

99 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU DIE
How to Make Your Own Life List—and Start Achieving Your Goals

Men's Journal

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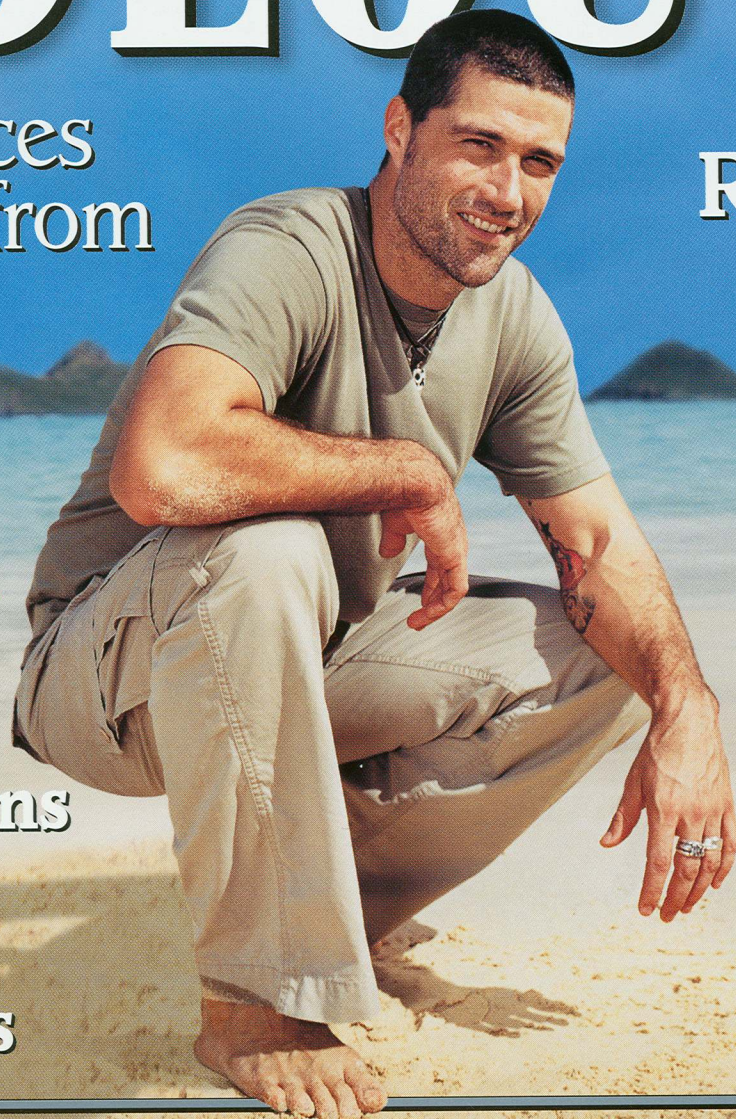
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 JUMP OUT OF AN AIRPLANE



99 THINGS TO DO (BEFORE YOU DIE)

MEN ARE DISCOVERING THE VALUE OF MAKING THEIR OWN **LIFE LISTS** — DETAILED ROAD MAPS TO HELP THEM LIVE LARGE AND REALIZE THEIR DREAMS. THEY'RE GUARANTEED TO GIVE YOUR LIFE A REAL KICK IN THE ASS — SO ISN'T IT TIME YOU MADE YOURS? **BY MICHAEL KAPLAN**

LONG BEFORE HE BECAME the eager host of TV's *The Amazing Race*, Phil Keoghan was an eager but inexperienced diver who liked to push the limits. When he was 19 he and a friend were exploring an abandoned ship, 120 feet below the surface of New Zealand's Marlborough Sounds. Left alone in the pitch black for a few minutes, Keoghan lost track of time and began to panic. His breathing became labored, and water slowly breached his air supply. Irrationally convinced that he'd been abandoned, Keoghan considered swimming out of the room and finding his own way to an exit point. But before he could make what would almost certainly have been a fatal mistake, he blacked out.

Next thing Keoghan remembers is waking up on the dive boat, squinting at the sun, and breathing uncompressed oxygen. Had his friend taken much longer to return, Keoghan would probably have drowned. For the first time in his young life, he glimpsed his own mortality, and all he could think about was how many things he'd have regretted not doing. Keoghan reached for a brown paper bag and began scribbling down everything he wanted to accomplish in his life. It was his first life list.



✓ FEED A SHARK BY HAND

"I USED TO THINK A LIFE LIST WAS JUST ABOUT DOING EXTREME THINGS. NOW I REALIZE IT'S ABOUT PUSHING YOUR MIND TO A PLACE WHERE IT'S NEVER BEEN."

