

From

Bridges *and* Ballet...

to **Butterflies**



By Bill and Jenni Burrige

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A short account of personal transformation

By Bill & Jenni Burridge

Bill's perspective



'A coming together'

"So, How do I look," I asked Dave, my best mate and fellow engineering student at the university of Cape Town.

"Like a right tart," he smirked.

"OK, give me another swig of that beer and let's go do this thing," I responded, faking courage.

We were headed to a Rocky Horror Show themed party at the neighbouring ladies residence. Dave's new partner, Gail, had pressed him to bring me along as a blind date for her friend and roommate, Jenni.

Picture the scene ... beer swilling engineering student in full cross dress with borrowed stockings and skimpy lace underwear, attempting to impersonate Frank N. Furter.

As I think back to that defining moment in my life, I shake my head and laugh at my blissful ignorance of the universe's unfolding plan ...

I was about to meet the love of my life to be.

What a first impression!

Mercifully, Jenni was blessed with a great sense of humour and our relationship continued, even after the 'rocky' start.

Amongst our peers in the engineering faculty, word spread quickly that Dave and I were dating students from the university's ballet school. Publicly, we revelled in the boost to our 'cool cred'.

Privately, however, we soon began to lament how under equipped our calculator-and-logic type personalities were to deal with the emotional tempestuousness of our artistically natured girlfriends!

On reflection – Jenni and I have been married longer than Britney Spears has been alive – we may, ironically, have stumbled upon the secret to relationship longevity.

If you ever experimented with magnets and iron filings in a school science class, you'll appreciate the saying: 'unlike poles attract'. Well, 'unlike poles', Jenni and I most certainly were.

Post university, our relationship was soon put to the test.

While I joined a major construction company specialising in bridge building and moved across the country, Jenni accepted an offer to run a dance school for kids and took off for the beautiful Indian Ocean island of Mauritius.

After a year apart I flew out, excited to join Jenni on a three-week holiday only to discover that she had begun to succumb to the charms of a softly spoken local man with an intoxicatingly romantic French accent.

It was clearly an unfair competition and I had to act quickly. On the eve of Christmas at that symbolic turning point – sunset – I proposed.

Mother nature, though, was not impressed. Within days, she unleashed upon us the wrath of Claudette – one of the most devastating cyclones to make landfall in Mauritius in fifteen years.

Claudette's destructive force pummelled our breezy vacation let throughout the night, scaring the living hell out of both of us. But despite her best efforts to disrupt our relationship, the experience served to strengthen our bond.

In Cape Town, a little more than a year later, we were married.

After the wedding we moved to a beautiful little town on the south coast of Natal where I got absorbed into the testosterone-fuelled culture of a large bridge construction team.

Jenni, on the other hand bought and operated a health and fitness studio, exclusively for ladies.

At home we struggled to reconcile our different outlooks. Jenni's love of form clashed with my obsession with function. The temporary nature of construction projects led me to view spend on curtains, carpets and the like as wasteful.

Instead I believed in spending only on essentials ... like a belter of a hi-fi stereo system! At least when time allowed us, we could party like there was no tomorrow.

As time wore on, though, I became increasingly unsettled about living in a permanent state of transition and wanted something different.

When I chose to study engineering I knew, deep down, that it would be an imperfect fit. In wanting to 'do the right thing', I had suppressed my inner voice and allowed myself to be guided by peer pressure and the advice of others.

Now my inner voice began to speak up.

I reflected that whereas my working life had always revolved around *things*, my heart desired to experience working with something infinitely more challenging and exciting – *people*.

The defining moment came in the midst of a torrential downpour, late at night out on site. I decided it was time for a change.

I left my job in construction and headed back to the university of Cape Town to embark on a year of intensive full-time study towards an MBA degree.

Jenni found an hourly paid job as an aerobics instructress, running up to five high intensity classes a day just to take care of our living expenses. It was exhausting work for her but, my goodness, she was fit!

The year flashed past and after graduating I joined a huge multinational, in the sales and marketing division. Loving the change, I eagerly looked forward to realising my passion for working with, motivating and directing people.

Life was good and, not wanting to mess with that, I easily suppressed any ideas of starting a family. That is, until the tenth anniversary of our marriage.

On that red letter day, Jenni pronounced, with uncharacteristic forcefulness approaching that of cyclone Claudette, that the time to start a family had finally arrived and further delay was not an option. I had no choice but to do the honourable thing.

