

Interview

Learn how to put your relationships back on course

Elizabeth Schnugh helps people use their issues with others to discover more about themselves, says **Constance Harris**



CONSIDERING how, from the moment a sperm meets an egg and a being starts to form, we are never alone, the constant, most challenging issue we face as human beings tends to be our relationships with others.

Relationships define how we feel about ourselves and how we relate to the world we live in. We play out the role of perpetrator or victim, often self-righteously convinced we are the latter and deny we are ever the former.

Elizabeth Schnugh travels the world teaching courses in relationships, giving people the skills to improve theirs and to help them turn their lives around.

I attended one of her

courses in April and after just three days, I left armed with the kind of clarity that I think one only could have if on a drip feed of wisdom from our inestimable Patricia Redlich.

From South Africa, Elizabeth used to be a card-carrying member of the corporate world, managing corporate politics and people with ease. Internally, however, she was searching for something — but did not know what.

Her father had died when she was 11, leaving behind seven children. Her mother went to work to support the family. Elizabeth describes herself after this as being a horrible teenager and that she was always angry.

"I felt abandoned and I



EPIPHANY: Elizabeth Schnugh abandoned corporate politics to teach courses on relationships. Photo: Gerry Mooney

took it out on my mother," Elizabeth explained. "There was anger on my part, guilt on her part. And we stayed like that. Being a family of seven, in which six were girls, when I was 17 I decided to leave and I went into a world of men, where there were no women. Right up until 1995, I spent my life working with males."

Without realising it, Elizabeth rejected who she was as a feminine being, becoming, as she described it, "a second-class male". "As a 17-year-old, I must have decided a man's life was better," she said.

Then in 1990, Elizabeth discovered the work of Christopher Nevill, of Foundation South Africa. She did two

courses with him — Harlequin and Chalice.

"That was the start of the epiphany," Elizabeth said. "His two courses showed me I was playing the blame game and why it was so critical I change the relationship with my mother.

"Because my relationship with my mother was stuck, so was my life. Materially, I was well off, but inside I was stuck and it was starting to affect my outside life, too."

As Elizabeth found her life so positively affected by her new awareness, she tried to spread the word within her working environment, organising courses for colleagues. Then, at the height of her career, in 1995, she quit her job and came to Ireland with her mother to visit the place where her mother had been born.

For Elizabeth, it was about putting ghosts to rest in her relationship with her mother and putting a full stop to a part of her life. She then decid-

ed to give courses full time.

The bulk of her work is based on the teachings of Theun Mares and Elizabeth will be giving a course in Ireland in October.

The first thing that happens on the course is that Elizabeth reminds everyone that they are not here to be told they are wrong, or bad, or a failure. But personal responsibility is the foundation of personal strength. So during the course of the three days, you work through your issues with others, and yourself, on several layers.

Elizabeth teaches people to use their issues with others, to learn more about themselves. This is called mirroring. For example, if I have a problem with someone and say they are controlling and mean, I must ask myself: "Am I controlling and mean? Where could this possibly be true of me?"

Not all judgements of others mean that you are that

thing yourself, but it can be argued that if you recognise it, you must either have some of it operating in you, or had in the past.

The course is a veritable toolbox of techniques to learn more about yourself, how you operate with others, and what you can do to improve your understanding of yourself and the others you interact with.

Half of the group on the course I was on were married or in committed relationships. One couple were so distant with each other that I didn't realise they were married. On the Friday, they spoke of their spouses like they weren't in the room. By Sunday, they were sitting next to each other, being honest to each other, accepting responsibility for their own actions and words, and bonded again — they loved one another and wanted to survive as a couple.

There were people there who struggled with bosses

who were bullies, mothers who were alcoholics, children who ruled the roost, and the list went on.

But everyone's story held something for everyone else. Every moment was information and insight learnt.

"The people coming to the courses give me hope, to see how open and ready they are to change what they are doing, to change their world and a responsibility to self," said Elizabeth. "Each one of us is our own creator."

The next course will be held at the Clonea Strand Hotel, Dungarvan, Co Waterford, on October 1 to 3, and costs €390. Elizabeth Schnugh is giving a cheese and wine introductory evening at the hotel on September 6 at 7pm.

For more details, visit www.institute-for-the-study-of-man.com/schedule.php, email patrpower@eircom.net or telephone (058) 42903.