

# Chapter 10

## Pearl's Rebirth

Pearl and I met for the first time when we were introduced to each other by a mutual friend. When Pearl heard the topic of my doctoral study she told me that she has an issue that has plagued her for 30 years. She was not sure whether such old issues could be resolved, but was willing to take the chance. We thus agreed to meet in order to resolve the matter.

Pearl told me her story in Afrikaans and at times in English. For the sake of uniformity, I have chosen to present the whole story in English. My complete version of Pearl's story was verified by her with regard to facts and sequences of events.

### Pearl's Story

Pearl was an average student throughout her entire school career. She did her homework diligently every day but did not excel in any way except in History and Biology. Her love for History and Biology were born from a desire to understand the origins of why things were the way they are. But despite her love for those subjects she failed to obtain a distinction for her

Matric Examination. Although she accepted herself as being only an average student, she dreamed of obtaining a doctorate at University. Nothing less than a doctorate was good enough for her in her dream.

When Pearl was in class 10 her parents wanted to send her to a commercial school, because both her teachers and parents felt she would be better off as a secretary. Pearl hated the thought of going to such a school. She did not want to be a secretary! All she wanted was go back to her old school where she felt at home. So she returned, matriculating as an average student with average marks. Her parents could not afford to send her to University, and without prospects to make her dream come true she became more and more despondent as she watched her dream dissolve into thin air. However, God smiled upon her. Every three years a well-known businessman sponsored a needy student, and the year Pearl matriculated, the student he had sponsored for the previous three years was ready to graduate. Pearl was overjoyed when she was told she had funds to study! She immediately enrolled for a BA degree. More than anything else she wanted to study psychology but was too frightened to even contemplate registering for that subject since the course required studying statistics.

Before the official opening of the University all neophytes are required to attend a three day orientation course. During those three days every student progressively visits lectures and listens to various professors for different aspects of academic life. Pearl had never been exposed to an academic environment, and was totally overawed in that situation. Amongst other things she had been assigned to a psychologist who assisted students with their choice of subjects. As he studied her average matric marks, he briefly looked up and with a hint of sarcasm in his voice asked, "And *you* want to swot for a degree with *these* marks?" She was mortified! He then continued to expound the pitfalls and difficulties that befall 'average students' who aim to master statistics without mathematical grounding. That day Pearl walked away crying. Her worst fears had been confirmed by a 'professional', she was too dumb to study, and studying psychology would be completely out of the question.

Pearl was devastated for having been labeled dumb. She felt worthless, helpless, and questioned her competence with regard to everything. She did not know what she should do nor what she would be able to do, and whether she should rather take the psychologist's advice and study education at a College? Her thoughts were whirring around in her head. She could envisage herself as a teacher, but not as a teacher with merely a diploma! At this stage she saw her dream of being a psychologist fade. The thought of having to master the statistical aspects of the course made her very uneasy and fearful. It also reconfirmed her belief that she was not clever. She thought the psychologist was right with regard to her inadequacies, and although the dream of being a psychologist still excited her, it now seemed out of reach for ever.

In her agony and inner turmoil she turned to Frik, a minister by profession, who at the time was reading for a Master's Degree in Arts. She poured her heart out to him. Frik was very kind and encouraged her to continue with her plan to attend University. He emphasised that school achievement is known to be a bad predictor for academic achievement at University, and that she should give herself a chance. The things he said soothed her raw nerves. Because Frik told her the exact opposite to what the psychologist had said it was difficult for Pearl to believe anything at all at this stage. After having been told she is too dumb, it was now impossible for her to believe that she is clever. Her mind simply could not assimilate both possibilities simultaneously. However, what she did know is that she is ambitious, and that she wanted to be in a decision making position, be in charge of her own life, and work the way she wanted to work. Having her own business one day would be the pinnacle of achievement for her, which would mean that she had made it. If she were to become a teacher, a managerial position would be essential for her well being, but obtaining merely a diploma would not suffice. She therefore decided to enroll at a University and study towards a degree. She would choose History and Afrikaans as her main subjects, because she was sure she would pass those. On the other hand, she continued to doubt her ability to even obtain a mere BA degree. In addition to that, she heard her mother's ambitious voice nagging her in her mind, that she would only be good enough when she had obtained a

