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FROM THE EDITOR

At TVNZ they call it "the Jim Hickey factor" – New Zealand's most affable weatherman strikes such a positive note with the public that international consultants can't believe the approval ratings Jim gets when viewers are quizzed about their favourite star. Jim's 6.30am counterpart Tamati Coffey provokes the same reaction.

Tamati and Jim – one a soon-to-be-married gay Maori man, the other a church-going father of four – are about as warm as a Christchurch nor'wester in February. They not only bring us the weather, they make us feel good about it, even when it's hailing golf balls.

This week both meteorological megastars feature in the magazine. The very private Jim allowed the Weekly into his home above a New Plymouth hangar and talked about the daredevil pursuits that have wife Sue praying for his safety each flight. Tamati's current hobby is a bit safer – he's renovating the "dive" he and partner Tim bought two years ago. Jim and Tamati are predicting a warm summer ahead for all of us and big life changes for them both in 2012. As always with these two, the outlook is sunny.

Sarah Stuart, Editor
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ANNABEL LANGBEIN:

‘WHY I LOVE

MY FRIENDS’

The cook speaks candidly over lunch with her closest mates

Annabel says her friends help 'keep things real'



In the hectic whirlwind that is Annabel Langbein's life, there are two things that she is never, ever too busy for.

One is her family, the other is her friends. "Friendships are such an important part of the rhythm of life," says the popular Kiwi cook. "I don't know where I would be without my friends. They help to keep things real. It doesn't matter how busy life is, you need to make time for friends."

Today is a case in point. It's been a mad week with her new book, *Free Range in the City*,

to promote and tomorrow morning she's up bright and early to catch a flight to Melbourne, where she's doing more publicity work.

But that hasn't stopped mum-of-two Annabel from inviting a few of her nearest and dearest pals over for a "girlie" lunch.

Over a delicious meal of crab shooters, bruschetta with white bean topping, duck and mango salad and strawberry custard tarts ("all prepared in advance and just assembled at the last minute – so easy!" says Annabel), there are fits of giggles as old memories are recalled and new ones created.

Stories fly around the table

of fishing trips in which the prized snapper was dropped overboard, of picnic lunches in cemeteries and of partying in a beached boat. Then the tales turn to topics that cannot be repeated in a family magazine and the peals of laughter grow even louder.

"This is why friends are so great," smiles Annabel. She loves the fact that they accept her for who she is, regardless of the celebratory status she gained when her TV show, *The Free Range Cook*, became a huge hit. "They don't care if you're having a bad hair day."

Annabel's pals come from different backgrounds. Lina Le Grice and Margot Wills



Annabel's pals (from left) Kim, Kerry, Charlotte, Lina and Margot all admire her down-to-earth personality



Cooking for people she cares about makes the TV host happy

are housewives, Kim Owen has a table decorating business, Kerry Barris Brown runs an advertising and marketing company and Charlotte Gerrard is a private investigator.

Some are great cooks themselves, while others prefer eating fabulous meals to creating them.

One thing they all have in

"I don't know where I'd be without my friends"

common is an admiration for the way Annabel has remained the same unpretentious person they've always known and loved, despite her career taking off so spectacularly in the last few years.

"Fame has not gone to her head," says Charlotte, who has known Annabel for about six years. "She's the same natural person she has always been,

and you don't ever feel as if you are in the presence of someone really well-known."

Annabel had already become something of a celebrity by the time Kim got to know her two years ago, but she says she's never seen any sign of airs and graces.

"Straightaway you could tell she was so genuine. She's just very down to earth."

Adds Margot, a friend for nearly 20 years, "What you see on TV is what you get in real life. Annabel loves to nourish her family and friends, and to share her passion with other people. It's not what she does for a living, it's who she is."

Kerry agrees that Annabel "lives and breathes food", and says she's impressed with the way her great mate of the past 25 years handles being in the public eye. She recalls being on holiday with Annabel and going shopping for shoes the morning after a big night out.

"We were feeling like death warmed up and suddenly we were surrounded by all these women who wanted to talk to her. I would have said, 'Go away, I've got a hangover,' but she's so nice and she stopped to chat to them. It's because she just loves what she does."

Meanwhile, Lina – a friend for nearly two decades – says it's come as no surprise that Annabel has risen to the top in her field. "We knew she would be a household name because of the kind of person she is. She works so hard and we're very happy for her."

For Annabel, happiness is cooking good food for people she cares about and she hopes the recipes in her books will inspire people to do the same.

And she vows that no matter how frantic her life gets – there are even more demands on her time now that her TV show is screening overseas and her books are selling well around the world – there will always be plenty of room in her life for her pals.

"Do you want to be looking back when you're old and thinking, 'Oh yes, I remember that work I did,' or do you want to have memories of the laughs you shared with friends over a meal?" says Annabel. "I know which I'd prefer!"

Donna Fleming



STRAWBERRY CUSTARD TARTS

Ready in 20 minutes, serves 8

1 cup vanilla custard
½ cup mascarpone
Zest of ½ lemon
8 sweet pastry cases
Strawberries, sliced
Raspberry jam

1. To make custard filling, mix 2 tbsp custard into the mascarpone to soften.
2. Stir in remaining custard and lemon zest.
3. Spoon into 8 x 10cm diameter cooked sweet pastry cases.
4. Top with strawberry slices and brush with a little sieved raspberry jam to glaze.

For crab shooters, bruschetta with white bean topping and duck and mango salad recipes, see *Free Range in the City* (Annabel Langbein Media, \$59.95).