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Beauty editor Sophie Forte  
Acting beauty editor Emma Calder  
Beauty writer Kim Parker  
Beauty intern Emma Krause

Features & Lifestyle

Editorial assistant/PA to the editor-in-chief Lisa Harvey  
Email: lsharvey@redmagazine.co.uk  
Features & lifestyle assistant May Frost  
Features intern Alice Walker

Features/Lifestyle Contributors

US editor Michael Martin  
Associate food editor Dora Robertson  
Travel editor Lisa Johnson  
Email: lisa.johnson@redmagazine.co.uk  
Contributing editors Fiona Sibson, Anna Hedges  
Contributing interiors stylist Sarah Keedy

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Red Direct editor Jo Connolly  
Red Direct buyer Abbey Clarke  
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Promotions art director Caroline Tang 020 7150 7291  
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Promotions assistant Caz Morris 020 7150 7278

Hachette Filipacchi Medias

143-151 rue Anatole-France, Levallois-Perret 92354, France  
CEO Lagardère Active Media Didier Quilès  
CEO International Carlo d'Assisi Bonolis  
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# Contributors

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## GREG WILLIAMS

Admits to his Victor Meldrew complex, on page 100.

**Best things in life?** • Having dinner with my wife and kids – it's the highlight of my day • Serving an ace at tennis • Shane Meadows – his films reflect the real Britain • Prosecco – the second bottle is as delicious as the first  
**This summer I want to...** Read. I've just finished writing two books, so now I want to catch up with what other people have been doing.

## LOIS CAHALL

Shares the lesson she learnt from her mother, on page 68.

**Best things in life?** • Men with integrity • Women with optimism • Drinks at the Connaught Hotel in London • Sven – my blond, Swedish masseur • Anything to do with Paris • Typing the words 'The End'  
**This summer I want to...** Divorce my computer, date a few beaches, and get more tan lines.

## ARIEL LEVE

Uncovers the alternative glass ceiling, on page 85.

**Best things in life?** • Coffee – the first morning sip is pure joy • Flossing • My friends • Being a Gold member on Virgin Airlines • Having *The Cassandra Chronicles* published in August • Getting older – I no longer care what other people think of me  
**This summer I want to...** Discover something new about myself that makes me feel grateful to be alive.

## LUCAS ALLEN

Photographs stripes for Red's living section, on page 158.

**Best things in life?** • My girlfriend. All, because she is amazing • Taking photographs – I'm so lucky that I get to do it for a living • Travelling – I'm sick of airports, but I love seeing new places • Swimming in the ocean • Music • Good coffee – I'm an addict  
**This summer I want to...** Experience all of the aforementioned best things in life in heavy rotation.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Lois (centre) with her mum, Marie, and daughters Rebecca and Maxine (foreground), two weeks before her mother's death; as a baby with her mum; her mum and stepdad, Ernie



## 'Losing Mum taught me how to grab life'

A sudden tragedy made Lois Cahall, 46, finally pay heed to her mother's 'Life is what you make it' advice.

**M**y mum, Marie, was so alive. She was petrified of death – wouldn't discuss it, ever. Marie was the type who would wake up at 5am, throw the curtains open and embrace the sun.

I was away on business in Manhattan when she phoned for a chat one February morning. It's hard to believe it was 10 years ago now; it feels like only yesterday. I was rushing to a breakfast meeting when our conversation, about the differences I was having with my husband, shifted gear. "No man is worth it," she said earnestly. "I've been up since 5am, thinking about this. If you're that unhappy, you should just leave. Don't settle. Life is too short."

Stubbornly, I said nothing. She sighed. We said our goodbyes and hung up.

A moment later, her husband – my stepfather – asked if she wanted a coffee. "Yes," she said. And then she collapsed on

the bathroom floor. It was a heart attack. As the rescue workers were attempting to save her, I carried on my busy day, oblivious. I didn't think about her advice at the time, either. "Life is short." "Don't settle." Maternal boilerplates – the kind of things mothers always say. Then, suddenly, my mother was gone. She was only 65.

We had done everything together, my mum and me. I was an only child, used to being loved exclusively and unconditionally. Now that unconditional love was gone.

But the pain of losing your mother is universal. Does it matter if you're an only child? Or whether she died suddenly or of long-term illness? What matters is the aftermath – the lessons learned. Because death is one event in life that cannot be undone.

In grief, my life took a new direction and I found myself divorcing. I had left

my husband, just like Mum said I should. As a suddenly single mother, I immersed myself in work and my two daughters, Rebecca and Maxine. At times, I felt guilty, wondering whether I had caused her heart attack. My mother lived and breathed for me – could her anxiety over my decisions have taken her very life?


All the more reason for me to do the things her life was too short to have accomplished. Like me, Mum had been a struggling single parent. She used to sing a Johnny Mathis song: "Life is what you make it, and what you make it is up to you." Back then, I didn't pay attention, but now it made sense. Rather than mourn the life she was missing out on, perhaps I could recapture her vibrancy.

Mum had dreamt of travelling, but her salary dictated otherwise, so she postponed her dreams until the year she retired. That was also the year she died.

I figured that if I could juggle single parenting, a house and two jobs, surely I could find time to experience eating crab cakes in the Caribbean, or see the snow-capped Alps? Yes, I would learn to live as a result of her death. And I did, but there was still something missing – a partner to share it all with. She had been right in that final phone call when she told me not to settle. Stephen came into my life when I least expected it, but I dreamt him long before we met, because my mother made me long for a man like him: sophisticated, educated, a man who could let me be me. Stephen is open to life, and eager to show me the world. Mum once said, "If a man

loves you enough, he'll swim the English Channel for you." Okay, he didn't. But he walked me across the Thames to the Tate Modern. Close enough. And he took me to the place my mother most wanted to visit in the world: Paris.

When we buried Mum, I was having trouble deciding

her epitaph, when that old song rang in my head. So her headstone reads: "Life is what you make it, and what you make it is up to you." I think she'd be pleased that I am now living the lines she used to sing. 

**'Mum had dreamt of travelling – I could experience it for her'**