

Real mum says

THE PRIMARY YEARS

A real woman's
guide to getting
your life back



After many years of being a successful professional woman in a tough industry, as well as a mum and a partner – My world fell apart around me with a terrifying, paralyzing experience.

I thought my life had ended, only to find it was just beginning.

Four weeks later I had the beginning of my new life handed to me – a blank canvas.

I've joined forces with wellbeing expert Roy Martin to share with Real Mums, the lessons that I learned the hard way.

*Be honest, have you ever thought
"give me back my life!"?*

Thirty four year-old working mum of two Emma shares her true story of recovery and reveals how a mid life crisis can happen at any age and under the most bizarre circumstances.

Whether you're a mum, work full time, have been ill, or are just feeling pulled in all directions, we all sometimes feel we're at the bottom of the pecking order, having lost touch with what really makes us tick.

Emma provides practical survival tips for real mums of all ages to make their lives their own again. These tips are explored in more depth by wellbeing expert Roy Martin MBE to give you the best of both worlds, so that you too can make your life your own again.



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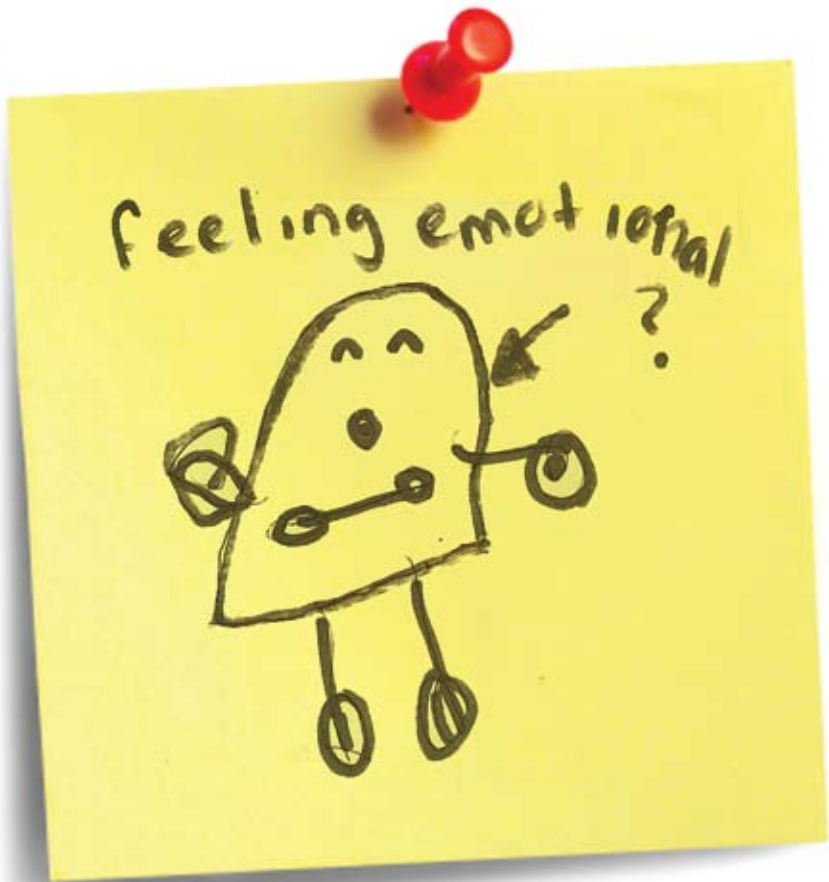
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DISCLAIMER – The common sense bit

ALL COMMENTS, VIEWS AND EXAMPLES WITHIN THIS BOOK ARE TO BE SEEN AS A GUIDE AND NOT ALTERNATIVES TO ANY MEDICATION OR PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL ADVICE YOU MAY BE CURRENTLY RECEIVING. IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY WORKING WITH A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL, PLEASE CONSULT THEM BEFORE MAKING ANY CHANGES. DO NOT STOP ANY MEDICATION OR THERAPY UNTIL YOU HAVE CONSULTED YOUR PROFESSIONAL.

Introduction



Q. . What happens when a Real Mum joins forces with a wellbeing expert?

A. You get your life back

I've written this book because I want you to question your life – but in a good way. Start chewing things over a bit more. If you take one thought from this book that makes a slight improvement to your life then I'm a happy woman.

