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KATHY WONG **Dream crazy?**

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Dream Crazy



by Kathy Wong

Kathy's journey has been about finding out it's okay to be not okay, and then, having accepted that, she not only found her purpose in life but learnt that the ordinary becomes extraordinary through others. An inspirational story.

Growing up in an Asian family in Sydney is interesting to say the least, and, being a banana, an Australian-born Chinese, and the oldest of three children born to migrant parents, Malcolm and Jan Wong, was a double whammy for me.

My mother arrived in Australia at age 6, fleeing the Japanese during World War 2, and was sent in a submarine from New Guinea, where she was born, to Australia. She came with her mother and at that time two sisters, one of whom was born in the jungle as they were fleeing the Japanese. My grandmother wanted to leave the newborn, my Auntie Edna, as she felt she could not take three children under such dire circumstances. Luckily the oldest girl, Margaret, would not have it and took charge of the baby. The girls all arrived in Sydney. They were separated from their father, and it was not until about six months after their arrival that they received a telegraph that my grandfather had been sent to Melbourne and the Australian government would reunite them soon.

My father was sent to Australia at the age of 16, to make a living and help support the family in China. He is the third oldest boy, and there are five siblings. His father had been quite a wealthy man, but when the Japanese invaded Dad's motherland, their family too had a terrible time. My other grandfather had a business in gunpowder and so the Japanese wanted his business and took him as a prisoner in his own house. When this happened my father's family lost all their wealth. When Dad arrived in Australia he had a distant uncle who gave him a job sweeping the floor of his fruit and vegetable shop. Dad pretty much had to fend for himself. Not long after he arrived in Australia, both Dad's parents died suddenly,

and he was not able to even get to their funeral as he had no money for the ticket back home.

Life for both my parents was difficult and they both grew up with so much fear, which is understandable, given their backgrounds. 'You don't trust anyone', 'You must be rich', and 'Having no money is a terrible thing', are some of the fears they tried to instill in me. The other strong message was that security is everything in life. On top of this was the Asian cultural thing where you do not ever show your true face because it's just not done. It's a sign of weakness – so emotions were never really expressed and shared in our family.

They also taught me the value of family, very much the Asian thing too, plus hard work, honesty, respect and kindness. My parents are the most generous, giving people you could meet. They sacrifice everything, even themselves, for their kids.

My childhood was very short. I remember accompanying Dad in his big truck before



I was school age as he ran from house to house delivering fresh fruit and veggies that he would have to buy at the markets before the sun was up. On one of these trips I was almost run down in the truck. Mum would be in the payphone all the time with her pennies making the phone calls to customers for their orders. At this time Dad held down two other jobs, driving a taxi and working at nights in a Chinese restaurant. I grew up with very little time being spent with my parents.

After these jobs, Dad managed to start a Chinese restaurant himself, and we lived above the restaurant. I was around eight and loved walking around talking to customers with my coloured pencils and drawing paper. Mum and Dad were always working

364 days year. Christmas Day was a holiday. I can only remember three family holidays together as a child. When my brother and sister came along I had to take care of them while Mum and Dad worked. I was in my early teens then, wanting to just play with my friends and not be tied down to my siblings, and, as I passed this age and became a young adult I found that I felt very stifled not being able to spend the time with my friends because of this responsibility. It was the restaurant that allowed me to connect with adults and I became very comfortable talking to all types of people. I also felt the experience of being a business owner and I knew then that one day I would own my own business.

IT'S OKAY TO BE NOT OKAY

After finishing my degree in design I had wanted to travel and work overseas. However, I found myself in two art director jobs immediately after completing college



and engaged to a Chinese man my parents adored. With my art director roles I again played the responsible one, nurturing the other designers who reported to me. It was very scary, as I was so green myself. After a brief 16-month work career, where I questioned my abilities to handle the pressures of the design and advertising world, I started my own design business from the bedroom of our family home. Dad did not take me seriously that I was going to be an entrepreneur. He said I would just get married and have babies, because that's what all good Chinese girls did. Well I did neither of those things in fact. I was engaged twice, lived in sin before getting married, and got divorced, had several miscarriages, and I was unable to bear children.

