

For the past fifteen years, I have researched, experienced, shared, discovered and taught the power of passion. Nik Halik's book is a beautiful and inspirational example of 'passion in action'. If you have not yet discovered what your passion is, or how it could be possible for you to pursue it, then this book will be a magnificent resource. Passion in my definition is a source of 'unlimited energy from your soul, your spirit, your heart', and Nik wisely and practically shows you how and why it is necessary to overcome the fears from your mind that block you from pursuing your passion.

I agree with Nik: you have been designed by God, by the Universe, by whatever force you acknowledge, to pursue your passions with passion. The Thrillionaire® will 'thrill you to bits'! Read it, absorb it, and burst out of any of your 'mind-imposed' limits.

Charles Kovess, Australasia's Passion Provocateur

THE THRILLIONAIRE®

The Thrillionaire[®] is dedicated to my father
Konstantinos Halikopoulos.
1930 – 1993

Nik Halik

THE THRILLIONAIRE®

Make your life an epic extraordinary adventure

Foreword by Bob Proctor



This edition published by Nik Halik
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As I begin to reflect on the magnitude of this project, I often think back on the chapters that were written in exotic locations across the planet. Most of the writing was undertaken in the Great Pyramid of Giza, on the balcony of my cabin sailing down the Nile River in ancient Egypt or on a yacht sailing in the Greek islands of the Mediterranean. Others were written whilst living on a military base in Russia at the world's leading training facility for orbital space missions, in a storm-chasing vehicle in the heartland of America fleeing the path and destruction of menacing tornadoes or on a private scientific research vessel in the remote and pristine wilderness of the Antarctic Peninsula with its unspoilt frontier, considered to be the most beautiful place on earth.

With regards to my journey so far in life, there are quite a few individuals I would dearly love to thank. Firstly, my mother Dionisia for providing so much support and love for me. You always believed in me and exhibited incredible determination throughout my life. You are the foundation of the family and your love for us all is our strength. My sister Victoria for your twenty-four-hour-a-day commitment and unconditional support. Your constant commitment to selfless contribution makes an incredible difference. To my sister Georgia for your humour and wit and my brother Jim for your heart of gold and ever-increasing respect. To my nephews Kosta, Oscar, Dion and Felix, dream big and live with passion.

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And finally, thank you to the Panos family, my adopted family in the United States. You were a beacon of light for me when I relocated to Los Angeles in my late teens. Also to my many friends and relations across the globe, I cherish and respect our associations. You are all incredibly unique in my life.

To the giants whose shoulders I stand upon, the mentors who have shaped my life, philosophy, wisdom and unwavering determination, I acknowledge you in *The Thrillionaire*® and salute you.

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Foreword

WE HEAR A LOT OF TALK TODAY ABOUT MILLIONAIRES and billionaires, but never before have I seen the word “Thrillionaire®”. However, it fits Nik Halik to a tee.

I have worked in the personal development industry for close to forty years. I have travelled to numerous countries and have worked in as many cultures and there are any number of people who give our program credit for becoming millionaires. I am flattered that Nik has endorsed my company’s ‘Born Rich’ program and credits it with inspiring him to accomplish the phenomenal feats that have taken him to outer space and to the depths of the ocean. But Nik is the first one to give us credit for him becoming a Thrillionaire®. I love the word!

Directly behind my desk I have the *New Lexicon Webster’s* dictionary. In it, I have found the word thrill and thriller but nowhere in the dictionary have I found the word Thrillionaire®. Not only does Nik Halik travel to places no one has ever been before, he’s creating words that no one has ever heard before. But again, that fits Nik Halik to a tee. He’s an extraordinary individual and his uniqueness comes out at you from every page in this book.

In the very early part of the book, Nik quotes J Paul Getty where Getty shared some fantastic advice, ‘When eighty per cent of the newspaper sentiment is saying to buy, you should sell. Equally, when eighty per cent of the newspaper sentiment is saying to sell, you should buy.’ Getty was, at one time, the wealthiest

man in the world. Nik Halik knows where to go for advice. And, if and when he does follow someone else's advice, he makes sure the person has done what they're telling him to do. He took Getty's advice seriously and became a very wealthy man. But, as I've already mentioned, Nik is unique: he is definitely a unique individual who cuts his own path. He doesn't even follow that small percentage of the population who has created wealth. Nik is not fascinated with cars, planes and homes. He wants to use the money he has created to serve him in fulfilling his deep desires.

As you go from page to page, from story to story, you're going to be shaking your head wondering how this man developed such an extraordinary personality. He definitely is a Thrillionaire® and an excellent writer indeed. Nowhere in the book are you going to be left bored, the way he puts the words together, he paints beautiful pictures in your mind and does, in fact, take you on his journeys with him. You'll quickly see this man is in excellent physical shape, or he would never be able to accomplish what he has accomplished or what he plans to accomplish on a normal diet or exercise program.

I have a magnificent library of over 3,000 books. I can assure you Nik Halik's *The Thrillionaire*® will sit in a favourite place. As you journey through these pages, try and remember that each fascinating journey Nik has gone on was the result of a decision he made to improve the quality of his life. These decisions are definitely bringing his God-given potential to the surface. I once read where George Bernard Shaw stated that when he died, he wanted to be thoroughly used up. It is my opinion that Nik Halik subscribes to that sentiment.

It would not be difficult for me to continue writing paragraph after paragraph, praising this extraordinary man, his accomplishments in this book. However I feel it's time for you to dig into it yourself. Get a comfortable place to sit and make certain that you have the time to keep reading, as you will not want to lay this book down. And, if you have a very dear friend who you enjoy sharing things of value with, you should definitely give them a copy of *The Thrillionaire*®.

Bob Proctor

Best-selling author of *You Were Born Rich*

Introduction

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step – Lao Tzu

IN AN AGE WITH SO MANY DISTRACTIONS VYING FOR OUR ATTENTION, simply by reading *The Thrillionaire*® you are demonstrating your commitment to taking the inaugural step in setting yourself apart from the masses. No matter what a person's status or level of achievement in society, those who have reached a pinnacle of success in life do not rest on their laurels. No person can become so astute in any mental faculty, that they are not able to further raise their level of awareness.

The universe cannot put good into your hands until you let go of what you are holding in them. The most powerful prosperity tool is wisdom and by increasing it, your wisdom will always manifest a corresponding compounding increase in wealth. Hence, we are born to evolve and thrive on change in order to harness new energies and opportunities.

The Thrillionaire® will communicate to your inner emotions and stir the fires of your soul. It will enrich your life and guide you to the keys of Mind and Wealth Prosperity. You now hold within yourself this principle of power that contains the solutions to a brighter future, a path to greatness and the formula for reaching your peak potential. With the absolute awakening of this principle, your mental faculties will be intelligently sculptured and coherently aligned towards infinite greatness.

Today is a good day. Your dream has never been closer than it is at this exact instant. You will vividly visualise the image of what you desire in your mind. As you plant the seeds for your future prosperity, the words you speak will reflect the prosperity consciousness you possess. This discovery of your true assignment will allow the universe to provide to you your next assignment when you are overqualified for this one. Your beliefs will change as you will allow yourself the luxury of critical thinking. Like writing a movie script of your vision, you will be involving all of your senses. You will ascertain that your mind is an instrument for poverty or prosperity. This transformation of thought process will bypass your conscious resistance and connect you to the deeper levels of your emotions.

In summary, my illumination is that you will draw a line in the sand and integrate your newly inspired internal representation of core beliefs. You will have the assignment of opportunity to re-program the most powerful computer in the world – your mind, to become prosperous. Understanding that the mind is not an object but merely an activity, your mind will develop into an ‘image maker’ governed by universal law. I encourage you to subscribe to, enrol and nurture others into your newly discovered vision, where dreams become reality. In the end it just comes down to one thing. You can’t run from the wind. You face reality. You face the world. Untie the mooring lines of limiting beliefs that hold you back from success. You trim your sails and maintain momentum. I encourage you to set sail on a voyage of evolution. I look forward to greeting you on the other side.

Live with passion and dare to dream. Make your life an epic extraordinary adventure.

Yours in prosperity,



Nik Halik

Chapter 1

The Thrillionaire®

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail – Ralph Waldo Emerson

MY CELL PHONE RANG, AND CALLING ME WAS A PRODUCER FROM the British production company making the television program *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* for European and North American viewers. He had heard about my investment exploits, my obsession with extreme adventures and how I'd literally go to the ends of the earth to fulfil my dreams. The call was early 2007, and the producer was eager to film a segment with me for the international program. He just needed to establish exactly what possessions they could film. First up, he asked me what cars I owned.

I was a bit slow answering, so he started to quote the names of the most exotic brands.

'Lamborghini or Ferrari?' he asked.

I was still thinking of what to say.

'Okay, Mercedes?'

'Well, not exactly ...' I answered.

'I get it,' he went on, 'you're a Porsche man.'

'Not quite.'

‘So, you’re a James Bond kind of guy. You like action. I bet you’ve got an Aston Martin locked away.’

‘Oh, I do like Aston Martins,’ I replied. ‘But no, I don’t have one in the garage. Actually, I don’t own a car.’

The telephone line seemed to go dead for a few seconds.

‘Aah, you’re a boat man,’ the producer spouted optimistically. ‘You’re a sailor?’

I felt a bit embarrassed. ‘I like yachting, yes, but, I’m sorry, I don’t have a yacht either.’

He was speechless.

I explained to him that my golden rule thus far was to not invest in anything that moves, and that’s why I didn’t have a car, a boat or even works of art. I then enlightened him that with regards to investing, for the last eighteen years I have aggressively subscribed to an *asset accumulation* and *compounding regime* of my life and have not entertained the idea of purchasing liabilities that depreciated.

It is alleged that Albert Einstein, arguably one of the most intelligent people who ever lived, was asked what he thought was the greatest of mankind’s discoveries. His candid answer is also alleged to have been: ‘compound interest’, the *eighth wonder of the world* and ‘the greatest mathematical discovery of all time.’ I provided this insight to the producer that to be a successful investor, it is important to understand the laws that govern investment growth and the mathematical laws of how compounded money really grows.

