



What Lies

writer Lucy Gregory-Roberts

Beneath

Pia Muggerud is an energetic, empathic and insightful life coach, trainer and facilitator. With her own coaching business, *Co-Pia*, and a client base of thousands across Asia, she works specifically with women – guiding, supporting and empowering them to be the best they can be. Today she is outgoing, passionate and full of life but Pia was not always so.

With a troubled youth and the inability to accept herself or reach out for help she spent a majority of her life depressed and disconnected. Pia shares with us her difficult yet inspiring story of her journey across the globe, into the depths of depression, and how through self-development philosophies and practices she came out the other side, found a new lease on life and love, and has finally reached a chapter she never thought she would.



On the surface Pia Muggerud's early childhood seems storybook perfect. Born and bred in Norway in the 1970's, her house was very much a family home. Her brother, parents and grandparents all lived under one roof. She was an active child. Her days were filled with friends playing outdoors, climbing trees and building tree houses, riding her bike in summer and skiing in winter.

The chapter on her idyllic days of friends, family and fun however came to an end when her father's job required a move to the Middle East. "I didn't want to go at all," remembers Pia. But in 1982 she found herself in the chaotic world of Abu Dhabi. "Everything was different. The temperature, culture and religion. Everything was extreme."

With very fair skin and white-blond hair, this 11-year-old girl stood out like a sore thumb. She attracted a great deal of inappropriate and unwanted attention from men. "I can't count how many times I was flashed and even touched inappropriately. Everywhere I turned I was bombarded with sexual energy from men."

Instead of facing the problem and talking about her experience, the troubled teen didn't want to burden anyone, so hid her unhappiness from family and friends. This triggered a pattern of behaviour that Pia stuck to for many years to come – one in which she escaped to new worlds to try to forget.

She returned to Norway with her family in 1985 but wasn't happy. She tried an exchange programme in the United States when she was 17 but eventually endeavoured back to Norway. However once she got 'home' Pia struggled to fit back in, so headed to the UK instead to study interior design at university. "I really don't know where my idea to do interior design came from," she reflects. "I can't remember ever enjoying it. I'm a creative person but it was the wrong decision for me. I always had a passion for psychology so I don't know why I didn't study that. I guess I just thought the seven year course was too long."

When her best friend moved to Hong Kong, so did Pia. "I kept running off to different countries to try and solve my problems instead of facing them. Hong Kong was

vibrant and exciting and I felt a real sense of adventure by moving here."

Despite the bright lights, Pia failed to find happiness in her chosen field which prompted a career change into event management. Unfortunately her attempt to reinvent her life didn't have the desired results. "I quite enjoyed the work but it's a tough business and I definitely wasn't passionate about it."

Like many people who don't want to face reality, Pia turned a blind eye to her bad habits. "I had my head in the sand. I wasn't happy in my professional life so I was going out and getting drunk a lot. It was lots of fun but was definitely not healthy."

Pia's emotional deterioration started when she was fired from her job, broke up with her (then) boyfriend and discovered her mother had been admitted to a mental institution back in Norway after suffering a nervous breakdown. "My mother had been quite mentally unstable throughout my life, but I was suddenly convinced I was going to end up like her." This thought sent Pia over the edge and when she returned to her homeland to visit her mother, her already fragile headspace collapsed. Remembering her first visit to the institution Pia recalls, "Mum had this blank look in her eyes; she had completely checked out and was definitely not my mother."

Despite feelings of an impending meltdown, Pia felt an obligation to stay and make sure everyone was alright and it was

THIS PAGE: Pia, aged one, and her mother, Drammen, Norway. OPPOSITE PAGE: Pia with sadhus in Pune, India, wearing a customary maroon robe for participation in the Osho International Meditation Resort.

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during this time that she hit a new low. “One day after my mother had been released from hospital I was looking after her while my father was out and I suddenly realised she wasn’t in the house. It was freezing outside and I couldn’t tell if she was wearing a coat or her shoes. We lived near a river and she couldn’t swim; I didn’t know how long she had been missing and imagined finding my mother’s drowned body.”

Pia’s mother had actually wandered over to the neighbours house but the incident had a profound affect on Pia. “I was so freaked out about the whole thing but didn’t want to worry anyone so completely downplayed my true feelings. In retrospect I realise I should have opened up to someone, but I was too concerned about mum to worry about myself.”

Pia moved back to London but her worries followed her. “I was carrying a lot of emotional baggage and wasn’t at all connected to my thoughts or feelings.” When reflecting on her emotional downward spiral she recalls, “I felt really ashamed of myself for no reason. I was crying every day but didn’t know why.

I was on my own a lot but didn’t feel confident enough to reach out to friends. I couldn’t understand what was going on so I couldn’t imagine anyone else understanding. I finally went to a doctor who asked me if I was depressed. I told him I wasn’t, but then started wondering if he was right.”

