



'... I realised she'd saved my life'

Personal stylist Chantelle Znideric, 29, was adopted from Indonesia when she was just three months old by her English mother, Gill, 59, and father, Frank. Chantelle now lives in Surrey with boyfriend Hayden

Chantelle says: "My mum and dad adopted me while they were working in Indonesia, and were always open about how the adoption came about. We lived there for a while and then they brought me back to Devon when I was five. There were only two non-white children and I stuck out like a sore thumb. I started to resent my colour and it made me rebel. By 12, I was being hauled before the teachers and I was always in trouble."

I was selfish and never considered my mum's feelings. She'd always been so loving, showing me videos of Indonesia, so I grew up knowing where I was from. When I think of the things I said, like how she wasn't my real mother, I feel ashamed.

The turning point in our relationship came when I was 15 and my parents took me back to Indonesia for a holiday. I saw a girl of the same age by the roadside. She was filthy, bare-footed and carrying heavy rocks on her head. It dawned on me, if it wasn't for my parents, I could have been that girl. From then on, things changed. I felt able to let her into my life and we developed a real friendship. We started going shopping and spent time going through her wardrobe. I'd give her suggestions of how to put together outfits. It's something I'd never done before, but I found I enjoyed it and, now, it's what I do for a living.

Since then, I tell my mum all the time how much she means to me, but she just brushes it off. She seems to have forgotten just how awful I was.

Now I've realised how important my family is, I want to let Mum know how much I love her, and how much I appreciate what they did for me, and it's something I'm grateful for every day."

Gill says: "Chantelle has always been more than a daughter to me. Our decision to adopt was sudden – when we first saw Chantelle, she was very sick with malnutrition – she weighed just 3.2kg – and we knew we couldn't leave her there. But, although we moved to Devon, I've always made sure Chantelle knew where she came from.

Visiting Indonesia was a defining moment in our relationship. I can't really remember Chantelle giving us many problems, although she insists she

was dreadful. Of course, there was a bit of angst through puberty, but I think that's a rite of passage for any teen. Now, we're the best of friends, and she was very supportive when, six years ago, we decided to move back to Indonesia to teach.

People say Chantelle is lucky to have been adopted from a third-world country, but the joy she's brought to my life outweighs anything. Not only has she been the best daughter in the world, but she has become my best friend. I'm so proud of the person she's become and everything she's achieved, and it goes without saying I always seek her styling advice when buying anything new!"

● For more information on Chantelle's personal-styling services, visit www.toylisa.com