The producer decided that they would proceed with the filming anyway, no doubt assuming that they’d get plenty of interesting footage out of my asset-rich business portfolio and a preview of my thrill seeking adventures. I make no apology for not fitting the stereotype of a person who has wealth and the trappings of it. Most people equate wealth with the trappings, the luxury items and opulence. I’m not into any of that. I guess I come from outside the square. People have this stereotypical view that wealthy people should be glamorous. The glamour aspect doesn’t grab me. I’ve always believed that wealth isn’t just

about what you can buy. Wealth is like a four-legged table. The monetary aspect is just one leg. The other quadrant legs include emotional wealth, spiritual wealth and physical wealth.

Real wealth is having an abundance of ideas and a strong belief system which underpins everything you do in life. Ninety-nine per cent of what I consider to be wealth is derived from one's belief system. The monetary strategies to become financially abundant comprise just one per cent of the equation. I recall my earlier life which was more money focused and orientated, whereas these days I am more cause orientated. In life there is no sense in possessing great financial wealth and not being happy. Equally, there's no point in being rich and being physically unwell.

Individuals who seek status symbols in life have a fixation on synthetic wealth, because they need something to reassure them artificially so they can impress others they don't particularly like. I am the type of personality to save, invest and attain self-mastery for the long term, rather than some people who blow their cash on Ferraris and young third wives. People should feel good about themselves because of what they are, and what they do – not what they have in their garage.

But, as I said, I don't consider things that move to be an investment. My number one rule in an *Accumulation Asset Phase*® of one's life is to not invest in anything that moves, unless you have a validated reason. Can you name something that appreciates in value that moves? An automotive will need to be a classic vintage in order for it to appreciate. The mandatory rule is that you adequately furnish your mind and ensure your financial foundation has been solidified and primed to erect your skyscraper and monument to your existence. Welcome to Financial Prosperity as opposed to Financial Cancer.

With a mosaic of colourful experiences available to all of us – I find it more appealing to drill deeper into life. I continually invest in a new vision or paradigm, participating in extreme adventures, that I am sure many people would find quite bizarre. A life of prosperity is a series of assignments, each one, helping you grow, developing your talents, and expanding your consciousness. As your consciousness grows, so does the impact you make

and the influence within your inner circle. With this obsessive desire to acquire the ancient principles of enlightened living, I have already visited over eighty-five countries in my quest for adventure. I have dived down to the deepest abyss of the oceans, rocketed to the edge of space and summited the world's highest mountains, just to name a few.

When I was a young boy, I developed my Top 10 'Hit List' of goals to achieve in my life. I must have had quite a vision because that *hit list* is still relevant thirty years later. I strongly believe that there are no coincidences in life. A higher consciousness individual understands how prosperity laws work. A person with a compelling dream actually bends the universe to their will and strives for a unique constellation of attributes. I have three major goals remaining from my original Top 10 Hit List, which include summiting the highest mountain peak in the world, Mt Everest, visiting a space station orbiting up to 300 miles above the Earth and finally, to explore the lunar surface of the moon. This enlightened living and the manifesting of new frontiers in exploration, will serve as the next chapter in the evolution of my life.

In early adulthood, my pivotal mentor was a peak performance lecturer, author and entrepreneur by the name of Bob Proctor, who instilled in me the belief that we were all born rich. For forty years, Bob Proctor has helped create lives of prosperity, rewarding relationships, and spiritual awareness. Born in northern Ontario Canada, Bob stresses the ideas of positive thinking and self-motivation. Bob was all about 'Nik, tell me what you want and I'll show you how to get it.' Until I met Bob Proctor, I used to regard the word *rich* from a monetary perspective, but later I developed the faculty awareness to drill deeper on what he said. Bob recalled that we were all born equal, with equal opportunities and an abundance of potential. Prosperity was our natural birthright and we all possessed the same colouring marker set with which we can make our mark in life. Some of us choose black markers and white markers. Others embrace a colouring book set with a myriad of colours. Bob really had the ability to reduce the most complicated concepts in life to the simplest form.

Just recently one of my companies, Financial Freedom Institute, hosted one of the most anticipated Mind and Wealth Prosperity seminars in the US called *Wealth Celebrities*®. The *Wealth Celebrities*® event in Los Angeles, California provided a forum for the planet's most distinguished speakers to inspire, connect, contribute and stir the soul. I invited Bob Proctor as my keynote speaker and it was a privilege to share the stage and to be reunited with him again. It was also an occasion and opportunity for me to reciprocate and pay homage to his influence in my life. I was thrilled to share the exploits of my life with Bob and I sincerely thanked him. My mind had the magnetic power to attract all that I desired into my life.

The purpose of a definitive life is one that provides an oasis of enlightenment. This is the secret kindling to ignite the inner fire that lurks within us all. We all have it, some individuals make the unconscious decision to extinguish it and maintain it devoid of illumination. In life we are only measured by our contributions. It's what you give out in assisting other people to achieve their goals, once you achieved yours. Socrates said: '*The best human is all humans put together*'. I don't believe we should ever be totally satisfied with where we are in our lives. There's always the opportunity to raise our level of awareness and seize the day, *carpe diem*. By redefining our lives and seeking new vantage points, we inadvertently remove the 'IM' out of the word IM-possible. The Bannister Principle is an excellent reflection of this theory. In 1954, an Englishman, Roger Bannister ran the distance of a mile in under four minutes ... even medical experts cautioned that it was impossible to run the mile in under four minutes. Within nine months of Bannister's feat, thirty other runners achieved the milestone too. When he was asked to explain that first four-minute mile – and the art of record breaking – he answered with original directness: '*It's the ability to take more out of yourself than you've got.*' We can incorporate the Bannister Principle and implement it into the interior of our personal and business life.

One of the portraits I have on my wall in my office is a picture of a mousetrap and a mouse. What do most mice do? They come head on into the trap, flirt with the cheese and get caught. But the mouse on this portrait reminds me of the heist scene from the movie *Mission Impossible* with Tom Cruise. This particularly astute mouse on the poster has shimmied down on a vertical wire

to the mousetrap to claim its cheese reward. The mouse is thinking outside the square. That's my mantra. Approach everything in life from a different angle. Unfortunately, most wandering souls approach everything in life from the same myopic angle, thus fuelling the tyranny of impoverished thinking, whereby they lose their faculty of thinking and remain captives of their negative ingrained pasts.

It is mandatory for us to cultivate our mind, hence allowing it to blossom beyond our expectations. I sincerely believe that this is the secret of happiness, where we truly find what we dearly love to do and then direct all of our energy towards doing it. Once we find out what our life's work is, we transform and undergo a sea of change and feel alive. We wake up every morning with a limitless reservoir of energy and enthusiasm for life.

My obvious enthusiasm for life has attracted lots of global attention. The television and print media of late have proclaimed me 'The Thrillionaire®'. They have classified me into a Thrillionaire® archetypal character, with my own passion points, consuming habits and creative style. With my life, I was not born into Old Money, fine art and privilege. My refinement and later sophistication of the mind was as a result of redefining my sense of purpose. I ultimately believe it is our responsibility to leave the world a better place than that we found it. It's the legacy we leave behind, the footprints we leave in history that count. We need to focus on the passions and motivations that radiate an abundance of vitality and energy in our lives, *rather than just the size of our wallets*. I am the new breed of moneyed traveller looking for high-octane adventure. Thrillionaire®s are individuals who understand the thrill of giving, and share their stories so that others will become inspired to become Thrillionaire®s themselves. Just like an inner compass guiding them towards their destination.

Look around. There is an abundance of thrills to be experienced. The quality of our thinking determines the quality of our life. We need to collect our change every day and give it to something that warms our heart. Everybody has a gift to give. If you put coins in somebody else's parking meter, send money to a child in need, sponsor endangered animals, collect change for UNICEF, give

away your personal belongings to charity, lead an exhilarating heart pounding adventurous lifestyle or write a check for a massive cash donation, you are a Thrillionaire®.

The book, *The Thrillionaire*® is about my self-discovery, the exploration of my identity and mission in life. It is about wisdom I have embraced from various mentors in my life and the vision that has established my system of empowering beliefs. I created a model of the world, a map of the world that allowed me to perceive the greatest number of available choices and perspectives. *The Thrillionaire*® details my stories of adventure interspersed with financial wisdom and is purposely set out the way it is. I sincerely invite you to immerse yourself and share the powerful insights with others.

Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop to look once in a while, you'll miss it.

THE THRILLIONAIRE® PRINCIPLE

- Once we find out what our life's work is, we transform and undergo a sea of change and feel alive. What is your life's work?
- It's the legacy we leave behind that shapes your life, what will your legacy be?
- Everybody has a gift to give, what will your gift be to the world?

Chapter 2

Journey to Titanic

If your ship doesn't come in, swim out to it – Jonathan Winters

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES. I had arranged to take my sister Victoria to see *Titanic*, the 1997 film about the immortalised ‘unsinkable’ ocean liner that struck an iceberg, sending more than 1,500 people to a watery grave. A night at the movies doesn’t usually lead to the most memorable experience of a lifetime – but that night did. Something truly bizarre happened during the screening. In hindsight, I guess it was a premonition of how close I would eventually come to history’s most famous shipwreck. The *Titanic* saga has captivated me ever since I was a small child.

I feel a personal connection because hundreds of passengers on board were immigrants fleeing their homeland and travelling to America, considered the new world, to pursue their dream of starting a new life.

My affinity with them is because my parents were also immigrants. My mother and father boarded ships out of Greece bound for Australia to start new lives in a continent they knew so little about. I’m sure the migrant experience isn’t half as romantic as it sounds. Most immigrants have to leave their families and friends behind because they see no future in their homeland. The optimism of the migrant is an emotion that’s born of despair.

On board *Titanic*, there were hundreds of people in the lowest class, steerage. When the ship went down, they were locked in, trapped, and most perished in

the icy waters of the North Atlantic Ocean. There were 2,228 people on board *Titanic* when she crashed into that massive iceberg on the night of April 15th, 1912. Only 705 survived. Not only was it one of the worst maritime disasters in human history, but it was one of the most amazing. So many quirks of fate conspired to create the unthinkable. For starters, it was a moonless night. There was no reflection on the water. It was well nigh impossible for the ship's crew to see the monster lurking in the fog. *Titanic* weighed over 50,000 tonnes – she was the largest and most opulent ship in the world. She was a palace on the high seas.