I have always loved words, positive quotes and affirmations. They have helped me so much in my life. That was my starting point to finding my tribe.

I know that for so much of my life I felt I had to prove myself to my father. I had always been such a Daddy's girl. I wanted to be financially successful, and that's at first all that mattered. Once I started my design business I made good money, travelled every year and had all the toys and material possessions I wanted. Of course both my parents were very proud of me, especially Dad, who loved to brag about his daughter. I was on a mission to retire at 45, which I did.

I loved what I was doing for most of that time until the last three to four years of my design business. I burned myself out and I was totally out of balance. My 19 years as an entrepreneur was the best personal development experience I could have had. I learnt so much about people and myself. I had so many incidents of being ripped off. There was the neurotic pregnant studio manager, the bipolar suicidal receptionist and the pedophile sales manager, to mention a few. I was fortunate that, after seven years of fumbling along, making loads of mistakes, I could start going to both business courses and personal development workshops, and I got a life / business coach. My thirst for all of this rapidly accelerated. When I got burnt out I began my education into health and wellness while seeking out spirituality too. I was able to live the dream for nine years during this time of healing myself, re-energising and getting in touch with my heart. I do remember going to a workshop where the trainer greeted me with, "Wow you are heading for an iceberg".

Having spent a lifetime of rescuing others and never nurturing myself, I needed to learn why I did this. I discovered that the martyr complex had been passed down through my parents and that I had real issues myself. My identity was all tied up in wanting so badly to be a good person at a cost to myself. It's taken me many years to know who I am. I believe I know this very well now but still fall into old patterns of behaviour. When I do, I try not to beat myself up, and instead sit in this realisation, allowing it to pass.

