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Mind Medicine

Tania de Jong

MIND MEDICINE AUSTRALIA

Healing with Psilocybin

Interview by Fierce Truths Magazine

Tania De Jong is the co-founder of Mind Medicine Australia (MMA), a registered charity working on expanding our treatment options to help reduce the occurrence of mental illness. She is the co-creator of the book 'Mind Medicine: Psychedelic Healing Stories from Australia' which was commissioned on behalf of MMA and shares the personal stories of 53 Australians who experienced healing through psychedelic medicines. Along with her husband, Peter Hunt, they aspire to make psychedelic-assisted treatments a safe, effective, and integral part of Australia's Mental Health System.

A philanthropist, business leader, innovator, and social entrepreneur, Tania is passionate about promoting new ways to combat the mental health crisis. MMA is developing the clinical application of medicinal psilocybin and MDMA to treat mental illness, sharing knowledge through information sessions, screenings, and funding trials. They created the first accredited practitioner training course in the Southern Hemisphere. Through her research and experience, Tania believes that psychedelic medicines have extensive neuroscientific benefits. One of these benefits lies in the ability of psychedelic medicines to rewire and repair damaged pathways and increase the brain's neuroplasticity. Working with trained therapists, patients can integrate the benefits of psychedelic-assisted therapies, having an incredible effect on their mental health.

We spoke with Tania about her work and how these medicines need to be taken into the light and made available to medical practitioners, ultimately becoming more accessible and affordable for all Australians in need.

Image credits: Tania de Jong Personal Collection

INSPIRING MINDS... INSPIRING LIVES!

> "*Psychedelic medicines* help bypass the default mode network of our brain, where connectivity between different hemispheres of the brain are often not functioning properly."

FTMag: Tania, you're quite accomplished. Can you share what you are about and who you are in your own words?

Tania: I'm a soprano, social entrepreneur, creative Alchemist, global speaker, business leader and spiritual journeywoman. I'm passionate about singing and performing, creativity, and innovation, and I have a passion for the ocean and everything in nature. I'm a big bird watcher. I love writing. And people, I'm very interested in people and what makes them tick. And I'm very passionate about mental health and well-being.

FTMag: You've got your hand in so many different things. What inspired such an incredible journey?

Tania: My grandmother was the inventor of the foldable umbrella in 1929 in Vienna and manufactured it there for the next ten years until the Nazis arrived. So, she was the pioneering type of woman, an incredibly creative and brilliant woman, a wonderful strategic thinker, artist and inventor. She was quite the celebrity, and my grandfather was a sculptor.

They bribed a border guard by sculping his boss in exchange for three passages out of Vienna that saved their lives. My mum and parents got to Switzerland, but the rest of the family was mostly taken away and killed. My father's father was hidden in Catholic homes in Holland during the war. It is a miracle that I'm here.

So, I think that's one of the things that drives me to achieve so much. My family had so much adversity, which must have been frightening. And their parents would have been very afraid to have so much going on around them.

But, you know, mine were the most loving parents. They're supportive of whatever I want to do, so I come from a very eclectic voice. My father was also a wonderful businessman. He was also a musician, and my mother was very creative and wonderful. She was also a Wimbledon quarterfinalist and the Dutch national tennis champion. So I also did a tennis scholarship in Texas when I was 18 and spent many years playing tennis at high levels of competition. I even had a tennis coaching

business for a while; at the same time, I had a singing teaching business.

I've always been highly entrepreneurial, even as a child. I used to have a little shell, stone jewellery, and gemstone shop outside our house with little necklaces and things on show for the neighbours.

Since then, I have founded probably six or seven creative businesses and three charities.

FTMag: You've done a lot in your short life, and you've recently founded Mind Medicine Australia with your husband, Peter. Where did your interest in psychedelics start and knowing it was the field that you wanted to move in?

Tania: I would have never expected that, and I've always been fairly anti-drugs. I'd never had any drugs, and I'd never been out of control. I don't even drink coffee. My way of getting high or being in a transcendence status has always been created by singing, which is a wonderful drug. The neuroscientific benefits are well proven. In my TED talk, *'How Singing Together Changes The Brain'*, I talk a lot about the neuroscientific benefits of singing, how it makes us healthier, happier, and creative and improves our memory, language, and facilitation. That's because it

increases the neural plasticity in our brain, which is similar to what psychedelic medicines do when they are used properly and with the right intentions.

Throughout my life, I've been a seeker. I'm very interested in healing and well-being, so I've tried many different things. Mind therapy, psychotherapy, therapy, yoga, meditation, you name it, I've tried it. But I've never had drugs.

Then, in 2016, I came across an article about psilocybin-assisted therapy to treat depression. It was by Michael Palin about a New York University trial that had achieved 80% remission rates in patients with a terminal diagnosis. As a result of a terminal diagnosis, people were experiencing depression, anxiety, and end-of-life stress, and after two doses of psilocybin, 80% of them had gone into remission.

One of the people who went into remission was a Jewish man who had experienced generational trauma. I think most Jewish people are carrying some trauma epigenetically. It comes through your DNA. Immediately a light bulb went off.

Then we had this extraordinary experience with psilocybin and seeing multiple dimensions of consciousness. It was extraordinary. I've never experienced anything like it. I had to let go of control, which was a good thing for me. To go with the flow with where the medicine was taking me because the medicine usually takes you where you need to go but doesn't necessarily take you where you want to go.

It's important to experience these medicines at the correct length with the right mindset and intention and in the right setting.

