

FRIENDS LIKE THESE

Facebook Face-Off

The friendship was officially over. How did Ariel Leve know? She'd been de-friended online

I SAT FOR A FEW SECONDS STARING at the computer screen, feeling horrified and confused. The woman who had moments before been a close friend was now an ex-friend denying me access to her Wall, barring me from receiving her status updates, effectively saying: you're dead to me. I felt powerless. I called a mutual friend and told her what had happened. She then discovered that she, too, had been de-friended.

At first, I was amused. Was I suddenly back in school? Then the paranoia kicked in. What was she saying that she didn't want me to see? I asked another mutual friend to see if she still had access. She did. What does it say on her Wall, I asked? She told me: 'Nothing says a friendship is over like deleting photos from Facebook'. She had officially ended the relationship by removing pictures of us from her account and announcing it in a status update.

The fight that had precipitated the end of our friendship occurred, unfortunately, via email. I was upset about a decision she had made and let her know. I did not accept the reason she gave and believed there was more to it. No one likes to be confronted or held accountable for their actions, and I regret that I didn't pick up the phone to discuss my feelings. But the emails snowballed so rapidly – a flurry of harsh words back and forth, each one escalating the situation, until her final email stated that she wasn't interested in discussing it, or being friends, any more. She wished me the best.

Paradoxically, she had been the cheerleader for me to join Facebook in the first place. She was a new friend, someone



I had instant chemistry with. We'd met nine months earlier at a gallery opening and I felt I'd met my long-lost sister. It was a love story – non-sexual, which is often more powerful because you don't anticipate there will be an end.

There were, of course, differences in our personalities; in particular, she was a devoted BlackBerry user and advocate of social-networking sites and I wasn't. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the advantages of getting instant responses and communicating at all times with her, purchased an iPhone and joined Facebook.

It was more than the technology of modern-day life that doomed the relationship. The real issue had to do with expectations and feelings. When I confronted her, it was because I believed there were underlying problems in our friendship that were not being addressed. In the end, I was proved right, though it was a hollow victory. And while the communication failure was accelerated through cyberspace, it would have occurred regardless.

Since all this, I have thought a lot about the dangers of social-networking sites and the impact they have on relationships. When you have 1,000 'friends', you become

accustomed to keeping in touch in a way that is manageable and controlled. It creates a false sense of intimacy and means that real communication – face-to-face or even over the telephone – feels like an assault: too close for comfort, too confrontational, too risky.

Now that some time has passed, my emotions have neutralised and I've moved on. No animosity, no regrets. There are days when I miss being able to share things with her, but, as with any break-up, the wound heals. I try to focus on my own behaviour and let the rest go. I've always been direct with my friends and, in the future, I'll make sure that if what's upsetting me is important, it's addressed in person, not over email.

Sometimes I wonder whether things would have turned out differently if I had waited to speak with her in person, but I don't think so. We move through the world with different ways of coping, and it seems strangely fitting that the friendship ended in a disconnected way. Literally and figuratively: the writing was on the wall. This article was not sent via BlackBerry. ■ *Ariel Leve's The Cassandra Chronicles (£12.99, Portobello Books) is out now.*