

Changemakers



FIELD WORK: Kathy Eldon (left) and daughter Amy Eldon-Turteltaub

How a mother and daughter team makes it happen for stories that matter

By Sarah Jio

In a world where news about Paris Hilton can often take precedence over tragedies in Africa, you might say that mother-daughter team Kathy Eldon and Amy Eldon-Turteltaub felt they could fill a void.

After all, it was Kathy's son and Amy's brother, Dan Eldon, who in 1993 was a 22-year-old photo correspondent for Reuters covering the violent conflict in Somalia. On July 12, U.N. forces bombed a house where it was believed a warlord was staying. In the process, more than 74 innocent men, women and children were killed. Survivors of the tragedy raced to the hotel where Dan and other international journalists were staying and pleaded with them to take pictures of the devastation.

But when Dan and his colleagues arrived at the scene, the crowd erupted in anger and began attacking the foreign journalists. Trapped in the violent mob, he and the other journalists were beaten and stoned to death.

It's a tragedy that still haunts his mother and sister.

“When Dan was killed in such a brutal way, it shook my belief of humanity,” says his younger sister, Amy. (For more on the life of Dan Eldon, see page 31) “But I’ve learned that people are good and well-intentioned; they just need good examples.”

So in 1998, the two women founded Creative Visions Foundations (CVF), which has set out to find those creative activists around the world. Drawing on their memories of Dan, the mother and daughter duo decided that CVF’s mission would be summed up in four words: “tell stories that matter.”

“It’s really hard for people to get funding for projects that are meaningful,” explains Kathy, who serves as the organization’s president and oversees fundraising and fiscal sponsorship. “Dan was killed by ignorance, so our job is to break down the barriers and cultural divides that led to his death.

“We give grants to young people who are using their creativity to bring awareness to the world about important issues.”

Amy, who calls herself a “peace correspondent,” is CVF’s vice president, heading up many of the organization’s new projects. She produced and hosted the Emmy-nominated documentary “Dying to Tell the Story,” which profiled frontline journalists in war zones, and also hosted a poignant PBS series “Global Tribe,” which featured “change-makers”—ordinary people trying to find solutions to global issues. For the series, the young filmmaker interviewed notables such as Jane Goodall, Martin Sheen and Arun Ghandi (grandson of Mahatma Ghandi).

In addition to securing funding, the women are involved in developing further infrastructure for rolling out their projects, such as a website for educators to support “Soldiers of Peace: A Children’s Crusade,” a one-hour CNN documentary about the Children’s Peace Movement in Colombia, which the Eldons helped produce. The film, profiling the teen founders of the movement, featured Bishop Desmond Tutu and Queen Noor. It premiered at the United Nations, and Kathy and Amy organized many events around the documentary, including Jam for Peace, where it was screened for 1,000 inner-city youths.

Like “Soldiers of Peace,” CVF-sponsored media projects have been distributed in more than 220 countries, as well as many colleges and K–12 schools in the United States. “It has been very gratifying to see the positive response to our projects, especially as they are usually very challenging to get going,” says Kathy.

Perhaps the biggest challenge, she notes, is fundraising.

So far, that funding has come from many places — Hewlett

Creative Visions projects include:



THE GLOBAL YOUTH FUND (GYF)

As one of their initiatives to engage the world’s youth, GYF held a short-essay contest titled “This I Believe,” for young people (ages 13-25) worldwide. Judges selected 25 essays which are currently being aired on GYF’s podcast. Visit www.globalyouthfund.org to listen.

An excerpt from “I Believe ... In Dreams” by Denitsa Georgieva, 17, Bulgaria

“Every time I am upset or lonely, I open the door of my dream world. This gives me the strength to go on. However, this year I had really difficult times. I started asking myself if there is any sense in dreaming when reality can be so cruel? Time has passed and I have overcome this period. I start dreaming again. What helped me – the power of dreams or simply time, which cures wounds? The answer came from a surprising place. I met a friend from childhood, however I haven’t seen him in two years. We sat on a bench in the park and talked about what had happened to us in these years. He told me about his best friend: because of an accident at work his leg is smashed under the knee. My friend was with him during the accident and he told me that it really shook him and changed his point of view. He is grateful they are both alive. In that difficult time, he also met, as he said, “the girl of my life.” In his eyes I saw happiness ... simply because he is living and in love. Then I realized life is not the same as we imagined it when we were children. In real life sorrow and happiness go together. He showed me that after suffering comes happiness, and I should dream not only when I am happy but also when I am sad. My belief in dreams will give me strength to struggle for my happiness.”