He began, as is typical with youthful life lists, with a string of sexual fantasies. But he quickly moved on to adventures (climb Mount Everest, jump out of an airplane, go into space) and edgy dares (get in the ring with a professional boxer, hand-feed sharks, walk on the wing of a Tiger

plane). He wanted to travel the world as a bartender on a cruise ship, learn to barefoot water ski, and bobsled in Calgary.

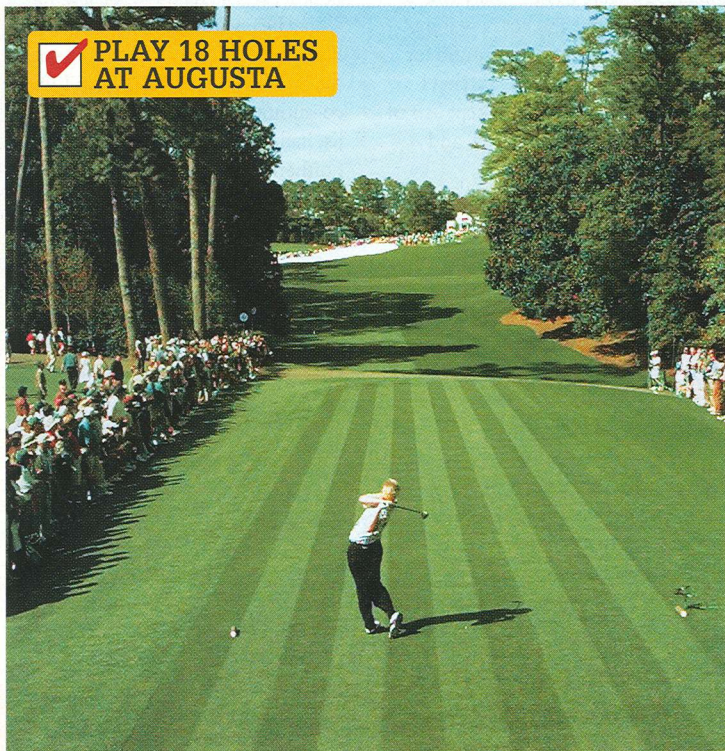
"My earliest list was extremely selfish," Keoghan says now. "It was about what to do for myself. The very first thing on the list was to go back into that sunken boat. I needed to prove my machismo." Nearly two decades later, Keoghan, 38, shakes his head and smiles at the memory. "I used to think a life list was just about doing extreme things. But now I realize that it's all about the mental leap of letting go and allowing yourself to be insecure and uncomfortable and pushing your mind to a place where it's never been."

That original life list became the blueprint for his early career as a New Zealand TV personality with a penchant for daredevil stunts. He hosted a gourmet dinner atop an active volcano, explored the globe's longest underwater cave (Nohoch Nah Chich, below the Yucatan jungle in Mexico),

and masterminded a world record bungee jump (the most people at once). "Every one of us has a wild gene — that much has been scientifically proven — but we sometimes

ignore the gene or forget to satisfy it. I think that's a mistake," says Keoghan, who authored a book this year called *No Opportunity Wasted: Creating a List for Life*, with a new cable TV show to go with it. He's far from finished with his own list: Recent additions include completing the Hawaiian Ironman Triathlon before turning 40, and hosting a barbecue on the South Pole.

PHIL KEOGHAN IS NOT alone. Around the world, ambitious men have penciled similar plans, laying the groundwork for achieving fantastic goals that they would be hard-pressed to accomplish without these indispensable road maps. Jimmy Buffett's list led him to swim with dolphins, take flying lessons, and learn a foreign language. Dot-com



✓ PLAY 18 HOLES AT AUGUSTA

MY LIFE LIST



ARON RALSTON
Climber

Climb to the highest points in all 50 states in 50 days

Complete the Hardrock 100-mile marathon

Relearn Hendrix's "Little Wing" on the guitar

Eat a home-cooked meal in every state

Make love with two women at the same time

Learn to fly a plane

Take a year off and sail my own boat through the Caribbean

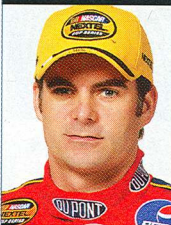


 **SAIL AROUND THE WORLD**

"IT GIVES ME A BLUEPRINT TO ACHIEVE MY GOALS... YOU END UP WITH CONFIDENCE THAT ALLOWS YOU TO UNLOCK THE LIMITATIONS INSIDE YOU."

millionaire Charles Veley visited 317 countries and territories in order to become the most traveled man on earth. *Today's Al Roker's* list includes climbing Kilimanjaro (a perennial favorite) and going on an archaeological dig. Even Tom Cruise, a guy who's surely got it all, has a life list. It includes climbing Everest and competing in the Reno Air Races. The life list of former Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz highlights his desire to be a scratch golfer, to get invited to dinner at the White House, and to appear on the *Tonight Show*. "Make sure you do something every day to realize your dreams," Holtz once wrote, and you'll "find yourself waking up hungry to take big, satisfying bites out of life."