Doctorate. Frik's words also kept reverberating in her mind, that studying would widen her horizon, and amongst the din of voices in her mind she was beginning to think that she was now going to widen her horizon in the way she liked, by enrolling for her all time favourite subject History. Sadly, Psychology would have to wait.

As Pearl left Frik, she felt anger arise in her. After a while she realised she was very angry at the psychologist. To this day, even after having obtained a Doctorate in Psychology, she still feels angry towards that particular man.

When she thinks about the incident, her anger quickly reaches boiling point, and she often thinks about how different life could have been for her, if he had not said those words. Now after many years have passed, and after having greater insight through her studies into the workings of the mind, she realises that the anger towards the psychologist may have been the trigger for all the times when she became angry in the past without the situation warranting such a response.

She has now reached a point where she would like to rid herself of the constant energy drain from those angry feelings. For 34 years her body has retained those feelings, with the same intensity, and with the same negative effect on herself.

## NLP Interventions

B You *do* realise that what the Psychologist told you when you were in your first year at University was *his* perspective?! He probably gave you that kind of advice, because he knew from *his* experience that students who had no mathematical background struggled with statistics. What he said was an objective comment about *his* own

experiences.

P *Yes, I can see what you are saying. I have never thought of it in that way.*

B You could not have thought of it in that way because you were only in your late teens. Although you had completed Matric you were not fully developed yet.

P *You are right, and I was sooo insecure that I didn't even know what to study!*

B You know, we all go through that phase. For some it is easier for others more difficult. That often depends upon the circumstances, the parents, teachers, and also the friends we have. It can also depend upon the historical period we live in.

P *Yes, my parents had no money to send me to University, so I didn't even dare to dream about studying.*

B That is very difficult for a child when there are financial constraints on top of all the other constraints.

P *Ja, (begins to cry) my poor father, he was such a proud man, and then he was reduced to nothing.*

B What happened?

P *My parents lived on a farm, and after the drought in 1933, you know about the drought in South Africa?*

B Yes.

P *Many people had to leave their farms, because the drought had made it impossible for them to stay on. If only they could have held on for another week, they would have made it. One week ! What is a week ! My father wanted to hold out, and if my mother hadn't been so impatient pushing my father to leave the farm they could have continued to farm.*

B Looking back, a week seems like nothing. But I can also understand your mother, at the time she didn't know that her agony would only last for another week. It is not easy to live on a dry farm with the food storage dwindling without knowing when it will end.

P *Ja, I haven't looked at it from her perspective. You are right. It must have been difficult for her. What I always see in front of my eyes is my proud father who had to*

*take a job on the Railways. (Pearl cries again.)*

B What did he do there?

P *He was a porter, (through tears and sniffs she says) you know what that is?*

B Yes, I know, someone who carries the suitcases on the platform.

P *My poor father, (cries again) he was reduced to nothing for the rest of his life.*

B Did your parents have children at the time?

P *Yes, my brother was already born. He had experienced the farm for a short while before my parents left.*

B Have you ever spoken to him about that time in your parents' life?

P Yes.

B What did he say?

P *He said it wasn't all as good as my parents made it out to be.*

B Did your parents speak about the good times on the farm to you?

P *Yes, all those years, they were sad that they had to leave the farm, and I wanted to experience the farm too.*

B It seems that the farm was your parents' dream, and when they lost their dream by having to leave the farm, they continued to relive the good times at the farm in their memories and in their stories. When you were born, you were brought up with their loss. You accepted their dream by listening to the good parts of their life through their stories, and made that dream your own. And then you went and made their loss your loss.