The *Titanic* was the grandest ship of her time. She was majestic, lavishly decorated and considered unsinkable because four of her sixteen watertight compartments could be flooded without endangering the ship. The *Titanic* was divided into social classes according to background, wealth and education. The ship's passenger list was a cross-section of early 20th century society. On board were some of the wealthiest people in the world – a Who's Who of business and commerce types from the Old World of Europe and the New World of the Americas. And down in third class, steerage, were hundreds of desperate immigrants, all hoping that America might give them a fresh beginning. They were bound for the land of opportunity.

It was *Titanic's* maiden voyage, which added to the pageantry and intrigue surrounding the vessel's departure from the mother country. All this drama was set against the backdrop of the new century, the last years of the industrial revolution. In a few years, the world would be at war. But, in 1912, the movers and shakers were enraptured by what engineering marvels they could build. There was a mood of optimism in the air.

James Cameron's movie of *Titanic* carried the same sense of anticipation. James Cameron is an Academy Award winning director, producer and screenwriter noted for his action/science fiction films. Cameron directed the film *Titanic*, which went on to become the top-grossing film of all time, with a worldwide gross of over US\$1.8 billion dollars. He also created the *Terminator* franchise starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. *Titanic* was hailed as a blockbuster, so Victoria and I decided to see it at what we regard as the best cinema in our home city,

Melbourne. The Gold Class theatre at Crown Casino is quite exclusive and seats only twenty-five people. With a vast screen and truly captivating cinematic auditory experience, the cinema design of the Gold Class Theatre was designed to recreate the acoustics and ambience of the movie studio. So, for a three hour major epic about the most dramatic shipwreck in history, I wanted to bathe in the myriad of sensations. I certainly wasn't disappointed.

About two hours into the film, when the ship started to take on water in the movie, and the bow was filling up quickly, a freakish incident occurred. I had wanted to soak up the experience, but I hadn't expected that art would imitate life so closely. At the moment the ship was about to split in two, the cinema's sprinkler system activated. Water sprayed down from the ceiling and, within seconds, we were drenched. Talk about reality film-making! I was so caught up in the unfolding drama that it took me a few seconds to realise what was actually happening. Perhaps it was an omen. As a result of seeing that film, I seized the opportunity to get as close to the real *Titanic* as any person can. The absurdity of the drenching and the extraordinary co-incidence provoked laughter from the some of the soaked cinema fans. Others left immediately, leaving a watery trail as they filed out. People waiting in the foyer gave us weird looks as we emerged from the cinema, looking like we had just climbed out of a swimming pool in our Sunday best. Because there was no chance that the audience could resume their seats, the cinema management kindly offered us tickets to see the movie another time. I couldn't wait to get back and see the movie through.

Ever since I first read about *Titanic* in the family's encyclopedia, I had been enthralled by the story. Everything about *Titanic* was a curiosity. I remember reading how *Titanic* had four funnels, yet only three of them worked. In the day when the White Star Line commissioned construction of *Titanic*, the more funnels a ship had, the more prestigious she was considered to be. Having four funnels was a sign of grandeur, but only three of *Titanic's* ever had steam coming out. If you see old drawings of *Titanic*, you might notice that she was often depicted with steam coming out of all four funnels. After the sinking of the *Titanic* and her sister ship *Britannic*, legend has it that shipping lines considered it unlucky to build a vessel with four funnels.

So a week after that original soaking, Victoria and I were back in the Gold Class theatre, and we watched the *Titanic* movie right through to the last frame. I didn't miss a frame of it, but I had a special reason to scrutinise the closing credits. I had been enchanted by the opening sequence, which featured modern-day images of the wreck. The pictures were so beautiful, so surreal. Here, in all her glory, was the legend. When the credits came on, I studied them to see if there was any mention of how the cinematographers had been able to film that opening sequence with the submersibles. *Titanic* lies on the floor of the North Atlantic Ocean, about 3,750 metres below the surface. To get down to that depth, and to actually film a wreck some ninety years after she sank, was an incredible achievement. As I sat through the movie, I kept thinking: If they could film the actual wreck, maybe I could go down there. So, I scanned the credits just as attentively as I had watched the film. And there it was, the following Russian entities were thanked as part of the deep sea dive – Kaliningrad-based, PP Shirshov Institute of Oceanology and the Russian Academy of Sciences. My mind started racing. In those credits was the clue that could lead me to one of the most exciting adventures of my life.

I had previously made contacts at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Space Centre in Russia during my Orbital Space Program activities in 2003, so I contacted the Shirshov Institute and was put in touch with someone who might be able to help.

After several phone calls I discovered that the MIR submersibles which were used in the deep sea dive during the making of the *Titanic* film had journeyed down to the wreck once every few years, carrying scientists, marine biologists, historians and some privileged paying enthusiasts. Paying enthusiasts? Yes! I vowed that – whatever it took – I would go down there and view the ship for myself.

In early 2005, my chance came. I was invited to undertake a dive down to the most famous sunken ship in history. Initially I was asked to complete all sorts of tests, just to ensure that I was physically and mentally suitable for the adventure. There were medical and psychological tests that I had to undertake.

They were particularly concerned about any possibility of claustrophobia,

because the submersibles are just 2.1 m wide, particularly for three people spending ten hours in a pressurised biosphere at the bottom of the deepest, darkest ocean.

The management at the Shirshov Institute informed me of an expedition departing in July 2005 – and that there was only one seat left. I booked my seat. That’s how I became one of the very few people in the world to ever visit the wreck of *Titanic*.

The investment in diving to the *Titanic* wreck was equal to a deposit you’d have to outlay to purchase an inner city house in my native Melbourne, Australia. For me, it was worth every cent. An adventure of this magnitude is what living is about. We were to dive down to the wreck in the month of July in the North Atlantic Ocean, as it was a month deemed to be reasonably calm and least treacherous. Other months in the Atlantic have patterns of low pressure systems that sweep across the ocean creating rogue waves. Such are the vagaries of trans-Atlantic crossings in the open sea. In the age-old battle against nature, disasters at sea have a distinctive unique appeal of human tragedy, occasional heroics and often mysterious circumstances. The *Andrea Gail*, a Gloucester Massachusetts, swordfish boat made famous in the book and movie *The Perfect Storm*, starring George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg, sank in the general vicinity of *Titanic*, just south of the tail of the Grand Banks. The Grand Banks are a group of underwater plateaus south-east of Newfoundland on the North American continental shelf. On October 28th, 1991, the *Andrea Gail* collided with monstrous storms and was left stranded in the high seas, defenceless in what meteorologists had called the ‘storm of the century’, when three weather systems converged in the Atlantic Ocean and created waves reported to have exceeded 100 feet.

RMS *Titanic* on her maiden voyage sank halfway between Southampton, her port of departure, and New York, the destination she never reached. At the time, she was travelling a north-westerly route and oceanographers believe she struck a *blueberg*. That’s an unusually hard iceberg. It is an iceberg that has a different composition – more rocks. Against a gigantic *blueberg*, even the world’s largest ship didn’t stand a chance.

To meet up with the scientific research ship that would take me out to the *Titanic* wreck, I had to travel to St Johns, Newfoundland, the most remote eastern tip of Canada. The Russian research vessel *Akademik Keldysh* was in port at St Johns to rendezvous with me. This was the same Scientific Research Vessel used in the making of *Titanic* by producer James Cameron. I was also very fortunate to meet James Cameron in my July 2005 Dive, as he was filming a Discovery Channel Documentary. Cameron was using our July expedition to produce a new *Titanic* featured television event.

The Russians proudly claim the *Akademik Keldysh* to be the most lavishly fitted research ship in the world. It has several small laboratories on board, as well as a specialised library covering underwater archaeology, oceanography and deep-sea exploration. The ship has satellite communications equipment, enabling passengers to make contact with the outside world while they are in the mid-Atlantic. I'm an investor by nature, so I used the five days travelling from St Johns to the wreck site of the *Titanic* to close a couple of stock market trades. I thought I'd lock in some profit via my laptop – just in case I didn't make it back. Where there's a profit, I want to lock it in. So that's what I did. I wonder what my broker would have said about me closing trades from a research ship in the middle of the North Atlantic directly above the wreck of *Titanic*!

The *Akademik Keldysh* took the scheduled five days to get to the precise coordinates above where the wreck sits. Along the way, something unusual happened. With the extreme excitement of an expedition like this, I took along a video camera – two, in fact – and I used the camcorder to document life aboard ship. On my third day out to sea I was invited into the navigation room by the captain and everyone was quite happy for me to film the bridge. While I was looking through the viewfinder, I noticed charts on the navigator's table. A closer inspection revealed that I was inadvertently filming the exact coordinates of the *Titanic* wreck, which were marked on the map on the table. The precise location of the *Titanic* had always been a huge secret, to prevent illegal salvage operations of its treasures. I couldn't believe I was recording the precise location of history's most legendary shipwreck. I still have that footage and those coordinates.

As curious as I am, I defer to the experts of the *Akademik Keldysh* to be the caretakers of this fascinating voyage. Deep sea exploration is an extraordinarily complex process, and the men and women on board the *Keldysh* were some of the world's best. They were certainly an interesting assortment of characters. The captain and chief scientist, Dr Anatoly Sagalevitch, is a real character in particular.

At night he ushered us into his cabin for shots of vodka, and brought out his Dobro guitar, whereupon he would serenade and play Russian folk songs. Anatoly played a key role in designing the world's most advanced MIR submersibles, which can dive to depths of 6,000 metres. With Sagalevitch at the controls, the MIR submersibles were made famous in the 1997 Oscar-winning film *Titanic*.

Some of the others on board were part of James Cameron's film crew. James Cameron used our July 2005 expedition to set up the production for a Discovery Channel and IMAX documentary. On our expedition, Cameron sent down a five kilometre fibre optic cable from the Keldysh to the wreck of the *Titanic*, so that they could return a week later and record the first ever live via satellite feed from the bridge of *Titanic* for the Discovery Channel. On board the *Akademik Keldysh*, Cameron had his own production studio with millions of dollars worth of equipment.