I say to everyone, do this with a guide, don't do it alone, treat it as something sacred and have proper integration. What you experience with these medicines is a sense of oneness, awe, wonder and connection with yourself and others on the planet. It's imperative to integrate that with therapy so you can take the insights and what you've learnt from the medicine into your life.

Out of over 160 current and recent trials and medicinal treatments of either psilocybin and MDMA-assisted therapy, the remission rate is between 60% and 80%. That is extraordinary because, in current treatments like antidepressants, you're only seeing about 30% remission rates for patients.

We get approached by medical practitioners daily, just wanting more tools in their toolbox to get people well. Four out of five Australians have reported declining mental health, and we've seen this massive spike in suicides, self-harm, domestic violence and a whole range of other addictions. It's tragic. So, we do have a major crisis.

So, these treatments are a complete paradigm shift from the standard treatment modality because they go to the root cause of a person's suffering. They're able to help a person to come to terms with whatever trauma issues they've experienced, to be able to accept and move forward with their life.

Psychedelic medicines help bypass the default mode network of our brain, where connectivity between different hemispheres of the brain are often not functioning properly. Which keeps us stuck in rigid and ruminating thinking patterns.

They create massive neurogenesis by rewiring and increasing neuroplasticity of the brain, which is what these medicines do—often repairing damaged pathways and creating new ones. Then what happens is that a person's brain becomes much more flexible. This provides an extraordinary opportunity for trained and skilful therapists to work with the patient to fast-track a therapeutic outcome. This is why healing outcomes are so great.

Patients become much more empowered in their healing process. So instead of taking daily medications and having something else fix them, they become an agent for their own feelings.

Many research doctors describe it as rebooting or resetting the brain.

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TANIA DE JONG

“OUR GOAL IS TO ENSURE THAT WE EXPAND AFFORDABLE TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR DOCTORS AND THEIR PATIENTS AROUND AUSTRALIA AND TO TURN AROUND AUSTRALIA’S TERRIBLE MENTAL HEALTH STATISTICS.

WE NEED TO HELP THEM ACHIEVE THAT.”

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FTMag: Incredible. There are many misconceptions about psychedelics, and society's perception is still tarnished from the political war waged on them back in the 70s. What how about the people that are taking them in more natural settings? Such as picking magic mushrooms or going into the jungles to sit with plant medicine. Is it the same?

Tania: I think there is so much desperation and suffering out there. So as more and more people with mental illness and psychiatric conditions become aware of these treatments and the current treatments are not working for them, they will search out other treatments wherever they can.

There are a lot of people in Australia who work in underground therapies and then the more shamanic traditions as well. People will go and seek them out because they're desperate; they want to get well. So they go to Peru, Mexico or wherever else and search out these treatments legally if they don't want to break the law in Australia.

That's what's happening at the moment. There are a lot of highly skilled and wonderful practitioners who work underground. But of course, with anything, there's a risk, and some of the risks might be people working underground and exploiting people who are vulnerable and unwell; financially, emotionally, or even sexually.
I always say to people, if you are going to do that, you need to do your due diligence. If people have those experiences underground, it's important that they still have the integration sessions I mentioned earlier - psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy because it is the combination of the medicine with psychotherapy that creates those outstanding remission rates.

So, this is not just trying out a medicine and going on a trip; you do have to do the work. And that has to be done with someone skilled at helping you integrate, whether that's a therapist or a counsellor, or someone else experienced at helping with integration so that you can get full healing out of these treatments.

Global drug surveys show that millions of people worldwide utilize these medicines and treatments underground, because they can't get the sort of psychiatric support they need in the medical system. So psychiatrists and psychologists and doctors, GP physicians, mental health, nurses and psychotherapist, and practitioners who help patients with mental illness are also really calling out. **That's why we've started the first-ever Certificate in Psychedelic-Assisted Therapies in the Asia PAC region.**

FTMag: Let's talk about the book that Mind Medicine Australia has launched, *Mind Medicine - Healing Stories from Australia.*

Tania: It's an amazing book. Mind Medicine Australia has over 30 chapters to build grassroots awareness of this movement in local communities and educate their communities with events and stuff like that. And, of course, we run a global webinar series and all sorts of other events and educate hospitals, universities, doctors, and political parties. We've also run a big global international summit.

But effectively, what happened was that the Canberra chapter came up with the idea to create a book of healing stories with psychedelic-assisted therapies. We had many people submit, and then we selected 53 stories to include in the book. It profiles some very diverse and interesting stories of healing from people who are quite young to much older. People who've had treatment-resistant conditions for decades. Many people who were suicidal and saved by these treatments. Very inspirational.

FTMag: How can people get involved?

Tania: My husband and I are philanthropists, so we donate all of our time to making these medicines. Our goal is to ensure that we expand affordable treatment options for doctors and their patients around Australia and to turn around Australia's terrible mental health statistics. We need to help them achieve that.

We're a registered charity, and we can't do this alone. So, we encourage everyone to donate and to help us achieve our mission and, join the movement, join our chapters. We've got a website with an amazing 'Learn' section. We run lots of free webinars with the leaders in the field. And the other essential thing is talking to members of parliament and educating the medical professionals so that people focus on the data and science behind the treatments and not the politics, stigma, and prejudice from 50 years ago.

> "These treatments have the potential to heal millions of people, and everyone deserves the right to access medicines and therapies that can heal them and allow them to lead healthy, happy, meaningful lives."

Visit **www.mindmedicineaustralia.org.au** to get involved..

Tania de Jong and Peter Hunt.