I've laid this book out in an agony aunt, Q and A style so that you can dip in and out of it at your leisure, because the chances are that you're 'time-poor', and sometimes you need to read something and then stop to reflect on it. I expect it'll take you ages to finish reading it, but that's fine.

I chose Roy Martin as the wellbeing expert for the book because not only is he a close personal friend but he is my guru in all things wellbeing based. He has a stream of experiences and qualifications in everything from psychology and NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) to EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique)

which I shan't bore you with now but I have included at the back of the book. More importantly Roy is also a real dad and husband, and he played an intrinsic part in my recovery from chronic illness. I believe in him 100%, and he believes in me and Real Mums everywhere who are doing their best to be superhuman.

With a little bit of support – no matter who it's from - you can begin taking steps towards getting your life back whether you are married, single or other.

I'm not implying that you are dissatisfied with your kids – it's just about striking a balance between them and you.

I had a lot of questions and answers from my experience that I felt applied to most mums and Roy has added his expert view to ensure that these answers are explored in as much depth as possible. The Expert's response to some of my questions may have similarities, as many aspects of deeper levels of human behaviour are linked.

If you are a single mum, the basis of taking on board some of the advice in this book is to begin developing a support group perhaps with mums at school or at your ante natal group. Begin a babysitting exchange with mums who you know well. If you are unable to babysit in the evenings because you are single, offer your babysitting services to married mums during the day, and perhaps they can return the favour during the evening when their partners are home.

Chat with your friends or family and begin asking for help. You will also find local websites offering support and connections with people in your local area. Local church groups are supportive and you don't have to be religious to be part of them.



Preface

"...a bystander, looking onto my own, lovely, perfect life."

Having worked in PR and writing for 13 years, everyone I've worked with says they're going to write a book – me included.

Well, because of circumstances beyond my control I have been compelled to start writing some words of wisdom about being a woman, motherhood and life.

I'm a mum of two beautiful and enchanting, noisy, challenging daughters aged three and six, and was happy with my partner although we haven't got round to getting married even after 14 years.

So what brings me to write this book?

I recently had the terrifying, paralyzing experience of having my life taken away from me. Then four weeks later I had it handed back to me.

I wouldn't call it a near death experience but more like being a bystander, looking onto my own, lovely, perfect life.

I had contracted Labyrinthitis – a little known virus, and one that nobody really understands and you get very little sympathy for. Over the course of 6-12 months the virus caused my health to decline to the point where my body said 'enough is enough' and I collapsed at home (after racing out of a hair appointment with wet hair!) and was taken away in an ambulance.

The virus had left my body struggling to walk and talk, let alone have chance to fight off the secondary infections. In summary, I was bed ridden for a month, unable to walk talk, wee, poo or eat unassisted.

Right then, that's enough about 'the illness' which I often refer to as 'the exorcism', as that's how it felt and probably how it looked!



*" I love my life and I want it back.
But not all of it."*

I am now in the privileged position to have been forced to see my life from an outsider's perspective – a busy mum, working freelance as and when I found the time.

When I woke from my almost vegetative – but totally conscious – state, that's when the real work began. I had a blank canvas. My body was a blank canvas; my calf muscles which had been lovingly built up through running 5 miles a week and attending a pricey gym, had wasted away.

My mind and my emotions were numb. I had no energy or inclination to feel excitement or any emotions towards anything. All I felt was anxiety and fear for the future.

Having had too much thinking time and wrestling internally to stay focused on recovery, I had analysed my life again and again. My conclusion was that I love my life and I want it back. But not all of it.

Now that I am stronger and with the help of family friend and wellbeing expert Roy Martin MBE who I jokingly refer to as my guru; it's time to take control of my life, my very own blank canvas and create to my heart's desire.

I have realized I don't want ALL of my life back, just the bits I like.

This is my blank canvas and if you can learn how to re-jig your life to recreate your own without going through what I did, then it was definitely worth me putting pen to paper!

In this book, you will find out things about yourself that took me months of immobility and boredom to discover. (And I've summarized it all because I know how busy you are...)

About Real Mum

So here's a bit about me to help you relate to me. It's often easy to assume that people don't 'have a story' and that they are simply the contented, tired, stressed, successful, or average person that you see before you.

I popped into the world on April 8th 1976, little sister to five year old Sarah. Sarah instantly noticed that I had huge pointy ears and set about making a toadstool mobile to hang above my cot to remind everyone that I looked like a pixie. We have shared this dry sense of humour and the ability to laugh wryly as huge changes are happening in our lives, ever since.