MY LIFE LIST



JEFF GORDON
NASCAR driver

- Win a fifth NASCAR championship
- Swim with a whale shark
- Travel into space with NASA
- Go on an African safari
- Scuba dive off the Great Barrier Reef

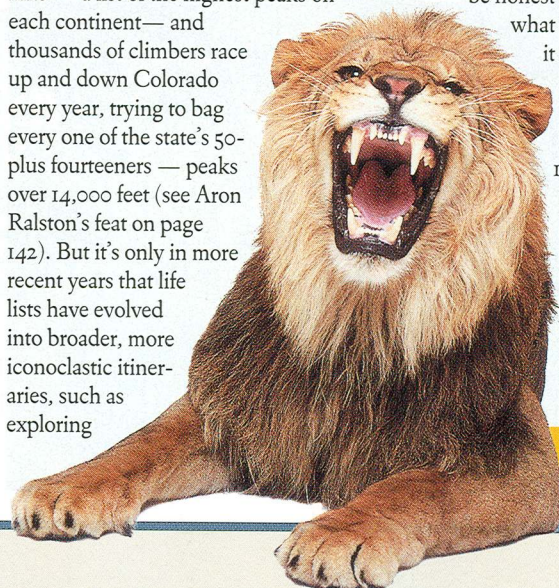
Among the faithful, a man's life list is a sacred text. You approach each new achievement with near-religious fervor, knowing that you are doing something much greater than merely satisfying an urge; you are fulfilling a vow you made to yourself. Life listers have committed themselves to realizing dreams in a serious and formal way. The list provides focus and operates as a kind of challenge. "It would be pathetic to write out a list and fail to follow through," says Keoghan, who has traveling into outer space on his list. "Ignore the list, and you'd have to wonder when you last put your *cojones* out there and took a risk."

A recent spate of books — from Keoghan's *No Opportunity Wasted*, to *101 Things to Do Before You Die*, to *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*,

and *2 Do Before I Die* — have made life lists seem like the hot new thing, but they've actually been around for centuries. Hunters, bird-watchers, and explorers have always kept lists of what they hope to shoot, see, and explore. Mountain climbers, especially, are partial to life lists. Some mountaineers pursue the Seven Summits — a list of the highest peaks on each continent— and thousands of climbers race up and down Colorado every year, trying to bag every one of the state's 50-plus fourteens — peaks over 14,000 feet (see Aron Ralston's feat on page 142). But it's only in more recent years that life lists have evolved into broader, more iconoclastic itineraries, such as exploring

Southeast Asia for a year or singing with a heavy metal band. "Making a life list is a quick way of cutting past the bullshit," says *2 Do Before I Die* co-author Michael Ogden (his life list includes photographing the northern lights, recording a CD of original songs, and traveling to Moscow by train). "It allows you to be honest with yourself about what is important: giving it a go as opposed to necessarily getting it right."

IT'S NEVER TOO late to start a life list, and different people take different approaches. Ted Leonsis, billionaire owner of the Washington



 **GO ON SAFARI**

Capitals, spewed out everything he could ever possibly imagine wanting to do. He ended up with 101 feats and accomplishments that must be completed before he dies: such as winning a Grammy, sailing around the world with his family, and restoring an antique auto. He's got quirky stuff (invent a board game, swim with dolphins, get an honorary degree) and things that are obviously the aspirations of someone who has a great deal of money at his disposal: He already owns a Ferrari, he has given \$1 million to his alma mater, Georgetown University, and he made a movie. (He helped produce the film *Capturing the Friedmans*.) All were on his list.

The Leonsis approach is to put down everything all at once, then spend the rest of your life accomplishing them all. He made the list 22 years ago and has already done 74 out of 101, including shooting baskets with Michael Jordan, going to Alaska, and playing Augusta. At this rate, he may have to break his own rule and eventually start a new list.