P *Yes, my brother said to me that the times on the farm were not only good but that there were also hard at times, even though my father was a successful farmer. And all was not the way my parents spoke about it.*

B You know, when one loses the life one has dreamt about, as your parents have, it often happens that the difficulties are simply ignored or forgotten. That happens with all of us, and that is why it is so important to follow our dreams, because only that way can we learn that nothing on this earth is perfect. What we also learn in the process is that

when we follow our dream, we are far more resilient to handle the hardships and difficulties that inevitably happen during the course of life. You have soaked up the loss of your parents' dream throughout your growing years, and bear it in your body as if it were your own loss. But because it is not your own dream you find it much more difficult to bear the loss of their dream than your parents do.

P *Ja, it seems like it?* **(Begins to cry again.)**

B What are you thinking of?

P *That jug, (sobbing) it was a part of the farm.*

B What does it remind you of?

P *It reminds me of the hard life my parents had, while they could have had a better life, if they had stayed on the farm.*

B Is that jug the only reminder of your parents' farm?

P Yes.

B What about that milking can?

P **(The crying stops suddenly, and Pearl resumes her normal voice)** *No, that is just a milking can that I bought somewhere.*

B But it also comes from the same time as the pottery jug from the farm.

P *It doeees, but it's not from my parents' farm.*

B But you know your parents' farm as little as you know the farm where this milking can came from.

P **(With a firm voice)** *That is true.*

B So both items are historical items that could be displayed in a museum or history book.

P *They could?*

B As you know, History Is something that lies in the past, and what happened then cannot be changed. All we can do is change the present. Sometimes we do that by rewriting History, and at other times we just let it go. Have you ever stood on a bridge, watching the water flow under the bridge?

P Yes.

B When you spit into the river on one side, and then quickly run to the other side, you can see your spit pass under the bridge and disappear as it goes down the river?  
You can do the same with history that has a hold on you. Gather it in your mouth like spit, spit it into the river of life, and watch it pass under the bridge of today on its way to the ocean where everything is gathered and intermingled to begin anew.  
Since you would not want to live on a farm, when I think of *your* dream, and you would not want to throw the jug from your parents' dream farm into the river, we can keep the jug just where it is to remind you of your parents' dream, and let the historical past go, like spitting it into the river. Would that be OK with you?

P Yes, **(Pearl looks full of energy)** *I can do that.*

B Would you like to do it now?

P *Yes, there it goes down the river.*

B Watch the hurting past until it has disappeared in the distance.

P *I can't see it anymore, it's gone.*

B Good. You can now write your family history into a History book, or just cherish the jug for its beauty, and as a reminder of your parents' past.

P *I think I'll do the last.*

B OK.

P *You know, I never wanted to live on a farm.*

B I can believe that after you told me your childhood dream. If you had lived on a farm you would have had to get bigger muscles, and you would have not been able to do your Doctorate, which means you would not have been able to fulfill your dream!

P *That's true.*

B And the way it happened, you have been able to fulfill your dream!

P *Ja, after all these years. It could have been earlier.*

B Maybe not?! Think of the way you were when you applied at university.

P *Ja, I had no confidence, and I was frightened of everything.*



- B There you are, the likelihood of failing was high.
- P *And if I had tried Psychology then and failed, I would never have had the courage to do it again.*
- B That could have been so. When unforeseen things in our life happen it is wise to pursue our course through the doors that open. By banging at the closed doors we are only wasting our energy, and that will make us angry, tired, and slow down our progress.
- P *You are right. I needed to hear that.*
- B Now that we have brought your childhood feelings in line with your adult experiences, I would just like to check how you feel when you go back to the time of the orientation course and re-experience the incident with the Psychologist.
- P *Ja, I understand now that he was speaking from his experience, and those feelings have gone!*
- B Really? What about the anger?
- P *No, there is no anger at all. I actually feel he did me a favour by warning me about the statistics, because at the time I wasn't even sure whether I would be able to get a BA degree. I should actually be thankful that he said those words to me.*
- B That is wonderful! I am glad the anger has disappeared. And I am particularly happy that you experience thankfulness towards him.  
Do you think you can forgive him?
- P *Yes, I have forgiven him already.*
- B That is wonderful, because from now on you are able to live your life with all your energy focused on your activities.