A flamboyant passenger also on board was a Russian billionaire named Boris. Boris was an *oligarch*, one of the individuals who became so immensely rich in the privatisation of the assets of the Soviet system after its economic collapse. He obviously had a lot of clout. He and his attractive young female companion were given James Cameron's state room. It had wall-to-wall video screens and was, in itself, a mini television studio. I'd say Boris was a man of some influence. Another unique individual was Fran Capo, a close friend of mine who joined our expedition to do a book signing by the wreck of the *Titanic*. Fran has been interviewed on Good Morning America, Larry King, CNN Live among others and was featured in the Guinness Book of World Records as the fastest talking female on the planet. Fran was clocked at *603.32 words per minute*. That's ten words a second!

There were several world famous deep-sea explorers on our expedition also.

One was the highly decorated Don Walsh, who I was fortunate to interview for my *Titanic* documentary. Don was a US Navy lieutenant, who had recorded the deepest dive in history, going down to a diving depth of 35,813 feet below sea level. This dive was undertaken in the world's deepest underwater canyon, the Marianas Trench off the coast of Guam. At a maximum depth of 35,813 feet it is the deepest location on earth. He and Jacques Piccard were aboard the bathyscaphe *Trieste* when it made the record-breaking descent into the Challenger Deep. Challenger Deep is so deep that if Mt Everest were to be placed into it there would be more than two kilometres of water covering it.

Another explorer on our expedition was Ralph White who was an award-winning cinematographer who had just concluded a National Geographic documentary *Search for the Loch Ness Monster* in the Inverness Highlands in the north of Scotland. The tales of Nessie, the sea serpent-like creature that fitted a specific type of dinosaur-era sea creature called a plesiosaur has enchanted people from all over the world. Ralph White, who alongside the very famous Robert Ballard, was a key player in the expedition that discovered the wreck of the *Titanic* back in 1985. Robert Ballard also discovered the wreck of the famous World War II German battleship *Bismarck* in 1989 and had just recently discovered the famed wreck of John F. Kennedy's *PT-109* torpedo boat. In the summer of 1985, Ballard was aboard the French research ship *Le Suroît* which was using the revolutionary new side scan sonar to search for *Titanic's* wreck. When the French ship was recalled, Ballard transferred onto a ship from Woods Hole, the *Knorr*. Unbeknownst to some, this trip was being financed by the US Navy for secret reconnaissance of the wreckage of *USS Scorpion*. The *USS Scorpion* was a top secret nuclear submarine that had sunk nearby. The agreement was that after the Navy search was concluded, Ballard would be free to hunt for *Titanic*. In 1985, Ballard came across the remains of the boilers that powered the great liner and later discovered the hull itself. *Titanic* revealed herself to the world after seventy-three years.

Whilst interviewing Ralph White for a *Titanic* documentary I was producing in 2005, Ralph informed me that he led an Anglo-French *Titanic* artifact recovery

expedition aboard the EFREMER Research Vessel *Nadir* back to the *Titanic* wreck in 1987, and that he had been able to provide them the exact secret coordinates. Ralph had co-directed the salvage operation and photography during the recovery of over 1,400 artifacts from *Titanic*'s debris field, which later became the world's leading *Titanic* travelling exhibition. Ralph White recently died on February 4th, 2008. He died from complications of an aortic aneurysm at Glendale Adventist Medical Centre in California. Ralph had dived the *Titanic* wreck over thirty times and had boasted to me that he spent more time on the *Titanic* than its original captain had.

The potential for further plunder of *Titanic* has become a big issue in recent years, and – after a string of court cases – England, America and France have signed a treaty to place a moratorium on all dives down to *Titanic*. The Russians with the deepest diving submersibles in the world have yet to sign the treaty. However, there is great pressure on the Russians at the moment, and it is quite possible that expeditions such as the one I embarked on will soon be halted. While I strongly believe that wrecks should not be plundered, I obviously approve of explorers being allowed to view these surreal time capsules of the past.

It was fascinating to hear the stories of those experts aboard the *Akademik Keldysh* as it churned through the Atlantic waves towards the coordinate location above *Titanic*. I love history, particularly the stories of explorers tackling new frontiers.

As I listened to some of the worlds boldest and famed deep-sea explorers aboard the *Akademik Keldysh*, I appreciated even more just how fortunate and privileged I was.

Quite possibly, the *Titanic* will disappear in the next decade, if not because of the controversy, then most certainly because the physical wreck is being eaten away. Marine biologists are fearful that bacteria could literally chew it up within ten to fifteen years. Rusticles cling to every bit of the structure, consuming an incredible 2,000 pounds of steel every day. These microbial communities are eating away *Titanic*'s iron at a rapid rate. There is precious little sea life at the bottom of the sea and, what there is, doesn't feed on bacteria. Because of the

lack of ambient light at the bottom, it is pitch black. Marine biologists have taken samples of these rusticles and report that the wreck is becoming more dilapidated every year. I guess the precarious state of the wreck heightened the desire I had to go down there while I still could.

The Russian MIR Submersibles are the deepest diving vessels in the world.

The MIR submersibles can dive to a maximum depth of 6,000 metres (19,680 feet), whereas a larger submarine has only a 400 metres depth limit. The cockpit of MIR is a five centimetre thick sphere made from a combination of nickel and steel, with an inner diameter of 2.1 m. The total length of the vessel is 7.8 m and the weight 18.6 tonnes. Air pressure inside the cabin remains at a constant one atmosphere with the air being recycled in a manner similar to that used on board spacecraft. The two MIR submersibles on the *Akademik Keldysh* are part of a group of only four deep-diving vessels in the world that the Russians make available to the world's scientific community. Built of special nickel steel, they are designed to withstand the enormous pressures that exist in the depths of the oceans. The pressure on the submersible at the depth of *Titanic* is something like 6,000 pounds per square inch. The submersibles are the closest thing there is to space capsules. Travelling in them is like orbiting the planet. The compartment that accommodates three people – a pilot and two passengers – is just over two metres in diameter. Naturally, there are no bathroom facilities on board.

On August 2nd, 2007 Russia used the same MIR submersibles from my *Titanic* dive to perform the first ever manned descent to the seabed under the Geographic North Pole, to a depth of 4.3 kilometres. The historical significance of this expedition was that no human had ever travelled to the real North Pole before. The crew of MIR-1 was composed of my friend and pilot Anatoly Sagalevich and Russian polar explorer Arthur Chilingarov. On the 'real North Pole' seabed, at a depth of 4,261 metres, MIR-1 planted a one metre tall rust-proof Russian flag, made of titanium alloy and left a time capsule, containing a message for future generations. There have been historical disputes and conflicts over who reached the surface ice at 90° North first. But one could argue that, no matter who did it, the real North Pole is not a point on the

ever-changing ice pack. Embracing the true spirit of adventure, its goal was a notable geographic ‘first’ in the exploration of our planet. The MIR descended to the unexplored Amundsen Plain, in the middle of the Arctic Ocean – the least known of all the oceans on our planet. This is a region where no human has gone before, more than 14,000 feet below the shifting polar ice cap in a dark and mysterious place.

The MIR submersibles were designed and built in Finland for the Russians during the Cold War. Their primary directives were presumably to salvage nuclear warheads from sunken Russian submarines or, alternatively, to plunder nuclear warheads from any American submarines that sank to the ocean floor. Curiously, MIR is a Russian word meaning *Peace*. Both MIR 1 and MIR 2 weigh around eighteen tonnes each. It takes a twenty-five tonne crane aboard the mother ship *Akademik Keldysh* to lift them into the water. The two submersibles dive down thirty minutes apart so that – if something goes wrong with one – the other might be able to help. At the depth of *Titanic*, I’m not sure how much help one submersible would be if another was trapped. But that doesn’t worry me too much. I honestly don’t concern myself with fear. My attitude is that the experience is worth any perceived risk. What’s the worst scenario? That I perish down there, I suppose. Well, if I am going to exit this world in the deep blue ocean, I’d rather exit on the deck of the *Titanic*. At least, I’d be doing something that I love. Much more exciting than let’s say, going out to the letter box, getting bitten by a wasp, and dying from the sting. Nah, give me *Titanic* anytime. You’ve probably guessed by now that I’m a curious person, and that extreme environments captivate me.

We know so little about the deep blue sea. Only three per cent of the world’s oceans have ever been explored. We actually know a lot more about space than we do about our oceans. For me, shipwrecks are utterly intriguing. They are time capsules. The clock stopped the moment they sank. History has always excited me. I guess it’s because of my European origins in Greece, a country so entrenched with history. It’s the birthplace of civilisation and democracy. If there was a time machine, I would much prefer to go back into history than into the future. None of us can turn back time – nor can we travel through the chapters of history – but shipwrecks are perhaps the closest we come to a true time warp.

The *Titanic*, which cost a reported \$7.5 million to build, is frozen in time, a time capsule of the year, 1912. That was a year when there was such optimism – the new century, the fastest and biggest ship of its time, the marvellous anticipation of its maiden voyage. *Titanic's* crew at the time sailed faster than they should have because they wanted to get to New York one day earlier than scheduled – so they could outdo their rivals. These were the early maverick days and industrial might of the turn of the century. I have read everything I can find of the memoirs of *Titanic* survivors, the correspondence and records. Now, finally, I was close to living my dream.

We arrived at the wreck site of the *Titanic* early in the morning and began planting four transponders around the diving area. These four transponders would make it easy for the MIR submersibles to navigate within and around the wreck. On the night before my dive, at 11.40 pm, the exact time that *Titanic* struck the iceberg, I went out onto the stern of *Akademik Keldysh* and proposed my own small toast. It was a moonless night, and quite foggy. Visibility was terrible. It was just as the conditions would have been on the fateful night of April 15th, 1912. I had brought with me a Pomerol 1998 Bordeaux bottle of French red wine, and I sat there alone, and polished it off. I looked over the stern and the water was completely still – just as it was on the night of the sinking. I thought about all the unfortunate souls who had perished of hypothermia in the Atlantic's icy waters. And I remembered Frederick Fleet, up there in the crow's nest, the crewman who in 1912 first observed the impending iceberg and sounded the alarm. Alas, it was too late. The monolith of ice and stone was so close that the ship had no chance. I slept lightly that night, thinking about the lives lost, and the ghosts of that catastrophe.

