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between friends

RETRO BABES For Jobstreet.com head of communications Chong See Ming and singer Janet Lee, their friendship has been cemented by their passion for all things vintage. As See Ming prepares for her wedding this year, Janet plays best friend, maid of honour and a shoulder to cry on in a friendship that goes a lot deeper than the bottom of a pile of previously loved items. By Reeta Sidhu.

How did the two of you meet?

Janet: I was fresh out of college and I met her on my first day of work. See Ming was so friendly, she volunteered to bring me upstairs to the boss' office. She was the first genuinely friendly, warm person that I came across in KL and that impression stayed.

See Ming: I remember being enthralled by her enthusiasm and naiveté, and at once felt very sisterly as she's a few years younger and had just moved to Kuala Lumpur from Taiping. I guess I saw myself in her – a small-town gal from Perak finding her way in the big city.

Was it an instant friendship?

Janet: I was 19 at the time and very bubbly, so See Ming and I hit it off almost instantly. She took to my young, star-struck and easily excitable personality very quickly and she became my mentor in no time.

See Ming: I really felt a connection with her. Perhaps we really are soul sisters.

What does the friendship mean to you?

Janet: It's like having a life partner, except she's a woman. Having this life partner means See Ming will always be there to witness my happiness, achievements and experiences.

See Ming: She will always be a big part of my life. I introduce her to everyone as my best friend although, honestly, sometimes we both take the "best friend" part for granted. The significance of this was highlighted in a recent conversation. Janet came with Sim and I on a house-hunting expedition and I introduced her to the real estate agent as "my best friend". The middle-aged lady was visibly impressed: she said, "Wow, you have a best friend! That's really good!" We were quite surprised at her reaction, and it struck us that not everybody can lay claim to having a best friend, especially one

that has grown with him or her through the years.

So you play quite a large role in each other's life?

Janet: She's asked me to be the maid of honour at her wedding, which I guess is quite a big role. She's the girl who comes to watch me perform, who buys me the books I want to read, who goes to the hospital with me when I'm not well, who gives me money when I'm broke and offers me her home when I'm homeless. And I'm the first person she calls when she has exciting news, and the one who helps her scout for apartments and wedding dresses. I'm also the first one to hear all the bad news.

See Ming: Although I was kind of her mentor in the early years simply because I'm older, we're really on a level platform now. She's matured a lot and I couldn't be more proud of what wonderful progress she has made with her singing and career. I cannot imagine not having Janet in my life. She's my sounding board, my fashion consultant (sometimes!) and my shoulder to cry on.

What keeps your friendship going?

Janet: Things have been good between the two of us. It's like magic and cannot be explained or analysed. It's probably in the way we treat each other with honesty and openness, and how we support each other in everything emotional or practical. Of course, the fact that we never stay pissed at each other for more than a day is yet another thing that glues us together.

See Ming: I think we have been through thick and thin. Nothing fazes us anymore. There were patches in our relationship where we drifted off slightly for a while – not calling or meeting very often – but we always eventually came back to the sanctuary of the friendship and the trust that we have. We've been through every important milestone in each other's life such as career and relationship changes, and we've celebrated many birthdays and achievements. We have also had



the blessing of sharing several good friends whom we have met over the years, and these mutual friendships give us a very deep sense of sharing.

Would you say that the two of you are quite different?

Janet: (Laughs) We are quite different in many ways, yet rather similar in many others. The interests we have in common are flea markets, books and travelling. And there are some we don't share: she's into gardening and I'm into singing. Different as we are, however, the people in the flea markets have spent years thinking we're sisters!

See Ming: We are outgoing and we both have an insatiable curiosity about people and things in general. I think the best part of our friendship is how we try to balance each other out. When I'm dreamy and impractical, Janet will give me some come-back-to-Earth advice, and when she has her head in the clouds, I give her a few gentle tugs.