## **Six weeks later – Pearl's feedback**

P *It is amazing how light I feel. I have completely forgiven the Professor, and when I look at the jug from the farm, it is like any other jug. The other day I actually moved it to another place, without having a negative response to it.*

B That is wonderful ! How do you feel about your mother?

P *You know, that is really interesting that you ask. My husband remarked the other day that my overall attitude and my behaviour has changed towards my mother. At first I didn't notice it myself, but he said that I am much more relaxed when she is around. I got that feeling slowly, as if it was gently descending upon me, that I felt less and less irritable, and more relaxed. Lately, I also feel much less depressed than before, as if a burden has been lifted off my back, and inside me I have at last made peace with my mother..*

B That is absolutely wonderful, and I am happy that you now feel at ease around your mother.

I also thank you very much for taking part in my research project, and I wish you well in the future. Take care!

P *I'll do that, thank you soooo much for your sensitivity and empathy during the story telling and the interventions.*

B That was a pleasure, and stay well. Goodbye.

P *Good bye.*

## NLP Strategies and Comments

Pearl's real problem lay in her exclamation: *"My poor father, he was such a proud man, and then he was reduced to nothing."* When she began to cry at the thought of her father having to leave the farm, Pearl's words express everything she feels towards her parents. (*"One week! What is one week! My father wanted to hold out, and if my mother hadn't been so impatient pushing my father to leave the farm they could have continued to farm."*) Pearl's agony, anguish, compassion, respect and love for her father lie embedded in that one sentence together with an implied accusation against her mother's impatience. Since both parents are absent in our current situation, and her father's perspective has etched itself on her mind, I automatically speak from the perspective of the accused. By underlining Pearl's mother's situation in the thirty's as a time of great uncertainty, as opposed to Pearl's position of argumentation as being one of having hindsight (she knew from history that from the moment her parents left the farm until support efforts were instigated only a week elapsed), I aim to address Pearl's unbalanced view of her parents' situation. Her compassion for her father is so overwhelming that she repeatedly bursts into tears at the thought of him as a porter on the railways.

In Pearl's mind working as a porter is the equivalent of having been reduced to nothing. Remaining on the farm would have meant being something. From these sentences, I realise that Pearl has forgotten to add the income that kept her parents alive while her father worked as a porter, but forgot to see that no income on the farm meant that her parents needed to live off their dwindling reserves.

A further exploration of the situation is therefore necessary, and it turns out that her brother had experienced the situation on the farm. According to Pearl her brother had said that it wasn't all as good as her parents had made it sound. This response indicates that Pearl has cognitively taken note of the farming situation as being not as good as her parents' stories

sounded. She also knew from her parents' stories that they were sad about having to leave the farm, and that she herself was sad for them and also sad for herself, because she also wanted to experience the farm. This piece of information is the crucial part of her cognitive and emotional discrepancy.

Having unearthed the underlying construct for Pearl's sadness, I begin to rearrange the information into a complexly interwoven congruent whole. By likening the farm to her parents' dream that was lost in reality but continued to live on in their stories, albeit as a huge loss, I joined her upbringing with the stories of their loss. By joining the two realities it automatically follows that their loss was experienced in her child mind as her loss (of missing the farm experience). Pearl identifies with the joined realities in her past by confirming the reality of the thirty's with her brother's words that those times were hard, and that her parents had really struggled. Her answer provides me with an opportunity to speak about losses and dreams in general and in particular, by linking them to her dream that has been fulfilled and her parents' unfulfilled dream.