Next morning, the carefully choreographed MIR support teams of the *Akademik Keldysh* hoisted our eighteen tonne submersible over the side, into the water with apparent ease. Our MIR 1 submersible pilot, Victor Nischeta, alongside myself with a fellow American passenger named Reda Anderson were the sole occupants of the biosphere. A twenty-five tonne crane using its umbilical chain attached to the submersible placed us in the water. Our capsule was lifted by a wave at this precise moment and bubbles rushed up, swirling around our porthole. The sight of entering one world and leaving another behind begins

to play out in your mind. We were then towed out to sea and away from the research vessel to initiate our descent.

Victor opened up the ballast tanks, the submersible took in the sea water, and we started to dive and sink down to the murky depths of the Atlantic Ocean. Attached to no tether or chains, we were on our own. Within ten minutes, the ambient light from the portholes disappeared. All traces of sunlight were gone and we were immersed in total darkness. As we dived, we felt a surreal experience, as if we were travelling through outer space. As aquanauts, we were descending into an alien environment so potentially hostile, with close to zero chance of assistance from the outside world if we required rescuing. There was also the risk of fire in the 100 per cent oxygen internal atmosphere, hence the requirement that we wear a Nomex suit. Nonetheless, in the event of a fire at depth, it is unlikely that the Nomex suit will help us survive.

We had some guides for the early part of the journey. Victor illuminated the pitch black environment with the piercing lights of the MIR. A pod of pilot whales swam alongside our craft. They were attracted by the sonar navigation of our submersible.

The pilot whales escorted us down to about 300 metres – like caretakers of the ocean – giving us a personal tour of their domain. It was fantastic. But, as we went below 300 metres, they ditched us, as if to say: ‘You guys are going far too deep.’

Reda Anderson, the other expedition member of our dive is a grandmother who lives in Beverly Hills, California. She had generated a fortune in property investment and business, and diving down to *Titanic* was one of the things she wanted to do before her time on earth had expired. It was all about doing something for the very first time for Reda. She had a contagious personality and I was invigorated by her personal triumphs. Reda also proclaimed that she was planning on becoming the oldest woman in space too. I don't doubt that at all. Several months later, Reda's life and space dream was documented in *Forbes* magazine. Readers were privy to absorb the chronicles of her life.

She aspired to be the oldest woman in space, and the oldest to dive so deep. At the time of our *Titanic* dive, she was seventy-six. Reda acknowledged she

was taking a great risk, but she was a thrill-seeker and great company. Instead of sitting in some salon in Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, having her hair done or buying a new alligator purse from some designer store, Reda was all about extracting the most out of life. We talked about what motivated us, and shared the belief that life is a mosaic of experiences and chapters. She wanted to deposit as many experiences onto her mosaic before her time ran out.

Our MIR submersible was really a marvel of engineering. The acrylic plastic view ports of the submersible were about fifteen centimetres thick. Each was about twelve centimetres in diameter. They were just enough to look and film through. Mounted on the outside of the submersible was a lighting rig, which lit up everything for a distance of ten metres. I took with me two video cameras and two digital still cameras. I wasn't going to miss capturing the moment. Reda didn't bother with cameras – she just put her nose against the view port and soaked up the scenery. She absolutely loved it. The submersible also had a camera on the robotic manipular arm and an extension camera with lights. We were able to watch on a plasma screen the pictures that the outside camera was capturing.

To conserve power, the MIR submersibles run without external lights. However, Victor occasionally switched them on to allow us to observe passing marine life. The dive down into the abyss took under four hours. The sea life was unlike anything I'd ever seen. When we descended below 1,000 metres, the bio-luminescent creatures started to come into view. Bioluminescence is the production and emission of light by a living organism as the result of a chemical reaction during which chemical energy is converted to light energy. These tiny illuminated fish were something else. They virtually lit up themselves, like Christmas trees, becoming transparent. Seeing them was so exciting. 'What the hell is that?' Reda kept asking.

After three and a half hours, we finally observed it on the radar screen. My heart was rapidly pounding. It was an outline of the most awe-inspiring structure I have ever witnessed in my life. We were still twenty-eight minutes from reaching the ocean bed, yet the bow of *Titanic* was clearly visible on the radar screen. My immediate thought was that this was going to be huge. Over

the next twenty-eight minutes, the image grew more vast and clearer. I could hardly wait. Exactly twenty-eight minutes had passed and then, in a moment of sheer ecstasy, we came upon the bow of *Titanic*. It was a surreal motion picture moment, simply awesome. If you remember back to childhood and how you felt when the candles lit up your birthday cake, or that first glimpse of the Christmas stocking, well, it was both of those for me.

Pressing our noses against the plastic, barely a metre from the bow, we could almost reach out and touch it. I had imagined the image so often that I had to remind myself that this was really happening. The promenade decking was still intact, so elegant, so majestic, ninety-three years after it plunged to the ocean floor. I thought of that scene from the movie, where Leonardo DiCaprio's character, Jack Dawson, balanced on the promenade decking and proclaimed he was 'King of the World'. I know it was fiction, storytelling, just a motion picture, but I'm sure people would have felt that way aboard *Titanic*. Standing on the bow of that massive liner, you would have believed you were a king or queen. My mind kept racing. I pictured the socialites of the Old World and New World swanning around on the foredeck, telling their grandiose stories of the industrial age.

The bow looked even larger than I expected. As we motored around it, up and down, I was struck by just how vast it was. And yet we were seeing only a third of the bow. The lower two thirds are embedded into the sea floor. The bow sank hard and fast, because it was filled with water. There were no air trappings in the bow. If there had been air trappings, it would have imploded the way that the stern did.

Implosions occur when air pressure outside the ship is greater than the air pressure inside.

Just above the sea bed, we came upon the anchor, covered in rusticles. I had seen the anchor in the modern-day vision in James Cameron's footage. But to see it myself, literally one metre away from it, to visit this ghost ship from the past, was as magical as being in space and orbiting around another planet.

Titanic was over 300 metres long. Every metre that we travelled, we came upon some relic, some treasure. We saw an old chest, suitcases that once belonged to

immigrants, china cups, mugs, plates, wine bottles, ceramic tiles, toilets, bath-tubs, light fixtures and shoes. We saw pairs of shoes, side by side, seemingly trapped together. At that depth in the salt water, bodies and bones would have decomposed within a couple of years. Those shoes, I realised, were what remained of human bodies. The submersible had a manipulator arm which made it capable of picking up things from the ocean floor. There were so many opportunities for us to collect relics – wine bottles, tiles, shoes, even the leather suitcases that had lasted over ninety years. But we chose not to. The only souvenir I extracted from the ocean floor was a small rock from the port side of the *Titanic* bow. To me, that small rock shed light to an amazing journey and story of its own.

Thousands of small rocks are littered around the wreck of *Titanic*. They are called Ilulissat rocks because of the town of Ilulissat on Greenland's west coast. Experts believe that these rocks beside the wreck were part of the iceberg that the *Titanic* struck, and that the iceberg most likely travelled all the way from the polar ice caps of Greenland. The majority of the Icebergs in the Atlantic break away from the Ilulissat ice caps. Those rocks could have been what made the iceberg so hard. In effect, *Titanic* hit a gigantic mass of stones glued together by Ilulissat polar ice cap.

As we skimmed the ocean floor, the two MIR submersibles stayed reasonably close to each other. We were teased by the amazing sights we saw. We came across Captain Smith's cabin, with its own bath-tub. We knew where it was located from drawings of the wreck, and the contents confirmed it was indeed the captain's. We cruised past his marble bath-tub and all the copper piping, still connected. The *Titanic* was going to be Captain Smith's last voyage. The owners of the White Star Line gave him the captaincy of the greatest ship ever built as a farewell gift before he retired. Captain Smith during the final moments of the sinking apparently locked himself in the bridge with gallantry and chose to go down with his ship. As we orbited past his cabin I remembered the context of an interview he gave to a *New York Times* reporter in Southampton prior to the maiden voyage.

I cannot imagine any condition which would cause this ship to founder. I cannot conceive of any vital disaster happening to this vessel. Modern shipbuilding has gone beyond that.

Titanic Captain E J Smith, *New York Times* interview

Another point of interest was when we came across Molly Brown's cabin. She was the American socialite, philanthropist and activist who had come into new money.

Brilliantly portrayed in the *Titanic* movie, Molly was attempting to fit in with the fellow travellers who were of 'old money'. She had a soft side, and was very kind to the people in steerage, helping many of them onto lifeboats. She became known as 'the unsinkable Molly Brown'.

As well as exploring RMS *Titanic*, I had a scientific task to perform. The renowned deep-sea explorer David Bright, who later became a close friend, was on board the mother ship *Akademik Keldysh*. David had asked me to search and document the *Titanic's* expansion joint section for a comparative analysis thesis he was working on. The expansion joint is the buffer in a ship's mid-section where it can stretch. This elasticity is critical for vessels to withstand impact. But with *Titanic*, significant stresses around this expansion joint soon reached the ultimate strength of the material and the giant hull fractured. David Bright told me he was using his personal dive to document photometric comparative analysis work on the *Titanic's* structure to test if she was widening or shifting at the expansion joint. David dived the day before I did to *Titanic*, but due to time restraints and deep sea mechanical problems on his expedition, they ran out of time to closely complete his experiments.

Diving in the MIRS generally do not go according to plan as sea currents and battery failures determine the length of your mission in the deep abyss. Since I was destined for the last dive of the season, David pre-framed me where to locate the expansion joints and provided me with nautical reference maps and illustrations. When I finally surfaced many hours later after the completion of my dive, I was not 100% sure I had documented the expansion joints for David's research.

When I arrived back on board the mother ship later, David anxiously surveyed through my footage. David was so ecstatic upon realising that I did in fact have thirty seconds of expansion joint footage captured. He later told me that my footage clearly depicted the widening of the joints and validated the further deterioration of *Titanic*. After viewing my footage, David asked me for the rights to use it for his presentation talks and to showcase it to the scientific community. Months later, David informed me that the *Titanic* Historical Society in New York had an opportunity to view my expansion joint footage.

Travelling the length of *Titanic*, we moved from the bow section through the debris field until we eventually came to the stern. It's quite hard to work out which pieces belong to the stern. It looks like the entire stern had gone through a food processor.

