

RESILIENCE

THE LIGHT-BULB MOMENT THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

From volunteering in remote India to running across Africa, three trailblazers tell *Body+Soul* about the experience that transformed their mindset, and how we can all unlock true happiness and purpose

BY HANNA MARTON



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Hugh van Cuylenburg

FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF THE RESILIENCE PROJECT AND CO-HOST OF THE IMPERFECTS PODCAST
THERESILIENCEPROJECT.COM.AU

"In 2008, I found myself volunteering in northern India. It was my then-girlfriend's idea to travel around India and initially, I didn't want to go. I was happy as a teacher in Melbourne and playing weekend cricket. But she was going, with or without me.

"After backpacking for about three months, she suggested we volunteer for two weeks as English teachers. Upon arriving in a small village called Thiksey and seeing there was no running water, electricity or beds, I said I'd last two nights.

"Everything changed when I met the people. I'd never seen joy like it before. I fell in love with the place and with how optimistic, resilient and kind the people were – despite the basic living conditions. They had so much time for each other; no-one was rushing from meeting to meeting. We spent more time with the school principal's family in the first two days than I'd spend with my own family in six months. I thought: 'So, this is what life is meant to be like.' We stayed for over three months.

"Back home, I became frustrated with the lack of resilience, tolerance and gratitude among the kids I was teaching in a very affluent demographic.

"I was also troubled by the high rates of mental illness across Australia, and I wanted to do something different. A teacher friend asked me to speak to a group of kids about my time spent volunteering in India. I was blown away by how engaged and moved they were. The more presentations I did, the more I realised this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The Resilience Project evolved from there. Of course, I bombed a lot at first and struggled with 'impostor syndrome' for years.

"Today, I'm a totally different person. I'm more comfortable talking about my own insecurities and vulnerabilities. In social situations, I would feel I had to put on an impressive and entertaining show – even when not presenting. Now, I'm far humbler and don't need to talk as much as I used to."

MY ADVICE? "Ask yourself three simple questions: what are you good at? What are you passionate about? Is there a community that would benefit from your idea or skills?"

Samantha Gash

ULTRAMARATHON RUNNER, SOCIAL IMPACT LEADER, SPEAKER AND CO-FOUNDER OF HER TRAILS
HERTRAILS.COM

"The day before I started working as a corporate lawyer, I'd been in Vietnam – in my bathers, on a bike, footloose and fancy-free. I'd studied hard, for almost 10 years, to land this position at a great law firm but didn't really belong behind a desk. For two years, I was eternally distracted.

"I've learnt if I'm not 'all in', then I'm not on the right path. Enthusiasm, passion, innovation and drive don't typically wane for me, but in this case they did. It wasn't the legal profession's fault; it wasn't my boss's fault. If you're complaining too

much about what you're doing, change your attitude or change your situation.

"So, in 2014 at 29 years old, I crafted a running expedition across South Africa's Freedom Trail: 2000 kilometres in 32 days on a remote track that crossed game reserves. With UK runner, Mimi Anderson, we'd raise money for Save the Children and shine a light on the high cost of feminine hygiene products for women in sub-Saharan Africa. But I hadn't accrued enough annual leave, so I quit my job. I created a rock in the road to make me brave enough to leap into the unknown.

"After the South African expedition, I was offered some corporate speaking gigs. I realised I loved sharing stories and knew what it was like to be in an office

"
I'd studied hard to land a position at a great law firm but didn't really belong behind a desk

– SAMANTHA GASH

and have the spirit of adventure inside you. I also wanted to create opportunities for other people to move their bodies and be a part of solutions – not just give money.

"I've created campaigns such as Relief Run during the 2019-20 bushfires: in 12 days we raised \$1.2 million with people doing their own fun runs. For once, I wasn't the one putting my own body on the line. There's something to be said for trusting your gut and letting things work out."

MY ADVICE? "The more successful we become, the more reluctant we can be to try something new. But you can't be great at something you've never done before. Free yourself of preconceptions and expectations and be curious."

+ Four tales of transformation

Whether heartbreaking or healing, these stories will change the way you think



MOVIE: THE WAY (ON AMAZON PRIME)

Directed by Emilio Estevez and starring his dad Martin Sheen, this low-budget film about a man walking the famous Camino de Santiago to fulfil his late son's dream will inspire you to step outside your comfort zone.



BOOK: THE GOLDFINCH BY DONNA TARTT

This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about loss, trauma and a stolen masterpiece – through the eyes of its teen protagonist – reminds us that nothing is constant and we all transform from one moment to the next.



MUSIC: JAVELIN BY SUFJAN STEVENS

An album about love and grief, dedicated to Stevens' partner Evan Richardson who passed away earlier this year. *Javelin* shows us how sorrow and heartbreak can be transformed into things of beauty.



PODCAST: THE ADVENTURE PODCAST

From mountaineers and arctic scientists to alcoholics who found freedom from addiction on the trail, this podcast unpacks the human need to explore while providing gripping stories from far-flung locations.

Nicholas Ingate

FOUNDER OF TRANSFORMATIVE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE COMPANY, SABBATICAL TRAVEL
SABBATICAL.TRAVEL

"In 2019, I was living in California as a partner at a luxury branding consultancy. With offices in Sydney, New York and London, we produced Oscar parties for *Vanity Fair*, events at New York Fashion Week, all these amazing things. It was alluring – all about making money, going to parties, looking good, going on dates.

"But I was burnt out and disenfranchised. I wondered: 'Does the world need another George Clooney tequila?' I showed up in LA as a 25-year-old single male and left 10 years later as a 35-year-old father. Society (and my ego) was telling me: 'This is your prime earning career – keep the momentum going.' However, I knew intuitively that period was done. I sold my share of the business and took a year off to figure out who I wanted to be... and what to do next.

"I travelled for long stints off the grid with no phone. I took my then four-year-old daughter hiking in Yosemite. The idea for Sabbatical Travel came to me on day seven of a 10-day silent Vipassana [meditation] retreat in Joshua Tree National Park. It was there I decided to help people curate their own quests. You can go on Google and find someone to take you deep into the Himalayas, you can find yoga masters in the middle of Bhutan, but they're hard to pinpoint.

"We service a small number of individuals with influence; we can either have 10,000 clients or 50 clients that can influence 10,000 people. If we can provide them with transformative experiences, it will have a top-down effect."

MY ADVICE? "Book a cabin in nature, leave your phone in the car and have a night by yourself. Don't take a book. Bring a journal, go for walks and your true essence will reveal itself."