It was at this point when Pia decided to take control of her life and emotions. “I could have plodded along living my mediocre life and being unhappy but I knew I didn’t want that. The visit to the doctor was a wake up call and thankfully I had some resources somewhere inside of me that made me grab the bull by the horns.” Determined to turn her life around, Pia bought dozens of self-help books, attended a plethora of self-transformation seminars and became interested in meditation. “Meditation allowed me to go further into myself to find answers, instead of looking outside.”

Feeling the need for a fresh start, Pia packed her bags one last time and moved back to Hong Kong to begin yet another new chapter. She enrolled in meditation workshops, met her first life coach,

discovered Landmark Education (www.landmarkeducation.com) and started seeing a counsellor regularly. “I was suddenly so inspired. It was as though I had broken open a huge other world inside of me.”

With a renewed outlook and fresh perspective, Pia enrolled in a life coaching course with Coach University and finally discovered the passion in her professional life she had long been searching for.

In early 2002, Pia met leading life strategist Anthony Robbins and participated in his world-renowned personal transformation workshops. “That was amazing. Suddenly I met all these people who had the same interests as me. The work was so dynamic and the energy in the workshops was fantastic. The whole experience was very liberating.”

Fueled by her passion for self-development, Pia’s big break came when she was invited to join Anthony’s global team as a senior mentor. “They pick their coaches on face-to-face interactions, not CV’s, which was extremely rewarding. Working alongside Anthony was a dream come true for me. It is so amazing to work with someone who is devoted to making people the best they can be.”

When reflecting on her leap from depression to life coach Pia credits the many mentors that have guided her along the way.



THIS PAGE: (Left) Pia leading a womens workshop in Shenzhen, China, 2008. (Right) Pia pictured alongside others senior mentors at the Anthony Robbins 'Unleash the Power Within', programme, London 2005. "We supported the participants post-workshop with coaching, to keep their momentum," recalls Pia.



"Given my history, it's interesting that some of my biggest mentors have been men," she muses. "Anthony Robbins was my first big mentor and the teachings of the (deceased) spiritual master Osho have also been a huge inspiration to me." Along with his readings, Pia has also visited Osho's international meditation centre in India annually for the last five years, to help her connect to her 'inner being'.

Acknowledged as one of the most insightful and provocative spiritual teachers of our time, best-selling author, David Deida, has also had an enormous impact on Pia. "David's work on sacred sexuality hugely transformed me and helped me accept the essence of who I am. It taught me to own my power as a woman." So what was holding her back? "I lived most of my life in fear of my sexuality and I had a lot of trust issues with men. I have worked very hard on healing those issues and now I feel so beautiful and powerful." A smile spreads across her face, "I am also in love with the most amazing man in the world."

Pia now has her own coaching business. Aptly named, *Co-Pia* (www.co-pia.com), it offers group and individual coaching sessions and workshops, along with motivational speaking lectures and business communication training. With a specific focus on women, Pia's work melds coaching principles with elements of therapy and meditation. The result? A space for women where they can feel empowered to fulfil their potential and live the life they want. "Life coaching marries my interest in psychology with my desire to help people," she smiles. "I feel like I am in my flow when I am working with people, it feels natural."

Listening to her talk, it's hard to believe that this is the same insecure and unhappy woman she describes in her past. "I am in a very different place now," she agrees. "The biggest difference between who I *was* and who I *am* is that I accept myself more. Laughing is ok, crying is ok, dancing on your own is ok. It's ok to not have all the answers and it's really ok to ask for support.

I did things the hard way; if I'd gone to a professional earlier it wouldn't have taken me years to really start feeling good. It is invaluable to have people helping, supporting and guiding you."

Drawing on her own experience, Pia finds it easy to empathise with suffering clients. "I went through a lot of dark tunnels before there was even a tiny bit of light but I think that makes



THIS PAGE: (Left) Pia exploring the ancient temples, aquatic structures and palace remains at Hampi, India in 2004. (Right) Pia hiking in the Hemsedal mountains in Norway in 2008. "We have a family cabin in this region, and I spent most of my holidays there as a child," Pia says.

me a better coach because I have been where my clients have been," she says reflectively. "I spent the majority of my life beating myself up for not being someone else, now I have total acceptance of myself and the moment. I simply try to encourage my clients to follow their joy – to do more of what makes them feel good."

Today Pia is passionate, open, warm, active and fun but she insists she is still striving to improve herself and is constantly learning to maintain her life balance. "I am still working on many areas in my life," she freely admits. "I can still be a better coach for my clients, a better daughter, a better partner – there is always room for improve-

ment. Most importantly though, I've realised we are all on a journey that doesn't always take a straight direction; we sometimes have to take detours that eventually lead us to what it is we really want."

Now happily based in Hong Kong with a thriving business and stable relationship, Pia has never been happier. "I never thought I would be helping others, guiding them to a place where they can be happy and balanced, but I truly feel that all my work and commitment has brought me to this moment. I am so happy and excited about my life now. I feel as though I have been reborn into someone completely different."

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