Peter Sharp - Reminding Humanity Of Our Common Connection by inspired.org

In Pete's words…

Who/what inspires me: Richard Branson and his ability to constantly strive for a better world. My parents for always believing in me and taking supportive action to allow me to further develop myself. Other people who dare to stand up for and/or support something they truly care about.

Best advice: Life begins at the end of your comfort zone. Be true to yourself and watch the whole world change.

A train roars through the night, its passengers staring vacantly out the window or into their smart phones. A young man approaches the front of the carriage and announces: "Ladies and gentlemen, is it just me or is this train sometimes like this emotionless tunnel where people stop communicating with one another?" The passengers glance around nervously, embarrassed, eyes downcast. "I actually believe life can be much more interesting than this and the only person preventing us from making it a little more interesting is ourselves," he continues. Bemused expressions, shock. "So what I'm going to do is, I'm going to start dancing and if any of you would like to join you're more than welcome. This is funky Friday, let's get funky."

The sounds of a dance tune blast through the carriage and the man erupts into dance. Half smiles, awkward glances. But then one lady gets up and joins him. A man joins them. Others stand up, hesitantly at first but then exploding into uninhibited dance. Soon virtually everyone is up dancing. Smiles shine out as strangers dance through the train. Barriers drop, fears evaporate and joy emanates.

Video footage of this rare moment of public connection went viral across the internet, attracting more than 23 million views. The man responsible for this act is Peter Sharp of Liberators International. Pete is driven by a desire to remind humanity of their common connection, to create public platforms for spontaneous outpourings of joy. He believes "life starts at the edge of our comfort zone".

His acts challenge us to face our fears, dare to be vulnerable and enjoy the resultant connection with others. He has created impromptu dance parties in the Perth CBD, he's shocked shoppers by dancing through aisles at the supermarket and, most recently, he challenged notions of racism by staging an act in which a blindfolded Aboriginal girl stood on the beach with a sign asking for free hugs – and received them. Each act is uploaded on the internet to further spread his message. But how did this middle-class former accounting student from Cottesloe Western Australia become a force for social change? What drives him to risk public scorn to get his messages across? And what impact is he having?

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Giving value

Pete first had an inkling that life could offer more than he'd dreamed while studying international business, accounting and entrepreneurship in the Netherlands. Away from his family, his friends and the life he'd always known, he found himself free of the expectations that had shaped his life so far – free to create his own life path. Maybe accounting and a house in the 'burbs wasn't what he wanted at all. Maybe there was more to life than that. Relishing the freedom he discovered living abroad in the Netherlands, Pete decided to continue living overseas, this time in Spain. He deliberately chose an area where he knew no-one, where he had no agenda, to see what would unfold, to see if he could find his passion.

In Spain, Pete would wander the streets of Barcelona contemplating the people around him. As a DJ back in Perth he'd had some experience in judging the moods of a crowd and using music to influence it. Using this same technique he locked into the mood of the Barcelona public. "In Spain I was tapping into the collective consciousness of people on the streets. I know that sounds airy fairy but it was receiving information like I would on the dance floor (as a DJ) but just from people walking by. There are all these subtle clues floating by – people's posture, the look in their eyes, the way they hold their drinks."

The overwhelming vibe Pete picked up was negative. "I come out of Perth which is cloud nine – like, paradise on Earth, the bee knees of existence," he says. "And then you go into Spain and it's just been smashed by the economic crisis. There's so much negativity, uncertainty for the future." Borrowing entrepreneur Richard Branson's advice to find a place where you can give value to others, Pete devised the first of his public acts of connection. "I thought what we could do is create positive actions in a public space that prove to people that we don't need to feel this despair. We can tap into this love that's there, we can tap into this community spirit that exists here if we create the platform for

it.”

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Good Vibrations Barcelona

Pete grabbed a bunch of his mates, they dressed up in crazy outfits, made up signs, and welcomed a busload of tourists arriving in Barcelona as if they were celebrities. They gave out candy, handed out free maps, danced and laughed. “(The passengers) were truly taken aback, surprised in an incredibly positive way, with big beaming smiles and laughter. We sparked this good vibration.” Such was the feeling of love and joy they’d managed to create out of a mundane experience that the participants were hooked. “We just felt charged, everyone was saying ‘when’s the next one, that was awesome’.” Pete realised the positive experience these tourists had experienced would spread as they shared their experience. He also realised the value of capturing such acts on film so he could multiple the effect of the good vibration by sharing it with others. Pete had found his passion. Good Vibrations Barcelona was born.

Welcoming tourists to Barcelona.

Cookies for kindness

But what next? Again Pete and his tribe dressed up crazy outfits and hit the Barcelona city centre. They started approaching people with biscuits and saying “How could you pay for this cookie without money?” At first confused, people soon started getting creative. Someone started singing opera for a cookie, others danced in the street. One guy withdrew a rat from his jumper and put it in his mouth. “It’s just astounding how much creativity is out there – every single moment of every single day if you create the platform for that to be expressed,” Pete says.

The experience made Pete start questioning his own understanding of the world. If people were so willing to connect, to share love and joy when given the opportunity, perhaps there was no need for the distrust that permeates modern society. Perhaps we had

become so conditioned by negative media to expect the worst of the world that we'd forgotten how to trust. Perhaps, Pete pondered, we could rewire our brains to trust others, to connect with strangers, to spread love and kindness.