We grew up and still live in a lovely suburban area in the Midlands near to a wonderfully huge park. I have loads of happy memories of long walks after Sunday lunch, something that we do with our children now.

Like most children of the early 80s I enjoyed brownies, gymnastics, Top of the Pops, Duran Duran and collecting stickers and rubbers. I was naturally quite shy and in awe of my bubbly, funny, older sister. Laughter was mine and my sister's favourite hobby as well as spending lots of time with my mum's twin sister and my two cousins. This is something that is mimicked by mine and my sister's children today – the cousins are very close and a reassuring comfort zone for one another.

My parents remained married but my father was not around much, so my mum, sister and I set about making the most of being 'the girls'.

To some degree I grew up fairly quickly and have always felt nearer the same age as my sister who is five years older than me. I couldn't wait to become an adult and prove what a success I could be in the world. I've always felt very strong and determined and sure that I would be a success. As you can imagine this feeling of strength and invincibility did not combine well with my sudden experience of loss of control during serious illness!

I'm so pleased that I now have two little girls because I really feel that if you

have a sister you have a ready made best friend who will never judge you, and with whom you will get through anything.

When I was nine my parents divorced and my mum, sister and I, moved house just down the road and made a fresh start. It felt fantastic to officially be just 'the girls'. The good times began and there was a steady stream of boys, rows, hangovers, clubbers, and fashion crises at our new house.

I always got my grades at school (I was a secret swot!) but I rebelled with various friends. Throughout I always had a constant friend in Emma G from the age of four. At school we were known as Emma G and Emma C – and still are. Emma's mum and mine have also remained friends through thick and thin. Emma and I were recently featured in Cosmopolitan magazine as lifelong friends. Emma and I went to the same primary, junior and grammar school. We shared holidays to New York, drunken Uni nights out and all the latest fads – from mountain bikes to store cards! Although we went through phases where we really didn't have much in common, we still drifted together.

When I was 13 myself and another friend enjoyed hanging around the local skateboard ramp. There my attention turned to a gorgeous long blonde haired skateboarder. We fell madly in love for eight months which is a long time when you're 13. We'd meet after school and share his personal stereo, walking round the shops holding hands and sharing the odd sneaky fag. He would give me his puffa jacket to wear to keep me warm and do loads of snogging.

We drifted apart and would bump into each from time to time and declare our love for each other.

When we were 19 I came home from Uni for Christmas. Skaterboy and I bumped into one another in a local pub. He came back to my house to frolic in the snow as my mum was away – and the rest is history. He is now my wonderful other half and daddy to my two beautiful daughters.



At the risk of sound cheesy, he is my absolute hero.

Throughout much of my life, I have kept a diary. I only have to dip into these to recapture my absolute infatuation twenty years ago, with the man I am finally due to marry next year after over 14 years together.

Writing is something that can be a very therapeutic way of getting your thoughts into some kind of order and something that I naturally seem to turn to during periods of massive change in my life, eg: puberty, illness etc. As a 'coper' it's something that works well for me as I can start working things out as I spill my heart out onto the page.

After leaving Middlesex University (or Polyversity as I call it) in North London, and well and truly getting London life out of my system - I took the difficult decision to return to the Midlands to be with my family and Paul and to get a head start on my career, even though lots of my friends were going travelling. Once again I was eager to be a real adult and to whizz through the career years in order to get to the part where I could start creating the perfect family home.

After getting many doors slammed in my face, I finally got a small job in a PR agency earning 8K and doing mainly crappy jobs such as photocopying and stuffing envelopes. I was determined and invincible and I worked my way up the greasy career pole for the next ten years, buying into the whole 'work hard play hard' and 'ladette' ethos of the time. I always planned to work freelance and have children – and after nearly ten years of hard graft and planning, I finally had the experience to do this.

I had enjoyed working long days and putting my all into my jobs and didn't mind working unpaid overtime because I was passionate about what I did. Like many people, I always aim to do my best at everything I do even though I cringe at women who describe themselves as 'competitive',

I experienced the usual bullies in the workplace and I would team up with my workmate at the time and humour once again would get us through.

I strove to be the perfect worker, in order to have the skills to run the perfect freelance business when I spread my wings and began working for myself. I was very focussed.