Pearl's emotions are still tied to the loss of the farm when she sees items that come from the farm such as the pottery jug. The process is therefore not complete. When I mention the milking can, she immediately stops crying. That indicates that only the jug from her parents' farm triggers her sadness. By placing both the jug and the milking can into the same category of historical items, I am able to point out that history cannot be changed but the present can be changed. Providing her with the possibilities of changing the present with regard to the past allows her to move towards positive change. That becomes directly visible in her posture and facial expression. Her words that she can do that, are now congruent with her physiology, and I proceed with the process of letting go the hurting past by employing the metaphor of water representing her emotions. By choosing the metaphor of water in the guise of river and ocean, I emphasise the natural transformation of the elements when we allow them to take their natural course.

The outcome of using the naturally transformative power of that metaphor had an immediate effect on Pearl. As I was going to bring the intervention to a close, she said to me in a calm, adult voice: "You know, I never wanted to live on a farm." That sentence and her voice demonstrated to me that the intervention was successful, and I assisted Pearl in anchoring her new understanding in the present. The anchoring procedure opened the door to her new found insight into her own situation and into her own state at the time when she started studying. I thus proceeded to test her feelings with regard to the psychologist. Pearl's newfound understanding of the psychologist's view of her matric marks were demonstrated by her complete absence of negative feelings and her calm comment on actually being thankful to him for having said those words. The path towards forgiveness had been cleared and Pearl had already forgiven him. I ended the session with a positive comment about focusing all her energy on her present activities. This served to motivate her towards living positively different in the future.

## **Discourse Analysis**

Historical events can have a powerful effect on us, particularly when we are not mature enough to understand the connection between our own life and the related historical events. Pearl's life may have been influenced by the big drought of the 1930's, but she was formed by the stories her parents told about the big drought (Pennington, 2002; Drucker, 1998). Hearing about her parent's shattered dream of having to leave their farm as a result of a natural climatic event, had formed her life (Moe-Lobeda, 2002; Barušs, 2003; Drucker, 1998; Bogdan, 1984; Pennington, 2002). Pearl's parents seem to have had difficulties overcoming their loss (Pennington, 2002), and they continued to speak about the good times on the farm while neglecting to verbalise the difficulties of farm life (Schwartz, 2004; Stemmer & Whitaker, 1998; Christianson, 1992; Bruner, 1990). The idea "what would have been if..."

was the guiding principle Pearl grew up with, a possibility that could never be proven, approached, attained, or moved away from (Pennington 2002; Stemmer & Whitaker, 1998; Bruner, 1990; Bogdan, 1984). She was caught in the untenable situation of living a life that was unobtrusively suffused with words that provided her with a vague sense of helplessness (Pennington, 2002; Stemmer & Whitaker, 1998). An added problem was her ability to learn best by hearing the spoken word. That probably explains her average marks at school, and her complete identification of her parents' loss with her own loss. (Bandler and Grinder, 1975).

This vague sense of helplessness is a feeling that also accompanied Pearl until she enrolled at University. The psychologist who was meant to assist her in choosing her future path only confirmed these feelings of vague helplessness, by providing a label and casting them in stone (Pennington, 2002; Bradley, 2000; Bruner, 1990; Wilkinson & O'Connor, 1982). Pearl was devastated for having been labeled dumb (Bradley, 2000; Pennington, 2002), and she now understood clearly that what she had felt about herself all her life has now been confirmed (Bradley, 2000; Stemmer & Whitaker, 1998; Bruner, 1990). How could she as an 'average student' aim to master statistics without mathematical grounding (Ochse, 2001). What made it worse for her was the fact that the person who said these words to her was considered to be a qualified professional person who supposedly had the necessary knowledge (Schwartz, 2004; Barušs, 2003; Pennington, 2002; Bradley, 2000; Bruner, 1990).

