



STORY BY *Nicole Partridge* | PHOTOGRAPH BY *Joshua Morris*

Anita Pahor (right), 45, founding patron of the Red Cross Society of Women Leaders, met Tania Harris, 48, a pastor and founder of global ministry God Conversations, at theological college. The two forged an enduring friendship.

**A**NITA: I was at a crossroads when I met Tania. I was 32 and had spent 10 years climbing the corporate ladder and travelling the world when I found myself seeking answers to some of life's biggest questions, so I signed up for two years of theological college. I was in class one day when I walks this tall, stunning brunette who began instructing us on the Old Testament. I thought she was so beautiful and intelligent and I was immediately drawn to her.

Weeks later, Tania and I met for coffee and one of the first questions she asked was, "So, what do you think you've been put on this earth to do?" This wasn't a conversational appetiser; this girl went straight to mains. I remember thinking, "I like this woman." Six months later, when Tania's accommodation fell through, I offered her a room in my tiny Sydney shoebox.

Over the past 13 years, living together on and off, Tania has become my best friend, my sister and my confidant. Our friendship works because we know each other so well and we are both committed to learning, growing and helping each other improve. Tania is so wise and has helped me structure my beliefs so they are not loose, weird, nebulous concepts.

She's taught me how to know the voice of God and how He might be directing me.

We can sit for hours on the couch with a glass of wine and talk about everything from careers to boys to family and how we navigate moral and ethical issues. She is also fiercely loyal. A few years ago, my heart was broken after a two-year relationship ended. I found myself in a foetal position, howling on the kitchen floor, feeling as though someone had ripped out my guts. Tania made me cups of tea, took me shopping and gave me foot massages.

Not many of my suitors pass the Tania test. One time, I met a guy online. Tania and I met up with him for drinks and a show afterwards, but midway through the performance, "Groper Gary" grabbed my inner thigh. I thought he was going to hurl me over his back and carry me home. I looked over at Tania – she was bristling and looked like she'd been sucking 10 lemons. Afterwards we had a good laugh.

Both Tania and I have faced the prospect we might never marry. I remind her I have a little place in Brighton in Melbourne and if this all turns to crap, I'll install one of those electric chairs that moves up and down the stair rail.

Navigating life's up and downs is much easier with Tania as my cheerleader, although I laugh at how different we are: I'm a sprinter and Tania is a distance runner. I like change and she doesn't. I love loud music, she'll have Enya on repeat. I am an optimistic serial dater and she'll happily wait for "the one". Stylistically, I am New York warehouse, Tania is Scottish castle. I love the beach and she loves to hike.

Recently, I agreed to go on a hard-core hiking trip. On the second day, it rained. Tania, who is very adventurous, had her outdoor backpack and rainproof poncho and looked like she was about to climb Mont Blanc. I was drenched, my hair stuck to my face like seaweed. I burst into tears and said, "I can't walk any further." Tania shoved trail mix in my face like I was a child. It did the trick. A few minutes later I was able to continue. Pushing me to go further and be stronger in life has been Tania's mission. Who wouldn't want a friend like that?

**T**ANIA: The first thing I noticed about Anita was her mass of blonde curls, wide green eyes and Queen of England posture. She was in the front row, pen in hand and ready to engage.

As it turned out, Anita's hunger to learn was driven by a deep desire to make a difference in the world. Soon after we met, she said something that floored me. "I want to take the best of global capitalism and give it a humanitarian heart." At that point I was thinking, "Well, what do we have here?" My next thought was, "Oh, I like you ... and I want us to keep in contact."

We come from vastly different backgrounds. I was raised in a conservative Christian home, didn't listen to the radio, go to many parties or drink alcohol. I think I swore once in year 6. I was introverted and insecure. Anita, on the other hand, had lived a glamorous, jet-setting executive life, flitting from New York to London.

She has a free-flowing side. Being friends with Anita, who is larger than life, has given me the confidence to be more creative, have more fun, wear those six-inch heels, dye my hair and sometimes even wear red.

Sharing a home with Anita is like having a live-in life coach, stylist and chef. Anita is good at everything from strategic planning to gourmet cooking and design. Her posture, physically and metaphorically, is tall and strong and confident and she's not afraid to challenge me. One time, we were cleaning our teeth when, quick as a whip, Anita yanked my favourite black silk scrunchy and flushed it down the toilet. "That's from the '90s," she said. "You can't wear that any more." I was shocked at her audacity. No one had told me scrunchies were out of fashion.

Anita always looks like she's stepped off the cover of *Vogue*, but she's just as comfortable in a slum in India. Her love and compassion for everyone, irrespective of position, is stunning.

In many ways, Anita and I are like an old married couple. We finish each other's sentences, we argue over how to stack the dishwasher. We share meals and will be each other's plus-one at events. We are each other's emergency contact, support one another through life's challenges, and make sure we always have somewhere to go on Christmas Day. I look forward to getting married one day but, to be honest, Anita will be a super-hard act to follow. ■

66

*In many ways we are like an old married couple. We finish each other's sentences, we argue over how to stack the dishwasher.*

99