Our beautiful baby Bianca was born in Cambridge during a short work assignment to the UK. Some four years later, back in Cape Town, our wonderful son Casey arrived to complete our much desired 'pigeon pair'.

However, I had precious little time for playing happy families over the next ten years, with my focus on climbing the corporate ladder. To enhance my CV I took on various roles in distribution, project management and technology.

My work ethic was noticed and I landed an expatriate assignment to the corporate headquarters in London. Our family association with England, where I was also born and raised as a child, was about to be renewed.

We lived very comfortably and wanted for absolutely nothing ... except that increasingly elusive commodity – family time together.

My new programme management role had me shuttling – at one stage weekly – between London and the US, where we were piloting the development of a web based software solution for international rollout.

It was a challenging and exhausting time for me. For Jenni it meant devoting herself to the kids and, on weekends, picking up the pieces of a frequently shattered husband.

The aftermath of the dot-com collapse caused the members of our project steering board to grow increasingly cautious and, after eighteen months and despite solid progress with the pilot project, they pulled the rug on the programme ... and with it, my job!

Fortunately, as that door closed another opened. I was assigned a senior management role ... in IT.

Though hugely thankful for the lifeline, I was inwardly disconcerted.

My career path had U-turned away from my passion – working with people. The steel and concrete of my past had been replaced by ‘bits and bytes’.

At about that time my company flip-flopped in its policy towards leadership development. Functional specialists, previously disadvantaged in selection for leadership positions, would now be favoured over ‘all rounders’. In other words, deep expertise in one field would be preferred to broad exposure in numerous fields.

It hit me like a ton of bricks. For twenty years I had sweated to gain the wide exposure seen as crucial for advancement ... only to find that the game had changed.

I learnt a salutary lesson. It was finally time to start playing my own ‘game’, doing what I loved rather than what I thought was expected of me.

That change of heart soon attracted an exciting new opportunity.

The IT division embraced a radical cost reduction programme that necessitated the appointment of an internal communications manager to help build trust and two-way engagement between leadership and the employees.

In simple terms this was a role that involved *working with and inspiring people*.

I jumped at the chance to apply, relying on pure passion – and a little help from the universe – to land the job.

Having the courage to follow my heart felt exciting, invigorating and liberating.

Over the next three years I became totally immersed in my great new job and was soon asked to join the corporate communications team and manage internal communications for the entire organisation.

Despite exciting developments on the workfront, my life transformation was still far from complete, with the 'holy grail' of quality family time beyond my grasp.

It was time for another curve ball from the universe!

With my assignment drawing to a close, my thoughts turned to the future. With a major restructuring of the subsidiary, job prospects at home looked bleak, so I enquired about the chances of permanent employment in the UK.

To my great relief, I received a very positive response. Eager to share the good news with Jenni, I left work early, for once.

Jenni's reaction to my news, though, was as shocking as it was straightforward.

"Six years is long enough, Bill. It's time for the family to go home. My mind is made up. Now you must decide if you want to join us."

I had clearly failed to 'read the tealeaves' while living in my work bubble. Realising that time had just been called on my career as I knew it, a feeling of anxiety, uncertainty and even resentment washed over me.

The universe knew differently.

Up until then I had been financially supporting a close relative that had fallen on hard times. In her wisdom, seeing little improvement in the situation, Jenni suggested channelling our support into hiring a life coach.

"Great idea," I thought to myself, *"but what on earth is a life coach?"*

Embarrassed with myself, I turned to Google.

To cut a very long story short, my research culminated in a very helpful meeting with Neil, the owner of a life coach training company and a man with whom I enjoyed instant rapport.

As I looked to close the conversation by thanking him for his advice, he surprised me by turning his attention firmly to me:

"Bill, it's clear you're facing a great deal of change on a number of fronts in your life. I strongly recommend that you give life coaching a try for yourself."

Neil insisted on connecting me with Sharon, a young Manchester based life coach who had graduated from his training programme. With more than a little scepticism, I agreed to a series of telephone coaching sessions with her.

To my great surprise, and Neil and Sharon's eternal credit, I was blown away by the sheer power and simplicity of the coaching programme she so skilfully guided me through.

Shaking with excitement, I called Neil and got straight to the point:

"I absolutely love life coaching. It's simple, it works and it's life changing. I'd love to introduce this training in South Africa. How about it?"

We concluded a deal and, in due course, Neil and his lovely wife Natasha flew to South Africa to help with the start up my new company, New Insights Africa.