The subsequent spiral of negative thinking about herself destroyed the little self-confidence that she had (Schwartz, 2004; Barušs, 2003; Pennington, 2002; Bradley, 2000; Bruner, 1990). Her natural tendency to generalise whatever she heard led her to apply the psychologist's words with regard to her matric marks as being true of every other aspect in her whole life (Pennington, 2002; Stemmer & Whitaker, 1998; Bruner, 1990; Brettschneider, 1965). This kind of all or nothing thinking is typical of the teenage phase when the shape of the nose can cause the teen to reject his/her whole appearance (Douglas, 1973; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). Pearl's self-esteem was already low, and now the psychologist's

words had completely destroyed what was left of it (Pennington, 2002; Stemmer & Whitaker, 1998; Brettschneider, 1965). Because of her shattered hopes, and fading dream, she went to seek the comfort and assistance of a minister, who told her exactly the opposite of what the psychologist had told her (Pennington, 2002; Stemmer & Whitaker, 1998; Brettschneider, 1965). This at first resulted in confusion, since she did not know what to believe (Bandler & Grinder, 1976; Douglas, 1973; Brettschneider, 1965). Simultaneously processing and accepting the truths of directly opposite statements is impossible for the human brain, causing confusion in the mind with regard to what others had said to her (Pennington, 2002; Stemmer & Whitaker, 1998; Wilkinson & O'Connor, 1982; Douglas, 1973; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). Pearl was led through the introduction of this paradox to fall back on what her own internal voice was telling her to do (Yogananda, 1997; Wilkinson & O'Connor, 1982; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). Inadvertently she had gathered information from both sides of the coin, and by weighing up the rational insight of the psychologist with regard to her marks, with the emotional and supportive aspect of the minister's words with regard to her chances of widening her horizon through studying, she selected what fitted best with what she knew about herself (i.e. being ambitious, wanting to be in charge of her life and how she worked, wanting to be in a decision making position, and having her own business) (Pennington, 2002; Yogananda, 1997; Backley & Stafford, 1996). She also considered her ambitious mother's nagging voice that she would only be good enough when she had attained a doctorate (Backley & Stafford, 1996; Christianson, 1992).

All this incongruent turmoil in her mind caused her to make up her own mind with regard to her future, by selecting aspects of information from each participant who had informed her choices (Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Backley & Stafford, 1996; Bamforth, 1989; Bandler, 1985). Her decision to enroll at a University and study towards a degree was born from having listened to her inner voice (Yogananda, 1997). Pearl had grown up through one fell swoop (Bandler & Grinder, 1976; Backley & Stafford, 1996; Bandler, 1985; Bamforth, 1989). The part of the information that had been presented to her by the psychologist was particularly painful for Pearl, because of its complete dissonance with her personal dream

(Pennington, 2002; Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; Barlow & Durand, 1999). Thwarted dreams are always experienced as painful, and this hurtful experience resulted in the anger that has been with her for the last 34 years (Pennington, 2002; Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Travis, 1989; Bandler, 1985; Beck, 1976). Pearl later realised through the pursuit of her studies in psychology, that the old anger towards the psychologist could have been the trigger in many situations in which she had expressed anger without the situation warranting such a response (Pennington, 2002; Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Travis, 1989; Bandler, 1985; Bakhtin, 1981; Beck, 1976). She also realised that the unresolved anger had drained her energy, by having the same negative effects on her over the years (Bateson, 1980; 1991; Barlow & Durand, 1999). She also observed that the intensity of her initial feelings had remained in tact over the entire period of 34 years (Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Barlow & Durand, 1999; Bateson, 1980; 1991; Beck, 1976; Travis, 1989; Bandler, 1985). The anger she had felt then was still experienced in her body in the same way after all this time (Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Bateson, 1980; 1991; Bandler, 1985; Beck, 1976), and it was now time to release herself from this destructive way of relating to herself and the world (Moe-Lobeda, 2002; Von Krosigk, 2000; Wahking, 1992).