The chaos actually surprised me. It's obvious the stern imploded on impact. When *Titanic* hit the iceberg, the ship buckled, and thousands of rivets came undone. The impact was on the starboard side. Resting on the ocean floor, the bow and stern lie about 600 metres apart, facing in opposite directions. The stern must have twisted on the way down and imploded. There are thousands of items shattered all over the place. The disappearance of the crow's nest is another indicator of how the steel structure is rapidly deteriorating. The crow's nest was observed and recorded during a 1998 dive. But it has since broken off and fallen away. That's a measure of the rapid rate of decay. Now all that remains of the crow's nest is a hole in the mast that lies over the forecabin. We cruised above the mast and peered into the hole where the crow's nest was. It was there that Frederick Fleet cried out, 'Iceberg right ahead, iceberg!'

Cruising around the wreck for several hours, we discovered the ocean floor littered with debris from the wreck. At the stern section, when we were viewing the propellers, we had a very close call. In order to get down to the propellers, we went deep into the aft section of the stern, beneath the overhanging promenade decking which – at any time – could have entombed us. No-one mentioned the risk. A piece of promenade decking dropped on our MIR, smashing into pieces because of its decayed state. We were forced to use the manipulator arm to wrestle off the remaining piece of promenade decking. I have this magical

moment captured on video. I dare say that if a submersible got entangled or if a larger piece of debris happened to fall on us, the situation would not have been pleasant. Still, we didn't discuss potential negatives. Reda was fearless. Like me, all she wanted to do was to get as close as possible to *Titanic* and its giant propellers.

We took with us a packed lunch, and Victor had a treat in mind for us. He piloted the submersible cautiously onto the ship's bridge and parked it. We sat there for a half hour and ate lunch. What an eerie feeling and environment. This was the exact same location where Captain Smith had once stood as the doomed liner capitulated to the sea. What a surreal episode I was experiencing. I was literally one metre from the steering gear telemotor section of the bridge which Captain Smith once clutched in his grip. Was it a safe parking spot? Well, we had parked an eighteen tonne MIR submersible vessel on a sheet of two centimetre thick steel that had been eroding and rusting away for ninety-three years. You decide. Ah well, lunch was good. We had packed a few sandwiches, a couple of chocolate bars and an orange juice. Upon my return to Australia I was informed by certain media groups that I officially became one of the first in the world to dine on the deck of the *Titanic* since the actual sinking in 1912. An eerie ghostlike feeling enveloped my thoughts.

After a late lunch, Victor blew the ballast tanks using compressed air, and the MIR became positively buoyant again, allowing us to rise to the surface. Victor was quite relaxed about everything. So calm in fact that he and Reda both seemed to nod off to sleep during parts of the slow journey ascent to the mother ship. Reda was exhausted. I was wide awake, kicking back and listening to music on my ipod. I sat there thinking about all the marvellous sights I had just witnessed, and staring at the luminescent fish, flicking the lights on myself.

It took me several days to come down from that high. I enjoyed the celebratory glass of champagne back on board the *Akademik Keldysh* with Anatoly, Victor and Reda but I didn't need it. I was stimulated enough. That experience was contagious for me. Before going down to *Titanic*, I had known very little about the other great shipwrecks of the world. On board the *Akademik Keldysh*,

however, I heard about less famous liners that had sunk, and our famed team of deep sea divers aboard the Keldysh spoke of the doomed fate that befell *Titanic's* sister ships, *Britannic* and *Olympic*. *Titanic* is immortalised. It's like Neil Armstrong. Everyone knows the first man to walk on the moon. But who remembers the most recent person to walk on the moon? His name is Eugene Cernan and he strolled on the lunar landscape during Apollo 17, the last Apollo mission, the last human to walk the surface of the moon in 1972.

Aboard the Keldysh, I heard a lot about *Britannic*, the sister ship of the *Titanic*, from my friend and renowned adventurer David Bright. A few years ago David headed a team of US Navy divers that salvaged the USS *Monitor*, which was the first ironclad warship commissioned by the United States Navy and used in the American civil war. Upon her salvage from her murky depths, David and the other divers discovered the remains of two trapped crew members from 1863, who were later given full military funerals.

Tragically, my good friend David Bright died in a deep sea diving accident in August 2006, a year after our *Titanic* dive. He had the most recorded dives down to the *Andrea Doria*, the fabled Italian super line that sank off Nantucket in 1956 after it struck a Swedish liner called the *Stockholm*. David was on a new record dive of the *Andrea Doria* when he died. After a long, deep dive, a diver is required to carry out decompression stops to avoid the bends. The bends or decompression illness as it is medically known is generally caused when a diver surfaces too rapidly from depth. Air contains eighty per cent nitrogen, which at the surface is inhaled and exhaled without effect. At pressure this nitrogen is forced into the bloodstream and if a diver ascends from depth without allowing sufficient time to 'off-gas', nitrogen bubbles can form, leading to the bends. In David's case, during his ascent, he decompressed too fast and suffered a massive stroke. I know it's a cliché when it's said that someone died doing what they loved, but David truly loved deep sea diving. He was a gentle giant and amazing person. He was an inspiring character to be around. When you've done things so many times, I guess you can become a little complacent.

On our voyage to *Titanic* in 2005, we spoke for many hours about mounting an expedition to explore the wreck of the *Britannic*, *Titanic's* sister ship,

which lies at a depth of 500 feet, off the island of Kea, sixty-four kilometres south-east of Athens, Greece. With my command of the Greek language and networking contacts in Greece we could document the *Britannic* and produce a documentary for the Discovery or National Geographic Channel in the US. We had planned our expedition to the watery grave of the *Britannic* for June 2007, but due to David's death, I postponed all dive plans. I still intend to go ahead with the *Britannic* expedition and will mount an expedition at a later date in honour of David.

So far, there have only been three major expeditions down to *Britannic*. The first was the 1976 discovery of the wreck by a team led by legendary explorer Jacques Cousteau. The second was in 1998, and the only other was in 2003. The reason why there have been so few dives is that it isn't easy to get permission from Simon Mills, the Englishman who now owns the *Britannic* wreck, and also the protective Greek Government who discourages diving to the wreck. I have made contact with Simon, and he would support an expedition to the wreck. We both share and respect an appreciation for the *Britannic*, and the role she played in the saga of the ill-fated vessels of the White Star Line. *Britannic* was built in the same shipyard as *Titanic*. She was the new unsinkable ship – over thirty metres longer than *Titanic*. But, when World War One broke out, the opulent cruise liner was re-commissioned and taken over by the Admiralty as a Red Cross hospital ship. She was never to sail as the luxury liner that her owners had in mind.

She sailed off to war with 625 crew and 500 doctors, nurses and Royal Army Medical Corps personnel aboard. On November 21st, 1916, as she pushed through the Kea Channel off Athens, heading to Salonica to pick up wounded Allied troops from the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign, she was struck, either by a German mine or U-boat.

She sank in just fifty-five minutes – three times faster than *Titanic*. *Britannic* became the largest cruise liner ever sunk. The most sensational feature of the wreck of the *Britannic* is that it is still in one piece, resting on her starboard side. Even the fabled Marconi radio room is still intact. Twenty-one people died. They were killed when lifeboats were drawn into the whirling propellers.

The remaining survivors were picked up by naval patrol vessels. The third sister of the White Star Line, Olympic, was also doomed. She had a dismal record for collisions and ended up as a spare parts ship.

Mounting an expedition to *Britannic* will not be an easy dive. The strong current and the vagaries of ocean diving make it a very challenging project. But I want to document the *Britannic* and to thoroughly explore this extraordinary time capsule. During the most recent expedition, divers discovered such treasures as the metal frame of the chandelier that hung above the grand staircase. Even china items with the White Star logo were found. I want to discover what is left of the fabled Marconi room, the Turkish baths and other features that are part of folklore. *Britannic* is so integral to the *Titanic* saga. Having witnessed the awesome beauty of *Titanic*, now it's my dream to explore her sister ship and fulfil a promise I made to my good friend, David Bright.

THE THRILLIONAIRE® PRINCIPLE

- How much have you extracted out of life?
- Life is a mosaic of experiences and chapters, what are yours?
- How many experiences have you deposited onto your mosaic?

Chapter 3

Life origins

Wanting something is not enough. You must hunger for it. Your motivation must be absolutely compelling in order to overcome the obstacles that will invariably come your way – Les Brown

WHEN I WAS EIGHT, A TRAVELLING SALESMAN KNOCKED on the front door of our house in Port Melbourne and sold my non-English speaking parents a set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The salesman probably laughed all the way to the bank. He must have known that my father, a truck driver, and mother, a machinist at a car factory, could ill-afford such an expensive outlay. But the salesman's spiel was good. He probably thought his pitch was flawless. He advised my parents how the thick volumes with their plush leather lining would assist the kids with their homework and offer advanced learning.

I was the youngest of four siblings, and we were all standing in the background, nodding impatiently. I remember yelling out, 'Let's get them, let's get them!'

Our parents always put our education first, so they signed up to buy the set of Encyclopaedia Britannica – even though the purchase was probably beyond their means. That set of encyclopaedia turned out to be one of the greatest influences on my life.

It was the spark that set my imagination on fire. The gateway to knowledge was unleashed. In the 1970s if you walked into a home and the Encyclopaedia Britannica was on the bookshelf, you immediately knew that you were in a home where higher learning and discovery were respected and cherished.

The discoveries I made through reading the Encyclopaedia Britannica as a young child were simply breathtaking. They opened me up to the dreams that I would fulfil in adult life. I would read the encyclopaedia in family time and – without my parents knowing – I'd take them to bed with me, too. But bedtime for me meant grabbing an encyclopaedia and sneaking it into my bedroom so I could read in the dark. I'd shine a torch under the sheets, flick the pages of a volume through to a subject that fascinated me, and I'd read until I nodded off to sleep. The volume containing the *Space* chapter got a real workout from me. *Space* was indeed my true fascination. The pages of that chapter were so well-thumbed and dog-eared. I could never get enough of travelling into other dimensions. Sometimes I'd stay awake past midnight, dreaming about the things I was going to pursue in life, and imagining the world that was out there waiting for me.

