

SHINING BRIGHT



Ellysha, Lyn, Walt and Trent.

A flicker of an idea created a multi-generational family business.

📍 New South Wales

A lot happened during the 1970's. The Boeing 747 completed its first commercial passenger trip to London, Queen Elizabeth II and her royal entourage toured Australia and The Beatles broke up. Meanwhile in Sydney, Lyn Turner and Walt Burak meet, it is 1971 and they are about to change the face of restaurant lighting and food warming in Australia forever.

Lyn had previously worked in America and Walt in Canada and after being struck by love in Australia, they were hit with an idea. The light bulb moment happened over dinner at a Sydney restaurant. They thought "Isn't it funny that there isn't any ambience in restaurants like there is in Canada and the USA". The only candles being made in Australia were the blackout variety so they decided to make their own. "We burnt down half a garage before we got it right" Lyn says. "People didn't have candles in their homes in those days. It's hard to imagine. Now every home, department store and gift shop is full of them."

The first restaurant to buy their candles was a Surry Hills steak house. Gradually other restaurants took note and business picked up. In late 1972 they rented their first factory in Brookvale and when the industrial disputes of the mid-1970's caused power strikes across Australia, demand outstripped supply as their products also became popular for home emergency use. The couple worked around the clock, calling in friends and family for assistance.

Their big break came in 1978 when Pizza Hut put their



Walt at a trade show in Sydney in the 1990's.

new base holder and candle design on every table in every Pizza Hut restaurant in Australia. In 1978 they moved to larger premises in Chippendale when the business became a full time career for the couple who were now married and raising their children.

Walt's knack for constant innovation worked wonders. In the early 1990's he started manufacturing his version of chafing fuel (the fuel that sits underneath a buffet or bain-marie to keep food warm). He called it Oz Heat and the product was granted an Australian Patent in 1998. Fast forward two decades and the company is manufacturing and selling chafing fuel and liquid candles through wholesale and distribution partners to the hotel, restaurant and catering industry across Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. Large companies like Crown Resorts, The Star Entertainment Group, Intercontinental Hotels Group, Accor Hotels Group, Hyatt Hotels and Hilton Hotels & Resorts use Oz Heat as their chafing fuel of choice.

The late 1990s also saw an interesting time in Australia. Interest rates were high, wage growth was high and manufacturing costs were constantly rising. This fuelled with competitive pressure meant that

in order for the business to survive, manufacturing alternatives needed to be investigated.

In 1999 a manufacturing facility was set up in China. Walt shipped Oz Tableware machinery to China and created Tangshan Burak Hotel Supplies (TBHS). To date it is one of only a handful of 100 per cent foreign owned companies in China.

In 2000 their daughter Ellysha joined the company after travelling the world. "I'd been living in London for two years and when I came back, they offered me a job," she says. "I gave it three months to see if we could work together and 20 years later I'm still here."

In 2007 a factory move and a lucky break gave TBHS the opportunity to have a stand at China's huge Canton Fair each April and October. This opened up global export opportunities.

Lyn and Walt's son-in-law Trent Singleton joined the team in 2015. "We were very fortunate that our youngest daughter married someone who understood the basics of what customers need and what it took to build those relationships," Lyn says. "The timing was perfect for Trent to come on board as he had sold his business of 10 years. He understood what was needed to be done to grow the family business." Together, they

all keep things running smoothly. "We now have all the ingredients that we need to take this family business to the next level," Walt says. There's certainly plenty to do. The number of hotels worldwide has increased exponentially over the last 20 years.

Business in Australia and China is booming and the companies now employ 50-plus staff worldwide and export to more than 40 countries.

Lyn now enjoys retirement (and her grandchildren) but 74-year-old Walt, isn't slowing down. "His favourite thing to talk about is what he's doing in business and what he's going to achieve next," Ellysha says. ♦

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