SEEKING YOUR PURPOSE IS VERY SEXY

All of this has led me to be called to do what I'm doing today. This happened in

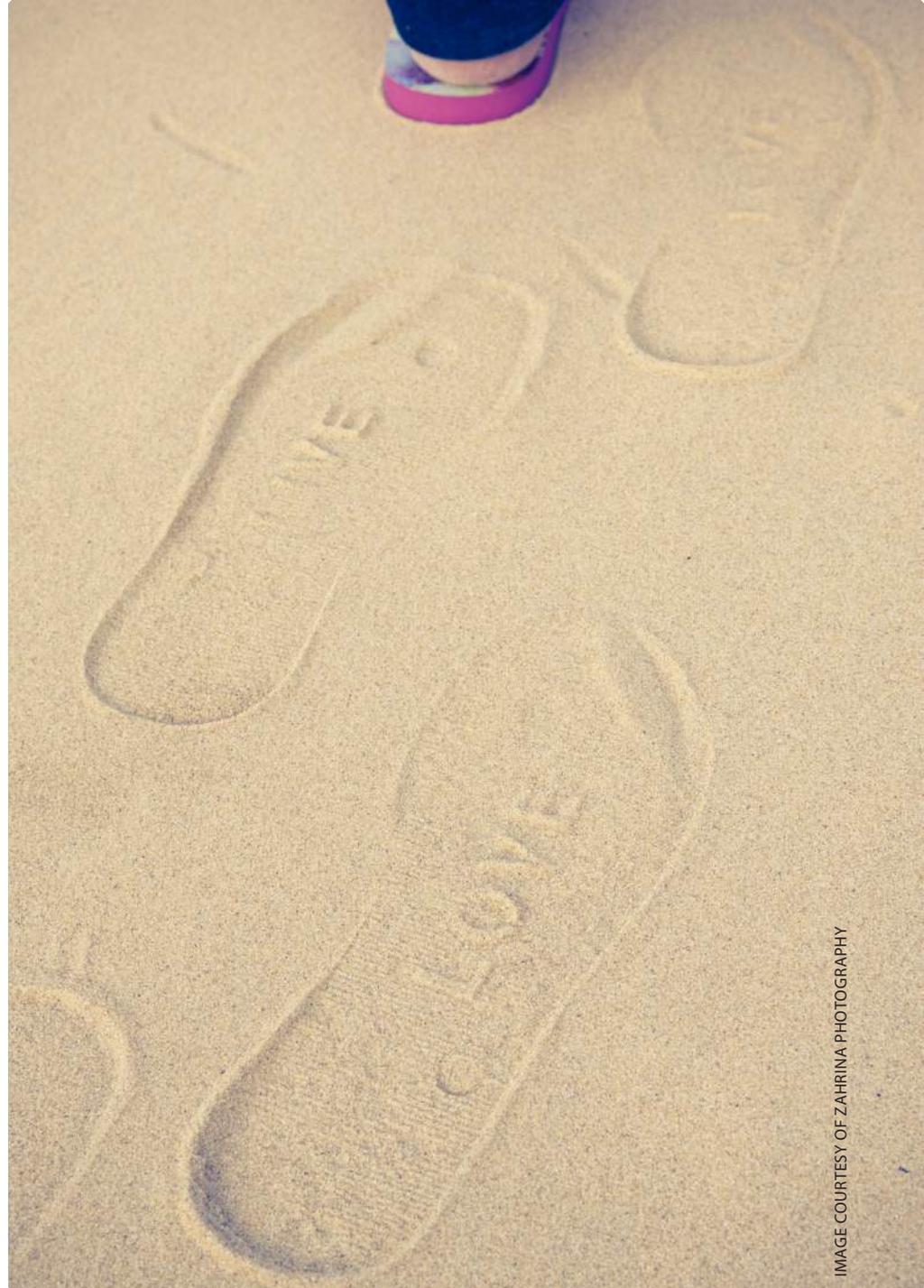


IMAGE COURTESY OF ZAHRINA PHOTOGRAPHY

February this year when I just woke up with an incredible desire to make a difference. I know this must sound clichéd, but it's true! It was very surreal really. I did try to ignore it. However, we all know how that works. The more you avoid, the more you get chased.

Once I realised there was no escape I went looking for how I could make this difference. I have always loved people. I am a true extrovert most of the time – people re-energise me. I decided to create a heart-centred community. I was so sick of the way humans are so disconnected from one another. I felt so many people were craving oneness, but how would I help?

I have always loved words, positive quotes and affirmations. They have helped me so much in my life. That was my starting point to finding my tribe. I started a FB

and Instagram page under the name Soul Republic. When I began this journey of sharing powerful visuals with words I wanted to inspire and connect to others, yet I had no idea about social media. It was a steep learning curve. However, it's opened up amazing relationships with many people, now dear friends. This was further evidence to me that it did not matter where in the world one might be – the power of human connection is so strong it can transcend any physical limitations.

After a few months, I was down at the beach sun-baking when I decided to do a thong, or flip flop as they are known internationally, which could carry my messages of inspiration while leaving an imprint in the sand too. I love thongs because they are associated with relaxation, good times at the beach and on holiday, and

they are fun! I love the lifestyle around this iconic Australian footwear. I always feel calm and happy when I have my thongs on.

ORDINARY BECOMES EXTRAORDINARY THROUGH OTHERS

I had already seen the difference I was making on my social media page with strangers reaching out sharing their deepest feelings with me, and telling me how much they loved the positivity of my platform. I've had many tell me how they look forward to my daily posts, that they make their day, and how much I inspire them. I knew that I could be the example to show that anyone can do extraordinary acts if they have a village behind them, and this is how Moeloco was born. Moeloco means dream crazy, and its meaning is very personal to me because it reflects my craziest dream yet, which is to reduce world poverty. Moeloco is a social cause brand based on a one-for-one business model. For each Moeloco we donate a pair of school shoes to a child in poverty through our collaboration with the Hope Foundation which runs orphanages in one of the poorest areas in the world, Calcutta. Being on the ground in India the local staff have access to purchasing the canvas shoes required for school.