Neil and Natasha quickly identified in Jenni a natural coaching ability and passion and Natasha channelled a lot of effort into coaching Jenni in the application of the New Insights system.

In the space of just a few months Jenni and I went from being ships in the night, sacrificing quality time together for the trappings of my corporate career, to being jointly involved in our own successful life coach training business.

Today I'm privileged to own New Insights, both in South Africa and the UK. Whereas I run the business and training side of New Insights, Jenni provides coaching services to trainee coaches. As you might expect, we bring very different yet complementary skills and perspectives to the business table.

A few years ago, I felt the time was right to do something I had, for a long time, dreamed of doing ...

I wrote and published a book.

It wasn't about building bridges (of the concrete sort), succeeding in corporate life or even starting a small business. I wrote about awakening to the magic of the life you love – a personal development book based on my journey to find and live my life purpose.

The cover page of the quirkily titled 'A Boerewors Roll for the Soul', features a little creature that Jenni long ago adopted as a symbol of her own spirituality ...

The humble, yet exquisite butterfly.

It symbolises my deep thanks and appreciation to Jenni for the role she played in my transformation ... and our coming together.

Jenni's perspective



'From human doings to human beings!'

"When we know better, we do better." (Oprah)

I don't think there is anyone, who at some point in his or her life hasn't said:
"I wish I had known then, what I know now!"

I've said this many times, but I know now that this wish is not my wish. Because, if I had known, I would never have embarked on this amazing journey of self-realisation and evolving consciousness.

I believe that managing the energy of thought, perception and the linked emotions, is the key to a fulfilled and happy life. When we truly understand that our 'doing' is a direct result of our thoughts and emotions, only then can we take full responsibility for our life experiences.

And then it comes to 'being' ... I finally learnt that Love, Joy, Peace and Happiness, are states of being that we can CHOOSE. The choice comes with a consciousness whilst IN the present moment, and the awareness OF the moment, and the thoughts we hold ABOUT the moment!

It all makes perfect sense, and the processes are so simple and very empowering. Yet we get so busy with life, and ego-jostling, and wanting to be 'right', that we forget who we are at the deepest level.

This wasn't clear to Bill and I in those early days. We used to argue and fight about 'reality'!!! I "*had my head in the clouds*", and "*needed to get down to earth*", and he "*just didn't get it!*" Of course I was going to expect miracles, who wouldn't?

And here, the fire and water signs made ... steam!

Bill and I and our children have had many memorable experiences together. Some fabulous and some not so much. However, each experience contained within it a lesson and an opportunity to learn and grow, but only as long as were prepared to do the work!

One particularly significant experience, was our time spent in England.

We embarked on an adventure that was to last six years – three years longer than originally planned. It was exciting, with so many new things to discover. A new country, a new home and wonderful travel opportunities which took us to The Channel Islands, France, Spain, Greece, Antigua, Tobago and the Maldives. We lived more than comfortably. The kids were enrolled at a wonderful school, we had everything we wanted, and, almost everything we needed.

What was missing was a wholesome family life. Bill's corporate career out-paced my life with the children and, as he has said, we were 'ships in the night' with very little time together.

There were days when I felt filled with gratitude for the beautiful English countryside, for our magnificent manor house and exquisite garden with roses, daffodils, ponds and ducks ... And then there were days when the loneliness caught up with me, and I ached for the familiarity and rhythm of Africa.

I was stuck, facing a conundrum! In England I had everything I needed in the world of form ... Yet, spiritually, I felt incomplete and my need for love and connection was not being met.

I tried really hard to keep afloat and grateful, putting my everything into the children, so that they felt whole while their father was absent. I knew that this life of imbalance was not sustainable. It was especially obvious at bedtime when Bianca and Casey longed for Bill to read them stories and kiss them goodnight.

I yearned to run barefoot on African soil again ... I got to a point, where I was more than happy to give up all the 'stuff' in order to live according to my highest values of balance and family.

And, so, after much ado, we returned to Cape Town. Bill has described the sequence of events leading up to his life-changing, massive leap, from corporate life to running life coach training companies in South Africa and the UK.

And here we are!

Bill runs the business using his people, communication and marketing skills, brilliantly. And I am now a life coach.

I call my practice 'True Essence Coaching'. It's my mission to help my clients find THEIR true essence, as I have, in order to live authentically and consciously. My inner and outer Purposes are finally aligned!

Bill and I will never be the same, and we don't want to be the same, but where we are now is getting into step on the Path of Life!

