

TWO of US

Film-maker Hansa Natola has spent the past two years taping the extraordinary life of local milliner Miranda Green, who has been seen at New York Fashion Week and the Kentucky Derby, has set up an ethically run millinery workshop in India and published a book – all while managing her ongoing battle with mental illness.

MIRANDA: Hansa and I met at an ashram in Beaconsfield in 2004. I was about to go to India to set up an ethically run workshop to produce my millinery line and I needed to prepare spiritually and emotionally for what I was about to do. It was a large thing for someone to do anyway, but it was even more so for me because of my ongoing mental health issues.

I moved out of my flat and lived at the ashram for six weeks before heading to India. When I was setting up in my little room there, I saw Hansa out the corner of my eye. She approached me, but I was very busy in those first few days doing an order for a client in San Diego. When we did get talking, I found her to be a gorgeous individual, incredibly warm and very spiritual.

After sharing a little of my vision for India, Hansa said "I'd really like to tell the story of what you're doing". She hadn't yet got development funding, but she asked if she could start filming right away. Hansa started filming me making this hat for my San Diego client and preparing to leave for India, and *A Milliner's Tale* sprang to life.

I'd never been to India before. The conditions in most production workshops all over the world are shocking and I don't want to contribute to it. I've been contacted by Chinese companies over the years that had seen my work and asked if I wanted them to produce it. It's just not an option. I want the people who produce my line to get the fruits of their labour. I'm not interested in making a heap of money out of it. I just want the workshops to give them positive employment, not undignified employment, and I want to practise

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my art and see it out there. India was also about personal growth for me.

Until I met Dr Michael Allsopp and his wife Cherie in my late 20s, no one had managed my depression properly. I had been in the system for 10 years, was living in a women's refuge and had probably been put on the hopeless list. By that point I had lost all sense of ever being anything. I wasn't able to do some very basic things.

If I hadn't met the Allsopps, I'm sure I'd be in a hostel somewhere and I'd still be battling to function. I only discovered I was creative after they encouraged me to stitch at this mental health clinic in Fremantle. They encouraged me to go to TAFE, where I did a class on stitched hats. I don't have any traditional millinery skills and I only learnt very basic skills in this class. I've learnt everything since then through trial and error.

Things need to change with mental health. Years ago, I was always told to not say anything about it and I never did. But now is the time. People need to hear someone who has had some success, because mental health affects everyone. Everyone has a predisposition to some kind of frailty in everyday living. We are all vulnerable.

The plan for the documentary was that Hansa would come to India and film us setting up the workshop with the Tibetans. She was there for two weeks when I got sick and had to come home.

India was confronting, which is one of the reasons I had to come home. Even to travel in India is a hard thing, but to set up a business over there was exceedingly hard.

Hansa and I have become very close. Because she is in my face, I need to really trust her. If it was someone else it wouldn't have got this far because it wouldn't have felt right.

A lot of the stuff I'm talking about is not easy, it's very personal. But I'm aware there's a story to be told, and Hansa is very skilful and treats everything very sensitively.



SIAN BRIGGS

briggsi@sundaytimes.news1td.com.au



Pictures: Jody D'Arcy

Milliner Miranda Green and film-maker Hansa Natola.

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HANSA: I've lived at the Beaconsfield ashram for around four years. I was born in Italy, and when I was 19 I moved from Rome to London. I used to go to a lot of rock concerts and became a freelance photojournalist. It was a great time in the '80s. I photographed all kinds of rock bands and singers, like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Queen, Metallica, Michael Jackson and Diana Ross.

Then I had a bit of a crisis and went to India, where I started my spiritual journey. I began a new life. I left everything behind in London, including my job, and lived in India from 1993 to 1997. I moved to Australia in 1998.

I was questioning what I should do next career-wise, and I started doing a few film courses and really enjoyed them.

I met Miranda about three years ago when she came to the ashram. We had a chat and I thought she was a nice girl, but it didn't go further than that at first.

My very first impression of Miranda wasn't "wow" – she was just another person coming to live here. Because it's a place where people come to retreat, you don't tend to know everything about everyone.

Miranda and I had more of a growing relationship. One day she had her door open and I could see these amazing hats and shawls hanging from her door. We started talking and I thought "There is much more to this person than meets the eye". We had a discussion about artistic tendencies and she showed me some photos of her hats.

I had been to Dharamsala in north India, so when Miranda told me she was going there to start a workshop for Tibetan people to produce her hats, it felt like every-

thing was coming together, that something was connecting us. Miranda had never been to India, but I had visited Dharamsala many times so I could tell her what it was like. We started talking and found we had more and more things in common. As we became closer and I learnt more about Miranda, I thought "Wow, this is a great story on so many levels".

I was at film school at the time, and the story had an artistic side, a creative side, a political side and an ethical side. When Miranda opened up and started talking about her mental illness, it added another layer to it.

I started filming about two years ago. I got development funding from ScreenWest, and now we're trying to get the broadcasters interested. If that doesn't work we'll go for private funding instead.

It's very brave for Miranda to share her mental health issues because it's so personal and we're all so afraid of people's judgment. I respect the fact she's willing to share it with me and a wider audience. One of the reasons Miranda and I became so close is because a lot resonated with me.

I've realised how much ignorance and stigmatisation there is around mental illness. In society what's generally reflected, on a subconscious level, is that these people are crazy and should be locked up. I also understand that it is not properly funded.

Miranda is very lovely and warm. She's also very private until she feels she can trust you. She's very sensitive and vulnerable. When she opens up, she is a very beautiful being who shares herself with others.

■ **Miranda Green's book, also titled *A Milliner's Tale*, is available from www.mirandagreenmillinery.com.au.**

