



Tania de Jong and Peter Hunt at the Duldig Studio in East Malvern, Melbourne, which hosts the work of de Jong's grandparents, Karl and Slawa Duldig.

CHANGE THE WORLD, ONE VOICE AT A TIME

Soprano and social entrepreneur Tania de Jong, and her partner, investment banker and philanthropist Peter Hunt, are experts on getting the business community to give their time and energy, not just their money.

STORY PATRICK DURKIN PHOTO WAYNE TAYLOR

Tania de Jong:

I met Peter on a trade mission to Israel in March 2012. He obviously has a lot of interest in supporting different charities and social projects, so I think I was pitching to him really.

I always wanted to go to Israel because of my family history and my mum and dad actually met in Israel so it's quite bizarre, really, to meet Peter there.

My grandparents were Austrian-Australian artists [Karl and Slawa Duldig]. They met while they were students of the esteemed Austrian sculptor Anton Hanak, a contemporary of [Gustav] Klimt and [Egon] Schiele.

In 1929, my grandmother invented and patented the very first foldable umbrella which was appropriately called The Flirt.

CHARITIES

Grameen Foundation provides micro finance for the poor in the Philippines, Cambodia and Bangladesh.

SoTheyCan runs a school in Kenya for very poor children.

Women Community Shelters supporting homeless women.

With One Voice choirs bring people from diverse backgrounds together to sing.

She received royalties from sales of the little umbrella for 10 years, but after the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany, she was forced to sell all her rights to the Austrian manufacturer.

My grandparents fled to Switzerland with my mother who was just eight months old. Unfortunately, many of their immediate family were killed by the Nazis.

In 1939 they travelled to Singapore and in 1940 they were deported to Australia and interned in Tatura in Northern Victoria till my grandfather enlisted in the Australian Army in 1942.

Mum became a great tennis player [reaching the quarter-finals at Wimbledon] and met my dad at the Maccabiah Games in Israel in 1961 [the Jewish Olympics]. He was playing hockey for

Holland. They met on the Monday and were engaged by the Friday.

I was born in Holland but came here when I was one year old. My whole career has been singing and being a social entrepreneur. My mission is to change the world one voice at a time, which I started 15 years ago with the Song Room and now Creativity Australia [which hold its major conference, Creative Innovation, in Melbourne on March 23-25].

The With One Voice program was founded in 2008 to bring people from diverse backgrounds together to sing. Each week we share a wish list: anyone can put a wish into the wishing well and it gets read out. It might be, 'I need help with my résumé', 'I need to get a job', 'I need to learn English', 'I want to learn the internet'. Almost instantaneously, someone will put up their hand and say, 'I can help you with that.' So far more than 500 wishes have been granted. Bringing together these very diverse people on a weekly basis, we are able to empower each other.

I was told never to bother having singing lessons even though I thought I had a strong voice and, of course, I have had a career as a

singer. About 85 per cent of people have been told they cannot sing, usually by their parents, teachers, or friends, and they grow up thinking they cannot sing. We are silencing people's voices.

What Peter is doing with his charities, for the homeless and overseas, and what we are doing with One Voice, is giving people a voice.

We are both very strong and have achieved a lot in our life so we can put more of a priority on our relationship now. Both of us have been in long-term relationships but sometimes when you meet when you are younger, you are not quite fully evolved and are very career focused. I think by combining our passion and intellect we are able to be better than, well, the sum of our parts.

THE HOMELESS MAN IN THE STREET WAS ME BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD.

Peter Hunt:

I spent the first 14 years of my life growing up in England. My father was a very caring man but unbeknownst to any of us, his business was failing. He went bankrupt when I was 13 and committed suicide. It was a terrible shock. We were left with nothing, literally, because in those days when you went bankrupt, the trustee in bankruptcy took everything, your house, savings, everything.

My mother decided we would emigrate to Australia to start a new life. Five weeks after we arrived in Australia, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and had one breast removed. She then had her second breast removed a few years later when the cancer returned.

She died when I was 23. At almost the same age my dad was when he started his own business, 43, I did exactly the same and started Caliburn [acquired by US investment bank Greenhill & Co in 2010].

I did better in life than I thought possible but I started to reflect on the fact that a lot of that was associated with luck. Yes, I worked hard but I realised you are lucky to be born in a western country, you are lucky to have your

health, you are lucky to be well educated and you are lucky to get into an industry which makes a huge amount of money.

I started in my late 30s as a philanthropist giving away my money but then I got actively involved in my mid-40s.

I was working with AMP and I said to one of the directors, Richard Grellman, then president of Mission Australia, "Richard, if I can ever help just tap me on the shoulder." Nothing happened for about three months but then Richard and Patrick McClure, who ran Mission Australia, came to see me. They said "Peter, mate, we are taking you up on your offer, we want you to raise \$3 million to help to completely renovate a male homeless refuge at Taylor Square."

My first reaction was that doesn't sound the most deserving cause, supporting homeless men. Because I respected them both I said, "I'll do it but only if I can do my due diligence first and get persuaded it's a deserving cause."

I guess I had the stereotyped view of homeless men that frankly they should get out and get a job like the rest of us. I learnt very quickly that about 80 per cent of these men suffered from some form of mental health issue and had gone through traumatic events in their lives and then just spiralled down.

The homeless man in the street was me but for the grace of God.

That was the moment I started to really become engaged and much more hands-on.

We need business people to be engaged philanthropists. Not just to give the money away, but to give away their intellectual property as well. If you want to solve social issues, you cannot rely on governments. Governments are very ill-equipped to solve social problems, there are too many political pressures, too many processes, too short-term and too risk-averse. If enough philanthropists did that, things really would change.