The one thing in my life I would have changed if I could have was to be a mother,

but I believe everything happens in life for a reason. I knew that one day I would work with children, and here I am. I cannot wait till I am able to visit the orphanages next year and see the kids in our shoes.

IT'S IN OUR TOGETHERNESS THAT MIRACLES ARE CREATED

The vision I had was very clear. However, I had no idea how I could make this happen. I just kept sharing my story and literally people showed up with all sorts of help. Friends with creative, marketing expertise, strangers who have mentored me or provided business services and needed resources, not wanting anything in return but to be part of what I'm building, has left me sobbing in disbelief and humbled by their generosity. Finding a charity to work with I discovered was one of my greatest challenges. Finding Hope Foundation was through another new relationship. This social enterprise has materialised so quickly – seven months is remarkable when you consider I had no prior experience in retail manufacturing or social cause.

My family have been very supportive. Mum delivered home-cooked meals regularly as she knew I was not eating properly. Dad accompanied me to China as my interpreter for the manufacturing. My husband brought me continuous cups of tea

and was simply there for me, and he and my brother had a ready supply of positive words of encouragement in my darkest moments. There has been no shortage of help, which has just spurred me on. The support keeps growing. The Universe keeps connecting me with like-minded individuals wanting to support this change. I feel so blessed to be given the opportunity to step up and hopefully cause change. Life really is better in flip flops.

BEING VULNERABLE IS THE GREATEST HUMAN CONNECTOR

This crazy dream has been so scary, not knowing anything about retail, manufacturing, or social enterprise. While saying this though my intention is clear and pure; so I know I will succeed. While I have been so focussed on helping these kids, I must not fall into my own patterns of behaviour where I put myself second and affect my health and well-being. I really want to enjoy this journey and must pull myself up all the time and remind myself that it's not a race, although I continually make myself feel I want to get to that finishing line as quickly as possible. My next scary part of this adventure is the scalability of the business and finding suitable retailers. I want to work only with those who have the same values and desires. ■

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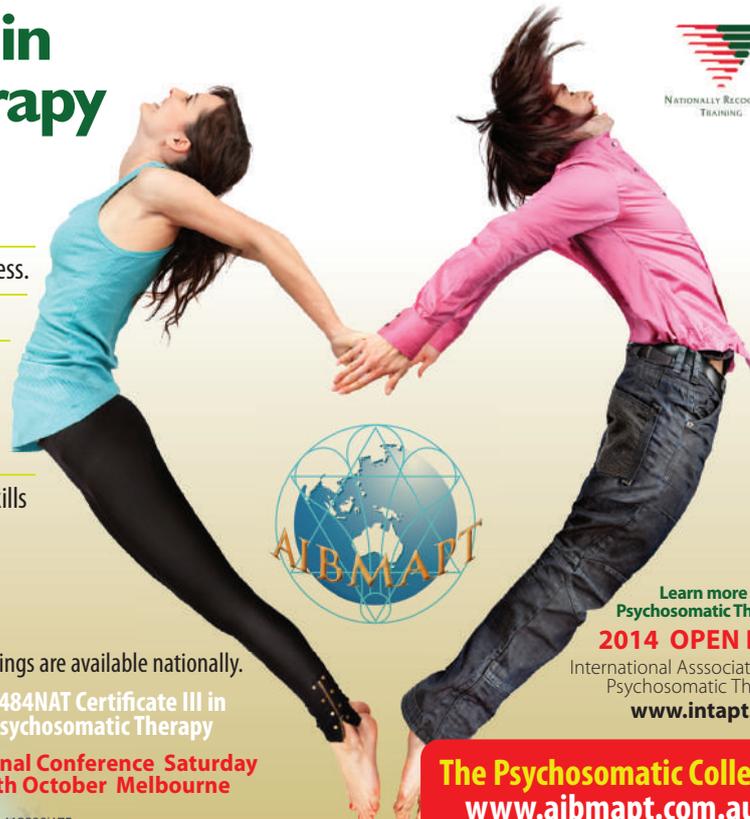
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