All that reading had its down side, though. My eyes suffered badly. My parents made an appointment for me to see an optometrist who recommended I wear glasses for my short-sightedness – but I disliked the glasses chosen for me, and refused to wear them. I'll tell you about the resolution to that problem later in this chapter. My eyesight at the time was abysmal, but my vision for the future did not diminish. The encyclopaedia opened up to me all the things I wanted to accomplish. From the age of four through until I was eleven, I wanted to be an astronaut. That was my main goal. It was every boy's dream to become an astronaut and travel to space, but I really believed and lived the dream of it. Those volumes exposed me to a mosaic of experiences, a whole kaleidoscope of flavours that I wanted to taste, feel and explore.

These days the Encyclopaedia Britannica is available on CD-ROM, but nothing will ever replace those rich, thick, bound volumes. It's a different feeling of absorption when you touch the page. There's escapism in those volumes and for me, they were magic. My mother still has that very same set of Encyclopaedia Britannica in her home today. That very same set that so inspired me a long time ago.

It was then that I pretty much laid down the framework for my goals and dreams. I sat down and wrote out all the things I wanted to accomplish.

Without knowing it, at the age of eight I wrote the screenplay of my life. Mapping out my objectives and my goals released the creative juices which set me on my path of purpose. To live life to the fullest, you must stand guard at the gate of your garden to allow the pinnacle of all information to enter. By choosing my thoughts I constructed the picture of prosperity in order for it to be manifested. The great artist Vincent Van Gogh was asked how he painted such beautiful work. Van Gogh said, 'I dream my painting, and then I paint my dream.' In other words, he vividly illustrated the picture in his mind first and then he made a replica on canvas-in oil, of the original visualisation in his mind. In truth, there has never been an *original* 'Van Gogh' sold!

Another inspirational character for me in childhood was a comic book adventurer named Tintin. The *Adventures of Tintin* (French: *Les Aventures de Tintin*) is a series of Belgian comic books created by Belgian artist Hergé. Tintin, a young Belgian reporter and traveller, who was aided by a colourful cast of characters. Tintin books remain both unrivalled in their complexity and depth even after more than a half century. There is an infinite variety of themes coupled with a select squadron of quirky characters. To date two hundred million copies of this globetrotting boy journalist's adventures have been sold worldwide and the books have been translated in over fifty languages.

Tintin was living the 'never grow up' dream and I travelled the world through his pages, taking in every exotic detail. I came across the Tintin books, which were written in the 1930s and 1940s, on the shelves of the library at my primary school. Every lunch-time I headed straight for the library to read Tintin. Our school library had the entire series of about twenty-three books, which I read and re-read, daydreaming about the magical world that Tintin inhabited. In his various adventures he was a pilot, space explorer, mountain climber and deep-sea diver. He also climbed the mountains of Nepal, rescued African slaves, battled pirates and dived down to the deepest abyss of the ocean to explore shipwrecks.

When not adventuring in some exotic location, our seemingly permanent adolescent hero, Tintin, lived with his amiable but accident-prone friend, Captain Haddock. Captain Haddock lived the good life in a huge country mansion, Marlinspike Hall, on a very expensive estate. He had his own butler,

Nestor, and was surrounded by an assortment of memorabilia from his exploits with Tintin. I deduced that – lacking a wealthy friend such as Captain Haddock, if I wanted to become an adventurer like Tintin – I too would need to develop multiple pillars of income in order to afford such a lifestyle. When I reflect back on the adventures of Tintin, I realised that the actual adventures I had personally embarked on thus far in my life, had been remarkably similar to his. On my travels through life I've lost count of the times that I've been in some far-flung destination and had this weird feeling of *deja-vu*, suddenly realising that I was having a Tintin flashback.

Snowy, an exceptionally white wire fox terrier, is Tintin's four-legged faithful companion who travels everywhere with him. The bond between the dog and Tintin is deeper than life, and they have saved each other from perilous situations many times.

Years later, I adopted a small sidekick dog of my own by the name of Cassiopeia who had been abandoned by her previous owners. I had managed to save her life from certain euthanasia at the RSPCA, The Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. After adopting her as my own, I reflected upon the everlasting spirit and influence of Tintin and Hergé that would later serve me in adulthood. Alongside other Tintinologists, my childhood remained in a blissful trance. Tintin addicts would also be pleased to hear that Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson, the director of *The Lord of the Rings* have announced a three-part trilogy and picture deal to finally bring Tintin to the big screen. Tintin is also currently enjoying a renaissance with a London stage show.

Growing up, I suffered a host of setbacks through childhood. Life in the real world rarely goes to plan. Fatigue and illness has the potential to dominate the lives of those who are living without direction and dreams. When I was barely a month old, my parents were advised by hospital staff that had I developed chronic asthma. My mother later told me that things were 'touch and go' for some time. The supposed asthma diagnosis and the later short-sightedness episode of my life conspired to derail my boyhood dreams. In school, I could barely see the blackboard and used to sit near the front of the class so I could read what the teacher was writing on the board.

Reality bites. When I was eleven my father gave me a stern appraisal of how poorly my life was going. He told me in no uncertain terms that I should stop wasting my time dreaming about becoming an astronaut. ‘You have asthma, you are short-sighted, and you are failing mathematics,’ he told me. ‘These are three reasons why you will never, ever become an astronaut’. I was shattered. My mind had lost its lustre, and perhaps my most human endowment, my spirit. Things could not have been any worse. Of course, he was right. I was poor at maths, short-sighted and now had become a stressed-out boy who was labelled as an asthmatic. Stress causes your precious mental energy and spirit to leak, just like the inner tube of a tyre.

My father was a hard-working truck driver. He carted gravel for a cement company around the state of Victoria in Australia. He always left for work so early that I never saw him in the morning, and he usually got home from work after we had gone to bed. At times he was gone for over a week. He worked long hours to ensure his children had food on the table and a private schooling education.

His name was Konstantinos Halikopoulos (which was later cut short to Halik in the mid-1970s). My parents chose to shorten our surname because almost everyone misspelt or mispronounced it. I was born Nikos Halikopoulos. Both my parents had emigrated from the Peloponnese region, a large peninsula in southern Greece. The Peloponnese owes its name to the mythological hero Pelops, a legendary king of the city of Mycenae. In historical times, the Peloponnese was mostly populated by Dorians under the leadership of the ruling Spartans from Sparta.

My father was a complex character, an enigma. He was born in the historical village of Hora, Messinia. Hora was built on a hilltop and has preserved its old-fashioned appearance – stone houses with tiled roofs and narrow lanes. Just outside my father’s village of Hora lies the famous ruined palace of Nestor, who took part in the Trojan War. Nestor was an Argonaut, who was part of a band of heroes who, in the years before the Trojan War, accompanied Jason and the other Argonauts in his quest to find the Golden Fleece.

The 1930s in Greece was the period of the Great Depression. My father was

the youngest of nine children and whose five older siblings died of disease and malnutrition. His parents were so poor that they gave him away to the Fotopoulos couple of Gargaliani who were wealthy land owners but couldn't have children. Gargaliani sits on a lush hillside with a magical carpet of olive trees and vines that stretch out to the sea. My father was only two-years-old when he was adopted by the Fotopoulos couple and was never reunited with his real parents until the age of eighteen. He met his biological parents for a brief time and forever remained angered at their decision to give him away. My father's biological parents begged him to forgive them. In the subsequent years of that visit, my father lived the life of a nomad until he joined the Greek Army as a soldier at twenty-two years of age.

He grew up hard, and music was his only friend. As a teenager, he learnt to play a famous Greek stringed instrument called a bouzouki and performed in the main Greek taverns of Hora, Gargaliani and Athens. In his late twenties he moved to Athens, like so many Greeks, hoping that the big city might provide opportunity. He continued to perform professionally as a bouzouki player in late night taverns. When he told me about those days, he would shake his head and say that musicians were at the bottom of the barrel in Greek society. He talked of the seedy bars, the womanising, the drinking and the lowlife. He never wanted his children to become musicians.

Greece in the 1950s was riddled with poverty. Unemployment was high. My father wanted to emigrate to America or Canada, but the only immigration option given to him was Australia. The island continent in the South Pacific needed as much labour as it could get. He had never heard of Australia until the week before his ship left the port of Piraeus, bound for Melbourne. He longed for a new life, a chance to start afresh, and he took what he was given. The voyage to Australia took three months.

Konstantinos Halikopoulos arrived in Melbourne on July 7th, 1959, three years after that city hosted the Olympic Games. His possessions consisted of an old leather suitcase, enough clothes for a few days, his bouzouki and a little red book that he carried everywhere. My father would never hear or see from his real parents or the Fotopoulos couple ever again.

My father had endured a lot of tough times and had formed some strong opinions, based on his working class ideologies. He was a proud socialist. The little red book he brought with him on the ship was the communist manifesto of Chairman Mao Tse-tung. He carried a Greek translation version of Mao's doctrine. There was a hammer and sickle on the front cover, and he carried it around everywhere. He was vehemently anti-capitalism, anti-western society. Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh were among his peers that he respected. He carried that little red book for decades and I can tell you the exact day that he finally discarded it. It was the day that the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and the unravelling of the Iron Communist Curtain was finally a reality. He threw it in a pit of fire in front of me. There and then, he finally accepted that the utopian ideology of socialism had proven itself to be a failed political experiment. He was devastated by the sight of the food queues in communist countries, the long lines of people just waiting to get bread. He had believed that communism would deliver equality for all people, a balance of equilibrium and prosperous societies.

My mother Dionisia Antonopoulos had left her remote village of Raftopoulo in the upper mountain regions of the Peloponnese, in southern Greece. If the economic circumstances in Athens were dire, they were appalling in the mountain village of Raftopoulo. Many young people fled the hills in the hope of finding work in Athens. My uncle Nick Antonopoulos had arrived in Australia before my mother and promised his sister that upon finding work, he would send for her. My mother didn't hesitate to leave Greece when he finally sent her the money for passage to Australia in 1958. She wanted to take the chance – even if it meant travelling alone. In 1959 my parents were introduced to one another and within one month they were married. Their first home, ironically enough, was located less than a mile from where their immigrant ships had come ashore at Station Pier in Melbourne for the first time.

