



U-TURN

ong friendships are
ooted in various
actors: shared
periences (nothing
as the bonding power
sing secret or six),
ds, a joint passion for
odes... But perhaps
ete bonding factor is
The sense that you and
e travelling down the
tackling the same
mpioning the same
e same end point

go, my close friends
n I'd met at university)
same area of London,
ishing touches to the
orked so hard to buy,
qually ambitious and
- one a high-powered
er a television producer,
ance. We were intent on
e for ourselves in our
rs, subconsciously
the feminist ideal and
ugh the career plans we'd
tudent union 10 years
pent our evenings
nis in the latest cocktail
llery opening, feeling
encouraged by being at
f a female generation
e career opportunities
er before them.
rnight, the friends I was
ould be accepting career
aking life-altering
ns in a few years told
rts weren't in it. One
er life felt transient. She
ut down roots somewhere
kered after something
ngful. Another wanted
nge, to give up her
ob and move back to her
to re-train as an English
acher. I tried to be the
rtive friend who had

coached them through difficult job interviews and promotions, but deep down I felt let down. Hadn't we decided to be glass-ceiling-smashing, independent women together? Suddenly the life path we were travelling down swerved in different directions. Two of them went one way leaving the rest of us to carry on.

QUIET REVOLUTION

Life U-turns are a growing trend among women in their 20s and 30s. Stressful jobs, high rents, money anxieties and not enough time with loved ones are just some of the factors driving women up and down the country to rethink their priorities and make significant changes in their

such as *Downshift To The Good Life: Scale It Down And Live It Up; Escape The Rat Race; and Downshifting: How To Work Less And Enjoy Life More* line the shelves. TV programmes are dedicated to the re-shaping of people's lives.

Even celebrities are getting in on the act. Actress and model, Liv Tyler has talked about quitting acting to open a health spa while Emma Thompson has announced she's taking a break next year to spend more time with her family. Keira Knightley has also revealed she's thought about giving up acting because she "wants a life" while Lily Allen has said she's not making another album for at least five years in order to focus on

journalism job in London when she decided to move back to her home town of Leeds to take up a more humanitarian role last year. She says, "My friends back home thought I was mad. To them, I was the one who went off to London to get a degree and bagged a glamorous job most girls would die for. They couldn't understand that I found my job high pressured and unrewarding. I hated the idea that I could be replaced in an instant and wanted a career that enabled me to give something back. I'm a lot happier now."

What's most surprising is that the trend is thriving through the recession. In times of economic uncertainty, surely, we should be clinging on to our jobs, not ditching them? At least, that's the argument I presented to my friends. Why, when so many Britons are doing everything in their power to keep hold of a job - any job - are they going the other way?

Fensome explains, "When times are harder, many women consider how they can make their lives simpler so they don't have to rely on their high-earning, stressful jobs. With everything in such a vulnerable state, we're seeing happiness doesn't have to be about tying ourselves down with huge rents and 12-hour working days - it's about slimming down our lives in order to free ourselves up."

The recession certainly didn't stop Erica Moore, 33, from quitting her well-paid job as a city lawyer to open her boutique tea shop Eteaket in Edinburgh two years ago. She says, "I was doing well as a lawyer, rising through the ranks, but I could see the next 30 years stretching

"The friends I was convinced would be accepting career awards told me their hearts weren't in it"

lifestyles; be it a career change, starting a family or relocation. More female bankers, accountants and stockbrokers are retraining as counsellors, psychologists and therapists than ever before, according to Chrysalis, one of the UK's largest counselling and therapy trainers. This is despite the majority of trainees having to take significant pay cuts - often up to £30,000 - to do so. But it's not surprising when you realise that the top consideration for 36% of women searching for a job is no longer a decent pay packet, it's work/life balance.*

The ideal we were fed during the early Noughties, of the power-suited career woman fighting for her place among the men, is now outdated. Walk into any bookshop and titles

fashion. It seems that making a U-turn is something even the most unlikely people are thinking about.

"Women's values are now changing as we reach our late 20s," says life coach Rebekah Fensome. "When they first start working it's about proving themselves and making a certain amount of money. But after a while, it becomes about fulfilment. There's a real trend towards self improvement right now and women are re-evaluating earlier in life."

THE SIMPLE LIFE

Mental health trust worker Sarah Bradshaw, 33, certainly fits this profile. She had a prestigious



LILY RETIRED FROM MUSIC AT THE AGE OF 25