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# Foreword

People are always asking me about myself; about my life, how I've got to where I am, where I started and whether the journey has been an easy one. (Simple answer – not always!)

So this seems like the perfect way to answer those questions properly and offer some insight into what I've learned along the way. I hope it will help other people explore their own lives and ambitions too – and also allow me to share my passion for lists and labels and how they can make a truly positive difference to your life.

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It would be easy for me to gloss over certain things here, to present an 'Insta-perfect' view of my life and my journey to get to this point. But something that's really important to me is being honest about the hard bits too – partly because I want people to realise they are not alone in going through them, but also to show that you can get through them and come out the other side. That's exactly why I want to tell my story and inspire others to do something for themselves, whether it's a small change like organising part of their home (even a cupboard is a great start!), or something bigger such as starting a business of their own or following another long-held dream or ambition. People constantly say 'Thank you for showing me that I can do it too' and this means everything to me.

*It began with a dream,  
a want to do something,  
a chance, a moment in  
time and deciding to  
do something I kept  
thinking of but never had  
the confidence to do!*

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## FOREWORD

I run my own business, I work full-time, I had three children at what's classed these days as a fairly young age ... it's fair to say my life is pretty busy, though I wouldn't change a thing. It's been hard at times but here I am.

I hope my experience will empower other people, especially women, and show them that they – yes you! – can do this too. You might have to work hard for it, but for me all the hard work has been totally worth it. I also want to encourage people to stick with their dreams and plans and not give up, because I know all too well that it can be tough. I haven't just had one job and then *bam!* here's my successful business. I've had several jobs. I've worked all the way through my pregnancies, through my maternity leave and there have been (very) many ups and downs. But I'm also proof that a normal person *can* do well and achieve what they want to. And if I can do it, so can you.

Empowering other women is a really important thing to do. For me, it's about making people feel like they have the ability to do something, no matter where they're from, who they are, where they are in their lives. It's about empowering people as individuals, not comparing with other people and what they might have achieved. So the aim of this book is not for you to read it and think, *Oh, but I'll never be Jemma or have my own business or anything like that.* It's about being yourself, becoming yourself and perhaps identifying with something here, something that I've done or I'm going through and realising you can relate

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it to your own life – and then being empowered to make a change from that. It can be something small, like working out how to use a new dishwasher, or something big, like starting a company, or anything in between. It doesn't matter. It's about that 'feel-good factor' and feeling like you've achieved something.

*Sometimes the best person to take a chance on is yourself.*

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My book is about:

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 **LOVE**

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And telling my story. Going behind the scenes with my family – who have supported me as I took a leap of faith towards my dreams – and finding the people who will be there for me no matter what. It's about learning to be true to yourself, about following your instincts and understanding your own worth.

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 **LISTS**

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My passion! The process of ordering my thoughts and making lists has been integral to my life and I've found that it has been helpful at each and every stage. I'll share practical tips and takeaways, and I will show you that listing can be fun (honest!) ... and equally, how it has helped me to deal with anxiety and get through some of the toughest times in my life.

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 **LABELS**

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Not only my business but another thing that's brought calm and order to my life. I'll look at where to start and how to make the most of organising your home and your life.

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I hope *Love, Lists and Labels* will offer you:

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 **INSPIRATION**

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To *be* yourself, to *believe* in yourself and to achieve whatever you set your mind to.

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 **MOTIVATION**

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To make positive changes, be that at home, in business or other areas of your life, and to ride out the challenges on the way.

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 **ORGANISATION**

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To show even if you start small, you can achieve big. Whether it's small-scale changes or bigger-picture ambitions, I believe that finding a sense of order is key.

*Emma*  
*Ex*

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CHAPTER  
ONE

Getting  
Started With  
the Rest of  
Your Life



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**I**t might have taken until my early thirties to find my true calling, but the foundations were laid at the very start by my family – my parents and siblings – and their values. Being there to boost each other, to support and build each other up has always been integral to all of our lives. We have never focused on who's done what or who has what, but on how we can uplift one another. For us, it's about how we've worked hard to achieve things in our own different areas and come together to celebrate those successes.

*Be you,  
always*

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I'm the oldest of three, though my parents split up when I was ten and so I ended up with three step-siblings and a half sibling too, so there are seven of us in all. But in the early days it was just me, my sister and my brother and I have to admit I found being the oldest quite hard. I am sure that middle children and youngest children will disagree with me here, but being the first is not easy. I think the oldest child has the hardest job because they have to pave the way for everything. They're the ones who when they want to do something in life get told *no* because the parents almost have to get over the idea of their children doing whatever it is. Then the next one comes along and it's all, *yes, fine*. By the time they get to the third they're past caring!

I think I was quite a nice child. I was always quite arty-farty – some things never change. Some would say quite bossy (an eldest thing?!), definitely pretty clumsy, but never horrible. Looking back, I think that's where my leadership probably started, from being a first child. It's definitely influenced something along the way, that's for sure.

I was always close to my siblings, though when we were teenagers, my sister and I fought like cat and dog. There's only eighteen months between us so we were very much in that whole teen/hormonal stage at the same time. It's funny looking back because we are so close as adults, but back then ... definitely not! In fact, things got so bad that one day we got home from school to find my dad had built

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a wall down the middle of our bedroom to keep us apart. It wasn't ideal; it went right down the middle of the window and both halves were so small that you could literally just fit in a bed and a tiny desk. But it gave us our own space, which was a very good thing. As we matured, we put the bickering behind us and became friends, but in those days it really wasn't easy! We laugh about the fact that as we've got older we have found common interests. We both got really into organisation in different ways and now we love doing things like that together. That's not to say that there isn't still a healthy sibling rivalry. One example: Stacey has done these amazing Christmas doors for a couple of years. They really suit her house and look fantastic. I've never really got into it before but I've decided that next time I'm going to do it too ... and I'm going to do it better! It's typical sibling rivalry. We so want to discuss the designs, but secretly know we'll end up copying each other, so our lips remain sealed. We do laugh about it though!