At 26 Skaterboy and I (who was now Salesman) had had enough of 'work hard play hard'. I got pregnant but I had a miscarriage. I shed a few tears and ploughed back into my work and partying at full pelt as I didn't really know what else to do.

We decided to turn this into a positive and do all the long haul trips we'd dreamt of such as Thailand and Kenya. When I was 28 we got pregnant with our first daughter and the rest is history. I didn't struggle with pregnancy or sleepless nights as I was so determined and grateful, but had experienced a traumatic birth with our first daughter. After nearly four days of labour my daughter and I nearly lost our lives as we got an infection and our heart rates dropped.

I was so grateful to have made it through this alive, that I really didn't spend much time thinking about what 'could've been.' It seemed to affect my other half more and he became understandably very protective of us all.

We had had our first brush with mortality and we spent a lot of time holding it all together, but I think we were actually all in shock that I hadn't simply done my yoga breathing and popped a baby out! I toyed with the idea that I was actually a bit rubbish for not being able to create the perfect birth – but every day I was so grateful to see my baby, that I just couldn't dwell on the negative. Our anxiety came out in other ways such as a sudden shared fear of flying.

The wonderful people at Good Hope Hospital had saved us both with a speedy emergency C-section. Needless to say that our second daughter was delivered via planned C-section three years later.

So here I am today, a mum of a six and three year old who has been through a life changing illness called Labyrinthitis to which I had to relinquish total control and pretty much start my life over again in my mid thirties. Probably like you, I am also a daughter, a wife, a sister, a career woman, an auntie and a friend.

At the ripe old age of 34 I have learnt that I am not invincible, I don't need to always cope and that asking for help or speaking up about things is okay. Although I sometimes feel tough enough to take on the world, this is not really necessary and it's okay to stop and just enjoy being part of the world instead.

I feel that your thirties, being a mum and the dreaded build up to turning 40, can genuinely be the best years of your life. I am not unique – most girls my age have faced challenges and with the right guidance, can enjoy their lives all the more for these experiences.

As Roy just commented to me; mine and many other Real Mums' stories are modern day fairy tales of enlightenment, freedom, survival, love and happiness – wow, perhaps we should sell our stories to Disney!

I have always wanted to write a book, but have finally found something that I am truly passionate enough to write about. I genuinely hope that this book helps improve your life as a Real Mum and a real human being.



About The Expert

I was born in Vienna in 1955 to an Austrian mother and English father and we moved back to England when I was about three months old. We became a single parent family, and I became seriously ill at a young age. Having been given a 50/50 chance of recovery, thankfully I bounced back.



My mother worked extremely hard sometimes doing two jobs a day to support us. Like my mother I felt the need to work really hard at whatever I do, but essentially I have just always wanted to help people as much as I can.

I was a shy child who was never seen as an achiever. I was always told that I'd never achieve in life and should work harder. I subsequently learnt that it is not working hard, its working smart that's the key to a well balanced life.

As an extremely active child I was always out on my bike around Margate in Kent. I relished summer jobs, because I liked the freedom and getting some kind of recognition. At home and school I was seen as a low achiever so the people I met through working were a welcome change.

I learned to listen to people because I was shy. I watched situations and carefully became aware of what was going on. I was a people pleaser, trying to work out the best way to please, to make sure I was okay.

Like many mixed race children, I felt different. (My father was from South Africa but his father was from Scotland and his mother was half Indian). When I was on a bus aged fifteen I wondered why someone on the bus had asked me why I was a different colour, and for the first time in my life, I recall thinking that I was different to those around me.

I remember my art teacher Brian Gillam who always listened to me and gave me faith in myself. He knew how to encourage me and helped me shine with my work. He and the deputy head teacher saw in me, more than I could see

in myself. Most people can remember one person who listened to them during their childhood and were influential in their life.

I joined the RAF when I was 16 years old because I wanted to do something different, I wanted to travel and I wanted a profession. In Kent where I lived the only other option was to go to technical college. My secret desire was to be a pilot, but I lacked the qualifications.

After leaving the forces at the age of 42 (I'd applied for redundancy) I realized I wanted a change and went for several jobs. I'd been married and divorced, had my own house but no kids. When I started to go for fundraising manager jobs with big charities, I found that I had all my training, qualifications and experience but no one would have me! I'd get shortlisted and fall at the last hurdle. It was as if I was not destined to move into the fundraising field and the Big Cheese had something else in store for me! The turning point for my career path was when I was one of three on the shortlist for a forces job as fundraising manager. Everyone thought I'd get the job as I was familiar with the territory and the team - but halfway through the interview I realized I didn't want to do this job. What I really wanted to do was work with people on their personal and professional growth.

