across the road at each other out of the windows until Emma's mum went absolutely mental.

We always used to buy the same thing, whether it was trainers or dungarees. And if one of us was feeling ill at school and went to the sick bay, the other one would follow pretty quickly.

I went on several holidays with Emma and her parents, mainly to Cyprus or Portugal, and we were unbelievably naughty. From the ages of 14 or 15, we'd sneak out to clubs until about five in the morning. And then Emma's dad would knock on the door at about seven and say, 'I can't understand why you're so sleepy.'

Emma is like a sister to me, and my mum treats her almost as another daughter. And as well as being godmother to my eldest daughter, Francesca – who's seven and calls her GoddyEmma – she's also godmother to my sister's daughter.

I'm a bit boring because I'm married with three kids and settled in the countryside. Emma, on the other hand, is doing all these glam things. Some of the time I'm quite envious, other times I'm not.

Emma always comes to me with her love-life dilemmas. I am her agony aunt, regularly saying, 'Oh for God's sake!'

I'm so proud of what she's achieved, and she invites us to lots of celeb events. But when she comes over or we go out, she doesn't have a scrap of make-up on and she doesn't care. I love that about

Em. Her only fault is that she is awful with time keeping. If Emma says she is arriving at 11, we know she won't be there until 12.

Once, when we went to Barcelona for a friend's hen do, Emma missed the flight because she was having a boyfriend crisis. So we all waited the next morning for her to arrive, then pickpockets took her passport and purse. That was the ultimate Crosby meltdown."

Emma presents 5 News at 5 every weeknight on Channel 5.

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