My father's beliefs were contrary to my mother's, who was a devout Orthodox Christian. Before she came to Australia, she had never travelled outside her village in Greece. She remembers, upon boarding the ship for the very first time, seeing her first black person. Until that moment, she had no comprehension that black people existed. It was 1958 when she set sail. My mother left behind

her old life, but she kept her values. Despite my father's alternative religious beliefs, she remained a strict Orthodox Christian. They agreed to send their children to catholic schools, because my father had at least conceded that Catholic schools would provide a sound education.

My parents always considered our education to be the top priority in their lives. They wanted to give us what they had been denied – scope to plan for the future.

We all attended private schools – I had my primary schooling at Resurrection Primary School in the suburb of Essendon and secondary schooling at Catholic Regional College in St Albans and Sydenham.

By the time we advanced to secondary school, we were living in the working class suburb of Airport West, near Melbourne's international and domestic airports. My parents worked slavishly to put us through private school. Seventy per cent of household income was allocated to pay the school fees. My father even nominated the professions that he wanted each of us to pursue. He decided that the oldest child, Dimitrios (Jim) would become a doctor. The second oldest, Georgia, would become a criminal lawyer and Victoria would study psychology to graduate as a psychologist. My father had plans for me to pursue law also. In his opinion, law, psychology and medicine were the only prosperous and honourable fields we could enter into. Jim would indeed study medicine, Georgia did graduate as a criminal lawyer and Victoria majored in behavioural psychology. As for me, I permanently deferred from university all together. My path lay elsewhere. A well-worn path wasn't necessarily the right path for me to follow.

While my father was a hard-worker and had a strong philosophy, in hindsight I believe he did lack some skill in parenting. Looking back, it must have been a strange household – we had an atheistic socialist father and a devout, orthodox Christian mother with four kids being privately educated in the Catholic schooling system. My mother's house was a shrine, paying homage to the Lord. My father's philosophy was that he felt religion was a divider of people, a phoney, and that it pandered to weak people. His belief was that people should create their own happiness, and not rely on the activities of praying

and wishing. He would comment that religion makes you wish that someone will save you, that people pray to be taken care of. Like my father, I believe power is in our own hands. We create our own destiny and fortunes in life. He would often complain that there were more churches in the world than shelters to assist the poor in need of food. I agreed with him on that. I embraced the theories from him about claiming ownership of my life. From an early age, I thought independently. I knew I had to create my own disciplines for my own goals.

I grew up influenced by his anti-religious philosophies and my mother's diet of forced religion. Through this combined parental influence, I developed an agnostic view in regards to religion early on. Growing up, I was looking for one belief system to cling onto but then I realised you don't have to, so long as you find something that gives you peace. But like my father, I am adamant that the most qualified person in the world will always be ourselves. The moment we rely on any external force, entity or factor, we automatically, in effect by law, become disempowered.

My siblings and I were all well educated. We share common goals. We're all about giving back and contributing to society as much as we can. Our parents wanted to provide as much opportunity as they could for us. They wanted us to achieve excellent grades and find prosperous jobs. My parents wanted society to be proud of us. That meant they worked from first light until dark every day. My parents continued to work laboriously, even after they acquired their first three properties. Because my parents went to work before I woke in the morning, my sisters Georgia and Victoria took care of me. They would wake me, make sure I showered, and provide food for me on the breakfast table. My parent's health deteriorated rapidly as a result of their hard work. My father suffered crippling back injuries for most of his life and my mother developed severe varicose veins throughout her life.

My personal health became an issue too – by the age of eleven, my eyesight was so poor that I couldn't see what the teachers were writing on the blackboard. I was receiving poor grades. The eye specialist put it down to my continual reading in bed. I used to go to bed every night with the Encyclopaedia Britannica or

Hergé's Tintin books. The specialist prescribed me glasses, but I refused to wear them. I viewed the wearing of glasses as a disability. I didn't want to be reliant on anything. I would do anything I could to avoid having to rely on glasses.

Playing guitar was soon to become a major influence in my life. One rainy afternoon in 1979, my brother Jim and I were watching a television documentary about Jimi Hendrix. I thought Hendrix was really cool. He was incredibly innovative and unlike any other guitarist the world had heard. Hendrix was considered to be one of the greatest and most influential guitarists in rock music history.

I had formative guitar lessons in the early days and rapidly progressed. By the age of twelve, I had surpassed the talents of my first guitar tutor who was allocated the task of teaching me. A spark of life had begun to flicker and the most golden opportunity to rekindle the passionate inner fire in me soon developed. After the extinguishing of my astronaut dreams, music would later consume my life. By thirteen, I was practising guitar for three hours after school. I dedicated my life to music. Even at thirteen, I started teaching guitar to people twice my age. I advertised my guitar lessons on the notice boards of music shops. Students used to come to the door of my family home and ask for guitar lessons and, when I answered, they would ask: 'Is Nik Halik here?' When I said I was Nik, they'd laugh. I was half their age and size, who can blame them for laughing. If they needed convincing, I'd challenge them to give me a chance and play a few tunes to show them what I was capable of.

From the age of fourteen, I grew my hair longer – so I could emulate Jimi Hendrix.

Soon I knew more about playing guitar than my second tutor. My development as a guitarist was relentless. I've always been the sort of person who, when I take something on, I get proficient at a very fast rate. I progressed through several tutors by the age of seventeen. Soon, I virtually ran out of tutors in my home town of Melbourne to be inspired by. I had an entire catalogue of students, of which some were professional performing musicians. I was charging up to \$25 an hour, a tidy sum of money for a teenage boy, and it was giving me the capital to upgrade my ownership of more expensive guitars and amplification equipment.

By the age of seventeen, I had also saved \$30,000. I used this money to fund my first big move – I started making plans to re-locate to Los Angeles in the US to study guitar with the best teachers on the planet. At age seventeen, I permanently deferred from university. My dream was to become a great guitarist and performing musician. As you'd expect, the notion of this disgusted my father, but my dearest and caring mother supported me. She told my father that they had placed great expectations on the three older children, but that they should allow the youngest one to follow his dreams. 'He'll find his way,' she said. It must have been hard for my father to accept, particularly as I wanted to move and live in the US, the land of Uncle Sam, the birth of capitalism and the dollar bill.

My father had been my musical influence because of his bouzouki playing, but he never wanted his children to become musicians. He didn't want me to travel the same path as he did – the seedy bars, the nightlife, getting home at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning. He was about earning respect by having an honest job. He did, however possess perfect musical pitch, a perfectly tuned ear for music. His children inherited that gift. Even as a young boy, I was able to hear a piece of music and within minutes, I could transcribe the work for my students. I still have that uncanny naturally born gift. A jet can fly past, and I could tell you the musical pitch of it.

I recall my students would come to lessons, hand me a cassette tape of a song, such as Deep Purple's *Smoke on the Water* or Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven* or The Eagles' *Hotel California* and I would transcribe the music and guitar solo for them.

In those days, very few people could transcribe these works, which in effect validated me to charge an additional monetary premium.

What spurred me to go to the US was that I earned myself a scholarship entry to the famous Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT), the world's most innovative school of contemporary music. The Guitar Institute of Technology was part of the Musicians Institute in Hollywood, California. It offered a comprehensive, hands-on education in contemporary music performance.

GIT was the equivalent to studying law at Harvard University or studying science and technology at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I had seen an advertisement for the GIT in *Guitar Player* magazine, and knew that my musical destiny involved studying there and moving to Hollywood. I moved to Hollywood, California in my late teens, to study at GIT. It was an awe inspiring arsenal of the world's greatest musicians. The institute was open 24/7 with over 300 of the world's upcoming musical students in attendance.

I vividly remember my first week in Hollywood. An earthquake along the San Andreas Fault measuring a magnitude of 5.0 on the Richter scale struck the greater city of Pasadena and Downtown LA. I also witnessed the carnage of two bullet-ridden limousines whilst travelling east along San Bernardino Freeway Interstate 10. Welcome to LA.

Hollywood, situated west-north-west of downtown LA, was the cultural identity and historical centre of the major movie studios. When I arrived there in 1988, an abundance of prostitutes, panhandlers, drug dealers and the homeless swelled her ranks. Hollywood had fallen into many years of serious decline. Tourists who came to Hollywood in order to view where the stars dined, played, shopped or lived were disappointed to witness the polar opposite.

I used to walk along Hollywood Boulevard from the apartment I was renting on the way to GIT and along the way I would brush past all the scientology spruikers, drug dealers, prostitutes and pimps hawking their wares. The stars were there alright – on the pavement only, the Hollywood walk of fame featuring the likes of Marilyn Monroe, John Wayne, Elizabeth Taylor and others. Hollywood, since 2001, is at last now undergoing rapid gentrification and revitalisation.

My decision to leave Australia was all about being inspired, to feel more alive and to fuel unbridled energy into my life. My natural curiosity to being mentored by the world's elite musicians was to provide the creative spark I needed. Within a fortnight of arriving in LA, I joined my first US band. We would often jam until 4 am. The band was headed by Derek, a half Cherokee Indian and myself on lead guitar. Both Derek and I were 'shredders', which is someone who 'cuts heads with the devil'. It was great stuff – a throwback to the 1930s, when

the blues artists would travel to the Mississippi crossroads to sign a deal with the devil in return for fame, going head-to-head against each other. We were forever attempting to outperform and challenge each other to greater heights. Performing is an amazing experience. It's the feeling of entertaining, rather than being entertained. You're sharing a melodic story with an audience. There is no feeling more powerful than having an audience that is dialling into your zone. Being a musician on stage, it's like you're having sex with the audience. Of course, groupies came with the territory. I had no idea that so many women would be attracted to vocalists and lead guitarists in particular.

Any former musician will tell you that they miss the lifestyle of being on the road and touring. But a savvy and mature musician will also preach that you take heed of their advice to aerate your mindset or quite possibly, to disassociate yourself from the industry and save your soul. I spent over three years in LA and lived the rock guitarist lifestyle. It was a blast. Living and experiencing the culture of LA was my personal odyssey of self discovery. I returned home to Australia years later, 300 per cent matured.

THE THRILLIONAIRE® PRINCIPLE

- Have you experienced a spark of life which had begun to flicker?
- Life in the real world rarely goes to plan, are you enjoying the greatness of the moment?
- Fatigue and illness has the potential to dominate the lives of those who are living without direction and dreams, does your life currently have direction?