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4 trips to expand the mind
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5 THINGS I HAVE LEARNT ABOUT *change*

Change may be good – but it isn't easy. Red's grown-up intern Babs Vinden-Cantrell reveals how she's following her heart as she moves from military to civilian life

Photograph **Victoria Birkinshaw**



I've worked up Himalayan mountains, in the middle of the Saudi desert and on a ski slope in Austria. I've seen life at its worst and best, from dealing with the casualties of an explosion, to the sincerity of the Masai people. That's the joy of working in the military. I joined at 18, and still love it at 49, the comradeship, the routine of our own way of living, working and socialising. But you know what they say about policemen getting younger? For me, it's the soldiers who are getting younger. It was when they started actually being younger than my own children, Jay, 20, Paige, 19, and Honor, 16, that I began to think it might be time for me to move on.

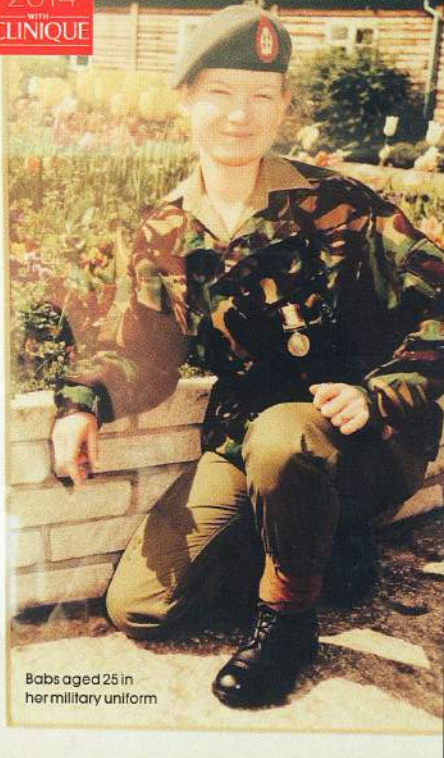
My daughter, Honor, played football quite seriously, for both Derby County

and England Under 15s. It was while standing on the touchline that I became fascinated by the mind and how it can be all *for* you, or possibly against. I watched games where the coach employed mind tricks that changed the play completely. So I took a part-time university course at Leeds Metropolitan University in business and executive coaching and counselling. The army gave me the days off, and I paid the fees – a fortune, but worth it.

I started to use my qualifications in my day job, working with service personnel and their families. That made me realise just how people of all ages are affected by blocks, things that stop them from progressing. So many people I spoke to had unfulfilled aspirations.

I began to look at my own life, too, and decided it was time to act, to start being selfish. My army contract finishes in September, and I'm leaving military life, moving off the army base after living in army housing for nearly 20 years. To do what? Well, I've always enjoyed writing – I've even won a couple of competitions in the past. The timing was serendipitous; I read about the month's internship at *Red*, and realised I could do it using my resettlement leave from the Army. I would discover how magazines work and start moving in the direction of my dream, to be a freelance writer.

And now I'm here, at *Red*: way out of my comfort zone, on the brink of a huge life change. On my first day, I was given a few self-help books to assess. One of >>



Babs aged 25 in her military uniform

these, *The Mind Makeover* by Sharron Lowe, hit a nerve. Lowe, a business success coach to brands such as Clinique, Estée Lauder and Chanel, says while we're constantly encouraged to make-over our appearance, we neglect our most important asset, our mind.

Nothing will ever happen, she writes, until you are motivated to take action. And she identifies the two key emotions needed to motivate change.

1) Desperation. You must take stock of your mortality, ownership of your precious life, commit to living to your full potential every day. For me, I knew with absolute certainty that *not* writing was *not* an option.

2) Inspiration. It's that feeling you get when you achieve something, the passion and enthusiasm and pure love that you have towards it. The feeling I get when I write.

So, I've taken stock, I've moved on from 30 years of working for a single institution, and I'm committed to reinventing myself. My first step towards that? Just being here, at *Red*. As for my future writing plans? Watch this space.

In the meantime, here are five things I've learnt on my life-change journey so far (see box, right).

5 things I've learnt about reinvention

1 PUT IN SUPPORT SYSTEMS

We're all in this together, says Sharron Lowe in *The Mind Makeover*. I'm lucky enough to have the backing of my children, as well as my boss in the military. I discussed my dreams with my children, and they were right behind me, told me to go for it, that whatever happens we will pull together as a family. My boss sent me an email on my first day at *Red* saying how impressed he was with my drive to go with my heart. It's their support that gives me the self-belief to pursue my dreams.

2 ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

At *Red*, I was sent on an evening course, *How To Realise Your Potential*, at The School of Life in London (theschooloflife.com). The building frontage is unassuming but, when you go in, it's an Aladdin's cave of inspirational books and courses to suit everyone. Our instructor, Cathy Haynes, told us she'd gone into coaching relatively late herself, just five years before, moving across from a successful but unfulfilling career in art curation. In her previous job, she'd missed talking to people. And while she isn't on nearly as much money now, she says her sense of worth more than makes up for it. A diverse array of attendees eagerly listened, from stay-at-home mums to students, musicians, office workers and a banker.

I loved Haynes' concept that potential is an attitude rather than a skill. I know I have potential, but this course encourages you to do something about it. 'If you always do what you've always done, then you'll always get what you've always got' rang true to me. If I don't make changes, my life won't change. It's a domino effect: you have to push one thing to make the others move. And once you have an attitude of progressing towards your goal, says Haynes, you're on your way to being successful.

3 SELFISH ISN'T A CRIME

For the first time in more than 20 years, I'm thinking about what I want my future to be – as opposed to being Mum, Taxi, Cook and General Manager, putting the family's needs before my own. Now I realise that to have good life balance, I need my own time. So when I'm looking at what to do next – freelance writing, life skills coaching – it's what I'm interested in that counts.

4 ASK YOURSELF: WHAT ARE YOU MISSING?

On a *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway* day course, run by Alison Hollingworth of Steps Forward (steps-forward.co.uk), we were told to divide life into six segments: family, socialising, work, leisure, charity/community and self. Mine was pretty much all work and family. There was no social, little charity, little leisure and a smattering of self. Clearly, this needed to change. With my children

old enough to be doing their own thing, I'm putting some balance back into life. I'm going to find time to see friends, take full advantage of my gym membership, and put my coaching and counselling skills into practice by working with military and sporting charities.

With her children, from left, Paige, Honor and Jay



5 JUST GET ON WITH IT

Making the time to sit down and write has been a challenge, but I've done it. It's a skill I learnt in the military – just getting on with things – that will stand me in good stead in this new life. I've taken my laptop along to my daughter's football matches and typed in the stands, and I've stayed up far too late finishing off things I've wanted to get written. And it's paid off. I've finished my first book, a story of survival, values, keeping positive and lucky breaks, and sent it off to publishers. Who knows what will happen next, but I'm creating my own future and going for it. ■

Read more about Babs' month at *Red* at... REDONLINE.CO.UK. Do you want to be our next grown-up intern? See opposite for your chance to be a part of the *Red* team