But one thing about us, which I hope my own children will have too, is the fact that whatever we do, good or bad, we will always be there for each other through thick and thin.

The support of my family has been so key to everything in my life and I feel very lucky that my mum, dad, step-mum, brothers and sisters have always been behind me.

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## FINDING YOUR TRIBE

I realise that not everyone has the support of their family – but if you can find a couple of people who will always have your back and fight your corner, then that works every bit as well.

I think, for me, there are almost two sides to my support network and I've always tried to keep certain things separate. For example, I know my main group of friends will always offer emotional support and it's amazing to know that they are there for me. But generally I've always tried to have some detachment from my friends in terms of my working life. So if there is a problem on the business side of things, do I go to those friends? No. I like to see them because they're my friends and when I go out with them we have a great time. They help me let off steam and I don't want to muddy that by bringing work issues into a place which helps me decompress. So actually, they don't really know anything about what goes on inside the HQ or any daily stresses and struggles in that area. And I want to keep it that way because they're my fun people; we go out, we have a drink, we have a laugh. They're my escape. I do feel truly fortunate to have them in my life.

Before college, I had my secondary school friends but we drifted apart. To be honest, at school I wasn't the pretty one, I wasn't the popular one, I wasn't really anything. I liked school, though, and was very lucky that I was able to

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maintain a middle ground. It sounds stupid, but it can be a cruel place so I tried to get through it by being friends with everyone and using humour as a defence.

When I was in college (so around 16), I met a group of girls and we're all still close friends now. And while we don't see each other every day as we did in those days, when we were always partying, going on holidays, doing all the things that teenage girls do, I like to think we've got a kind of *Sex in the City* relationship where whenever we get together we know we can all offer that support to whichever of us needs it. Even within the group, we have mini support networks in different areas. We have our friends' WhatsApp group where we talk about anything and everything, and share our various ups and downs. We also have a mums' one too, because not all of them have kids and not everyone wants to hear what the babies are doing or what they're eating – or not eating – or what do to with teething and temperatures and rashes. So that's a separate thing again, where the mums of the group can discuss whatever they need to. Being a paediatric nurse, I get called upon probably once a week for various health niggles too. But it's all part of the give and take.

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I'm so grateful to these girls, it feels like they've been there for me as long as I can remember. And I also have my best friend who I've been friends with since I was eleven and some other amazing friends that I've met over the years through work and when I was nursing. I count myself very lucky for all of them. It's funny – I'm not a hoarder and I have no problems getting rid of stuff. But people, that's a different thing altogether and I seem to want to keep them forever.

### **LEARNING FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES**

The support I've had from my family and friends has made me determined to ensure that my kids will have the same in their lives too. And even in the workplace, what I've been through myself has definitely influenced how I run The Label Lady, though in a very different way. The support I try to offer to my team now comes directly from the lack of support I received when I was working in the NHS. I really wanted to turn that around and not be that person. I wanted to be the supporter.

There are ten of us that work at the HQ and then my sister-in-law who lives in Switzerland and works remotely from there. So we have a WhatsApp group, which I think is really important, and I'll try and go and say hello to everyone every morning and check they're okay. I'll make sure I have catch ups with them, I'll do mini training sessions, I'll ask whether they think there's anything that needs improving

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or if there are things I could do better. It really matters to me that they are happy in what they're doing – they're a really nice bunch and I'm very lucky to have them all.

### **MUM AND DAD'S WORK ETHIC**

This was imprinted on me from a young age and it's definitely served me well.

My dad would always say, 'I don't care what you do but you need to work and earn your crust', so I actually worked from the age of 14 – they were different times in those days! My best friend's nana had a nursery so I used to go every day for two hours after school and do the washing up in the kitchens. Sometimes I'd help with the dinner, making beans on toast or heating up shepherd's pie in the oven and dishing it out. And then after dinner I'd do the clearing up. I was there every single day and I loved it!

There were two nurseries so on some of the days I used to work with my friend which was an added bonus. And then in the summer holidays, I begged her nana to let me work as much as I possibly could, so I'd spend six hours a day washing up breakfast, lunch and dinner, sweeping and cleaning out the toy boxes. I think that was where I first learned the importance of never letting people down because they relied on me turning up each day. Something else that's stuck with me through the years.

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I'd also grab extra shifts during my Christmas holidays and always took on Christmas temp jobs at our local shopping centre too. I worked in a gadget shop, a clothes shop and a shoe shop.

As I got a bit older, when I was finishing school, I started helping with the children at the nursery too and they put me in for my NVQ level 2 in childcare. Then, when I was at college doing my A levels, I carried on working there and did my level 3 NVQ. After that I got a job in a fish and chip shop with Stacey and then I worked at a wedding venue in Chigwell and we both ended up pulling pints there together as well. I worked all the way through school, college and uni too and because of that I've never been frightened of hard work. It's something I will definitely be passing on to my own kids.

Things are different now, of course, and it's not always so easy to find those sorts of jobs at that age, but the work ethic is something I will teach them no matter what. I want them to work to the best of their ability. Everyone has that spark in them somewhere, that thing that they're really good at, so it's about encouraging them to bring that out and helping them understand the benefits that working hard – in all areas of life – can bring.

There are certain things they don't teach in schools, such as looking after money, dealing with banks and so on, so it's important to me that they learn those sorts of things from

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