My journey so far had taken me from engineering in the RAF where I was awarded an MBE, to fundraising to eventually realizing that my real love is of working with people. This was a journey well worth taking.

At the age of 42 I finally began retraining to become what I am today and changed my life totally. So you see, it's never too late to adapt your life to how you want it to be. These changes can be small tweaks or a huge life change. Throughout my life I have remembered that goals aren't set in stone, they are good to work towards but should be flexible.

I became a dad at the age of 49 after meeting my wife through one of the personal development events that I run. When my six year old son was born he was rushed into the special care unit, because although he was a good weight, he'd contracted an infection. I remember going down to the unit and seeing the doctor trying to put needles into my son's legs and feeling so protective that I felt the urge to stop him hurting my child. Our baby was in

an incubator on antibiotics for three days, whilst my wife was expressing milk to give to him through a tube. My wife bonded with him straight away but I didn't. A year later I came home from working in Australia and finally felt the connection with my son. I've discovered that it's not unusual to experience delayed bonding when becoming a parent and sometimes for woman it is a cause for mental upset.

My son is now six and my daughter four. It's fantastic being a dad, particularly as I never thought I would be one. My kids teach me to play and live in the moment, and yes I allow myself to become annoyed with their behaviour at times but that's my stuff, not theirs!

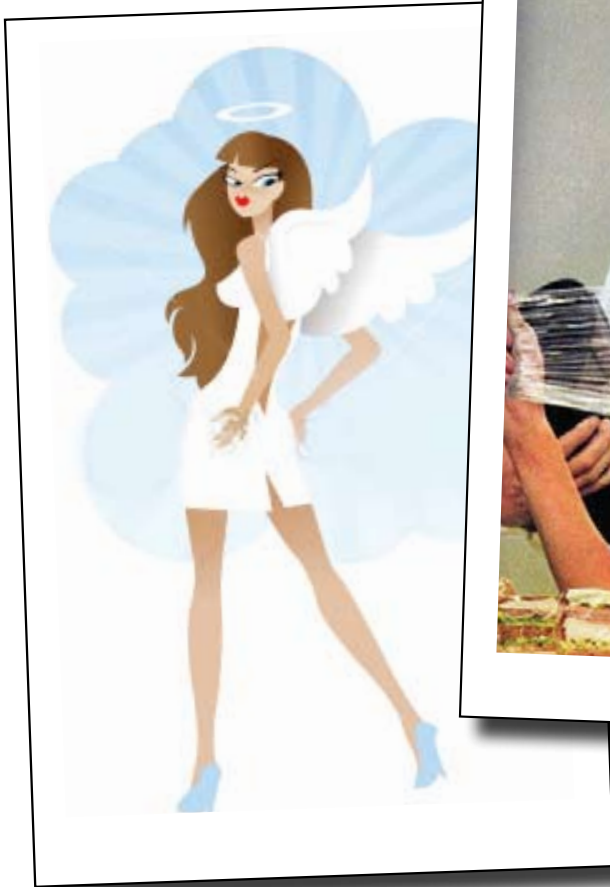
There is a saying, "the best teachers are the ones who challenge you the most", well your kids are certainly up there with that! I've learnt that I can be Mr Grumpy and stressy or look at why I'm reacting in that way so I can then sort out the underlying issue. In that way I have become far less stressed in life and have a happier and healthier relationship with my kids and wife.

Having to put aside all your grumpiness, tiredness and other issues, to just be with your children, gives you a lovely feeling as a parent and human being.

All of these experiences have helped me to try and be the best dad that I can. As clichéd as it sounds, taking the time with your kids is so much more important than spending money on them. What can you do today that lifts your lives and your kids? We can all kid ourselves that we are doing things for our children, such as working too hard, or running ourselves ragged - but it's often not our children that are governing this but our own insecurities or distorted motivators and beliefs.

The litmus test for this is to ask yourself, "is there anyone in your life who, if they weren't here tomorrow, you'd have regrets about or feel that something was left unsaid?". If there is then can I suggest you do something about it now!

The soul searching part
(Basic psychology)



which one am I supposed to be?

Who are you trying to be?