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Good Vibrations Barcelona swaps 'cookies for kindness'

Free hugs

Keen on testing his hypothesis Pete blindfolded himself in a public square, put a sign at his feet saying 'I trust you, do you trust me? Give me a hug', stood there and waited, arms outspread. He felt truly vulnerable standing there. Did he look like an idiot, what would people think, would anyone approach him, could he even be hurt? Slowly people approached. They'd inch closer, lean forward tentatively and place their arms around him. More followed. These strangers were trusting Pete just as much as he trusted them. The experience was truly liberating. And it cemented Pete's growing belief of the good in the world just waiting to be unleashed.

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Fired by passion

Of course, none of these acts earned Pete a cent. But he was unperturbed. If he could do what he felt he was destined to do, surely the money would come. He believed in the premise of international marketing guru and author Seth Godin. "That guy has changed

my fricking life," Pete says. "He's so not about just taking money and making cash. He says find an excuse to give your art away and give it away, and give it away, and you will be surprised that things come into your life when you give away what you love. It did take a really long time for money to come in but that's the great thing about passion – it keeps you going."

Slowly the money did start to flow. People started hiring Good Vibrations Barcelona for surprise pop-up wedding proposals. The couple would be in a public space when the Good Vibrations team would pop up around them, singing the girl's favourite song. They'd enlist strangers and soon the couple would be surrounded by a teeming crowd of strangers dancing, singing, laughing, radiating happiness for them. Fired up by these experienced Pete started to devise more acts, create more platforms to bring out the good that exists in the world, acts that would engage people and make them think.

A water fight in Barcelona attracted 150 people.

Realising a life calling

After three years in Barcelona Pete decided it was time to come home to Perth. He decided to return via a month in India. "I wanted to explore idea of love is all around," says Pete of his Indian experience. So he decided to test the idea of giving selflessly to others among the poor of India. He started by simply approaching a banana seller in the street and offering to help him sell bananas for the day. That offer sparked an incredible journey through India, one in which his offers to help resulted in him being invited into people's very homes, to see their local temples, to motorbike ride through the countryside.

"I'd jump on the back of a motorbike and drive off into the distance – fully trusting this guy and them trusting me and it was magical what happened," he says. "I was cared for like a king even in this country where they have nothing. It was a game changer for me. On that journey that I realised that, ok I've been given a gift to do this stuff and to be able to connect with people and to be able to inspire and uplift. So I was like yep I can't waste any more of my life pretending that's not what I'm here to do. I know it's what I'm here to do and I'm going to do whatever it takes to make that a reality."

Pete not only came to realise his calling but also to feel the responsibility for living it. As a privileged kid from a loving family he was well aware of how fortunate he was to be in a position to follow his dreams. The people in India were too busy surviving to worry about passions. He felt he owed it to the people who never had a chance to follow their passions to spread his own kind of magic. Buoyed by his realisations, Pete landed back in Perth. He

was fired up about starting similar projects in his home city. The reaction? Settle down mate.

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A trip through India cemented Pete's belief in following his passion to spark connection through public acts.

A movement is born

"Everyone was like, that's not going to work, don't do it dude, Perth is a completely different vibe, just don't do it, just settle down," Pete recalls. But Pete wanted to test himself regardless. He'd come up with the notion that 'freedom is state of mind' and wanted to share that premise through a public act. He considered the fountains of Forrest Chase in Perth's CBD and the sea of business suits that strides by them. No business man would dare find himself in those foundations, he thought. And they certainly would not dance in them. So Pete decided to dress up in a business suit and do just that.

His mates found excuses to avoid joining in. Even Pete himself felt vulnerable, scared of seeming a fool. "But then I just think of what I could provide to humanity," he says. "I think what I could provide to humanity is of far greater value than some selfish little fear that I have." Over the internet, he recruited a team of people keen on joining the act. An old mate organised and volunteered a professional film crew.

He ventured into the CBD in his business suit. Playing the part of a stressed out business man, he walked into the foundations, his head in his hands. Music sounded. And he erupted into dance. People looked up, embarrassed. Some pointed, some sniggered, some started filming on their phones. But he continued his wild romp through the water, lost to the music, ripping his jacket from his back and flinging it into the water. He pulled off his tie, his business shirt and announced: "Today is the day we reveal to ourselves that freedom really is a state of mind. And now is the time to dance." Others started to join him – many of them people Pete had invited over the internet, but mere standers-by among them too. And together they danced, drenched by the water. There's no doubt

that anyone there that day will forget Pete's 'freedom is state of mind' message.

Momentum

Emboldened by having smashed his fears once more, Pete found more and more people wanting to join his public acts. They staged a mini dance in a Myers store music department, a dance party in Perth's CBD, engaged hundreds of onlookers during the opening of the Gay Pride Perth, conducted a public mediation, yoga classes, dances in supermarkets. Each act is uploaded onto the internet, many of them going viral. Even those acts that don't garner much participation make people think. Why are they scared to take part? What's holding them back? And even people who weren't there but watch the acts online find themselves pondering his messages. Would I have joined in, they ask themselves? What do I lose by being too scared to act? Such is the depth of feeling these acts are eliciting that more and more people are joining the Liberators International movement. Pete is thrilled by the reaction. "I just get such a deep, deep value in enabling people to feel they are able to do so much more than they ever imagined," he says. Watch out for Liberators International's next act.

The 'freedom is a state of mind' dance act in Perth's Forrest Chase.