ASHÁNINKA PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT

Mission: To teach the art of photography to the Asháninka, an indigenous people living in the rain forests of Peru. To enable them to use the camera as a tool: to express their identity, culture and vision from their viewpoint; to expand their access to both give and receive information; to preserve their cultural knowledge, and to conserve their natural resources.

www.narobe.com



FIELD WORK: Amy and kids in Cape Town, South Africa.

INVOLVED

“WE TELL PEOPLE, ‘DO WHAT YOU CAN WITH WHAT YOU HAVE,’” SAYS AMY. “WHETHER IT’S ONE OF OUR PROJECTS OR NOT, JUST DO SOMETHING, AND PEOPLE WILL FEEL RIPPLES OF CHANGE ACROSS THE WORLD.”

To learn more about Creative Visions Foundation visit www.creativevisions.org.

Packard, the Reebok Foundation, the Shell Foundation and Rosie O’Donnell, among others. But Kathy feels that the crowning contributions could come from going after corporations. “We could help more people,” she says.

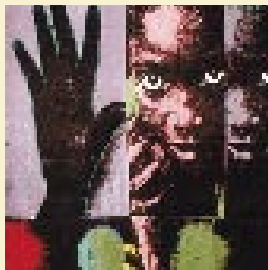
How do they pick their projects? “They choose us,” says Kathy. “People come to us with such a passion for change.” Currently they are working on: Video Volunteers, which teaches illiterate Indian women how to use video to create awareness of pressing social issues; the Asháninka Photography Project, which teaches the art of photography to the indigenous people living in the rain forests of Peru; and The Global Youth Fund, which teaches youth what it means to be “global citizens” by providing the opportunity for them to run their own global development funds in collaboration with other youth around the world.

And it’s actors and singers that will be the focus of the Eldon’s upcoming project.

“Star Power: Mission Possible” is a documentary series they’re developing with VH-1 that follows A-list celebrities on their missions to create awareness of social, humanitarian and environmental issues around the world—from helping Hurricane Katrina survivors rebuild shattered lives to assisting former child soldiers in foreign nations as they put down their AK-47s and go back to school. The project is in final development stages, with plans to launch next year.

If the projects seem disparate at times, it’s fitting in terms of what the mother-daughter team says is their motivation: “We want people to realize that we’re all connected, so let’s pull together,” says Kathy. “That’s the energy behind all we do.” ◻

“My brother
helped people
become brave”
– Amy Eldon-Turteltaub



DAN ELDON'S JOURNALS
Meditative, joyful and
humorous, Eldon's journals
are a lucid mind's attempts
to interpret the messages of
a complicated world.



THE JOURNEY THAT STARTED IT ALL

Dan, a young photo correspondent for Reuters whose photographs appeared in *Newsweek* center spreads and on the cover of *The Wall Street Journal*, among other publications, was working in the troubled country of Somalia in 1992, where a crippling famine had begun to paralyze the country. He and a small group of journalists alerted the world to the country's misery, where as many as 1,000 people a day were starving to death.

“I realized the situation was getting more and more dicey,” remembers Kathy, a former journalist who supported Dan's work yet worried for her son's safety. During a phone conversation with Dan, she asked him, “Don't you think it's time to get out?” But he reassured her. “My job isn't done yet.” “Well,” Kathy said, “I'm proud of you, and I love you.” Hours later, he was dead.

After the tragedy, Kathy and Amy had many questions, but they knew one thing for certain: Dan's life wouldn't be in vain. Believing that his story might inspire others, they turned to his journals—collage pages of ephemera from his young life, including newspaper clippings, food labels, even grains of rice, bound together in loose notebooks.

The fragile pages, which also housed photographs he'd taken since he received his

first camera at the age of six, were far from self-indulgent diaries. The unusual anthologies were a window into the heart and mind of a young man who cared deeply about the world around him, and the plight of others.

“He was dedicated to the journals in the same way that another young person might be dedicated to a sport or a musical instrument,” says Dan's friend Jennifer New in a written reflection about the young photographer. “He always had a journal with him, including during his frequent travels, and made sure to spend time on them at least every few days. Sometimes he would halt a trip for a morning in order to put down a semblance of the day's events or work into the night, his only illumination by a flashlight or fire.”

Believing that these journals might inspire others, Kathy and Amy published a sampling in 1997 under the title “The Journey Is the Destination: The Journals of Dan Eldon.” While the original journals are now stored at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the book itself continues to have an impact on many people, including famous fans Trudie Styler and Anderson Cooper. There is a feature film in development that Kathy has shepherded based on Dan's life. – S.J.