Real mum says:

Are you trying to be:

1. Your parents' idea of a perfect daughter? (Think about this for a moment – it'll be quite revealing)
2. Your partner's version of a Stepford Wife? (Even if that's more of a pint drinking, casserole cooking, shag like a rabbit combo as it often is these days.)

Once you have discovered what you are trying to be, have a think about who you actually are.

You may not know who you really are straight away but that's okay, because I'm sure you will by the end of this book.

The expert says:

Most of us are trying to be all things to all people. The only real way to be in a healthy balanced life is to be yourself! The trouble is that we have all these social and inner beliefs that we ought to conform and be different people in different situations or circumstances - talk about having multiple personalities!

We live in a world that expects you to jump to its tune and as a consequence there are countless people who are stressed to the eyeballs or depressed because they are struggling to cope with others expectations of them.

Maybe they're struggling because they believe they should act or interact in a certain way with certain people or situations, with Mum or Dad, kids, partners, friends and at work. Instinctively, you know when you are doing this as it feels unnatural and stressful and you tend to be uncomfortable in those shoes. It is as if we have become actors and actresses of characters that behave and act in different ways to the real person. Live from your inner values not your mental frustrations, beliefs and insecurities.

How do you know when you are being yourself? You know because it feels

good to be yourself, life just flows, you feel joyful and things in your life are happening in a positive way – you know because you feel it!

A few years ago I was giving a talk lunch time talk to a women's business group and spoke about being yourself and not being all things to all people. It could have been that I was one of two men at the event and the last speaker or the wine had been flowing for a while, but I got a lot of resistance to my suggestion that you just need to be yourself regardless of the situation.

There was a feeling from some of the women that at work you have to be a particular type of person or manager and of course, different at home with the family, that's what was expected of them. After a very interesting interaction and dialogue a woman stood up and informed the group that she totally understood what I was talking and went on to share how she was a very different person at work to being at home and the problems that had been causing her.

At work she felt she could be herself while at home she had stepped into a role and uncomfortable behaviours to accommodate her partner (as she said, she was not being true to herself). She had realised this behaviour had created problems for her and she was not happy at home, so weeks earlier she told her partner she was leaving! This received a tremendous applause and shouts of support from the other 40 plus women – as Real Mum would say 'girl power....'.

This professional mum understood that you can't be all things to all people, you must be yourself and if others don't like it well then that's their issue, not yours! Okay, now listen to the voice in your head and its reaction to what you have just read. What's it saying? If it does not like it, what is it that it does not like? What is it fighting against and conversely what is it it likes?

The key is to be yourself. To live from your truth, your intuition, your values, your perception of the world, and not try to fit into everybody else's ideas of what or who you should be. Being yourself is far less stressful and a whole lot of fun.



***So which one of your roles do you feel is the real you?
Because I'll probably guarantee it is. Then live that role and
be yourself.***

Real mum says:

When Roy first said this to me, I thought "Oh my god, I'm going to have to start being really direct and rude to people – I don't like doing that!" But that's not who I am and that's not what it meant. It just meant living my life how I want to. Doing more of the things I love and less of the things I don't. How I manage to do this is up to me. I don't need to be aggressive or address things in a way that I don't feel comfortable with.

*The expert
says:*

But what is being really direct and what is being 'rude'? They are ways which we label direct and rude. Our belief system can label them wrong or hurtful, this is just our perspective on how we should be in our life, similar to the way we see the roles that we take in our live. Is Simon Cowell from the X Factor being rude when he makes his comments or



just being honest and direct! It is down to our intention when we say things - could being direct actually just mean being honest and saying what you truly want to say?

And being rude is just a way of getting out your frustrations?

Neither are wrong, it's just what we do – its

called being human! Also, it's how we receive the comments too. Depending on our thinking and attitudes we can feel the person is getting at us or just helping – same words different interpretation! So how do you interpret what's communicated to you?



Real mum says:

Here's an example. If our family of four has an unreasonable amount of party or social invitations then I no longer feel obliged to take her to all of these. There doesn't have to be a direct diary clash in order for us as a family to decline an invitation. And there is now no longer need for me to justify declining. If it's too much for us and makes too many demands on us then that's good enough reason in itself. Don't feel the need to justify yourself. "Sorry we can't make it" is enough.

This is my own little way of being true to myself, as my happiest role is being within a contented, unstressed family unit, with time to be spontaneous and decide what we/I fancy doing from one day to the next. I'm no longer a people pleaser but ironically I feel more connected with people.