Chris Stout, the chief of psychological services for the state of

Illinois, has a different method. He began his life list when he was a teenager — “a nerdy fat kid who weighed 20 pounds more than I do today,” and has been refining it ever since. Now, at 45, he endlessly adds and subtracts from a list that totals around 400 items — 325 of which he's done — and includes appearing on a billboard, eating fire, and biking down Crater Road of Mount Haleakala on Maui. “Part of the importance of the list is that it offers a degree of self-examination,” says Stout, who recently completed a stair race to the top of the Hancock Building in Chicago (one more item checked off). “You start thinking about the things that are

important to you, and then you find quantifiable goals. Let's say your goal is to be a good parent. Then you have to think about what you can do to make yourself a good parent. Maybe it's reading to your kids three nights a week for the entire year.”

A more unorthodox approach is employed by ski mountaineer Andrew McLean. He keeps all his goals in his head, but as they get closer to reality, he prints them onto

Post-it notes and sticks the notes on a wall near his desk. “That way I keep my ambitions front and center: Writing them down keeps me from putting them off,” says McLean, adding that he takes the Post-its down after the corresponding task is completed. Currently on McLean's wall: go on an expedition to ski Mount Foraker, write a ski mountaineering book, and ski Mount Shuksan with his brother Alex. Then, lest anyone think that McLean has a one-track mind, he adds, “Next to go up is a note that will remind me to work on some dog-related products I'd like to design: backpacks, harnesses, and travel kits for canines.”

LIFE LISTS HAVE A TENDENCY TO become chaotic and unwieldy. They often feel a little random. And though making them seems to be more of a male pastime, it took a woman, novelist Stephanie Bond, to figure out how to organize them better. She's the den mother for a floating group of like-minded life listers from Georgia, her husband among them, and she takes a tightly structured approach to composing a list (hers includes learning self-defense, locating her high school English teacher, and patenting an invention). Every New Year's Eve, a group of them gathers in the Bonds' Atlanta apartment to update their lists

MY LIFE LIST



MATT LAUER
Today host

Climb Kilimanjaro

See the aurora borealis

Ride the world's biggest roller coaster

Throw a dart at a map and travel where it lands

RUN CHINA'S GREAT WALL



HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN LIFE LIST

ALL YOU NEED IS A PEN, SOME PAPER, AND PLENTY OF AMBITIOUS DREAMS — NOT TO MENTION THE NERVE TO GO OUT AND LIVE THEM

1 Block out a few hours of time that you can devote exclusively to thinking about all the things you've ever wanted to do, but have never quite gotten around to.

2 Start by jotting down everything that comes to mind. Don't censor yourself; you can edit it down later.

3 Don't stop if they seem ridiculous (putting your head in the open mouth of a lion) or improbable (walking a tightrope strung between two skyscrapers) or even too lame to put on the list (learning to drive a stick shift). Just keep thinking and writing.

4 Once you've written down every possible goal, make a list of categories such as travel, personal achievements, charity, adventure, possessions, and sports. These categories should be customized to fit your own interests.

5 Move all the items into the appropriate categories, then look through each category list and use it as a springboard for more ideas.

6 Do some pruning and editing, rethinking the utterly impossible — but keeping the intensely unlikely. There's no right length. Some people have a hundred items on their list; others have five or six hundred. We'd shoot for at least 99.

7 Now you've made a contract with yourself. It might not be legally binding, but if you put the list in a drawer and don't bother following through on your commitments, well, you'll feel pathetic and will be missing out on some essential life-defining experiences.

8 It's time to get out there and start checking things off your list. Good luck.



✓ COMPETE IN A TRIATHLON

“I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO I'D BE WITHOUT THE LIFE LIST. YOU WON'T FOLLOW IT EXACTLY, BUT WITHOUT IT YOU'LL NEVER GET CLOSE TO WHERE YOU WANT TO GO.”

for the coming year, and share achievements from months past. “The group dynamic makes it more fun,” says Bond. “And by discussing your list, you inspire everybody else. Plus, it’s an unusually good opportunity for reviewing all the things you’ve accomplished: In 2004 I went to Australia, hiked some of the Appalachian Trail foothills, and learned another language. I also started playing harmonica, but I’m really lousy, so it’s still on my list for this year.”

Bond studied the process closely and came up with a useful approach to organizing a list. She breaks her life list into categories such as ownership and acquisition (invest in original art, make an extra mortgage payment over the course of the year), travel and adventure (take a canoe trip, visit New Zealand), self-improvement (apply for a license to carry a concealed weapon, take diction lessons), and meetings with key people (meet a network anchor, write to a relative once a

month). The categories force her to consider the various areas in which she hopes to achieve things. “I think it’s important *not* to bring work experiences into the life list,”

says Bond, who crosses out each item upon completion and then starts the year with a totally clean list. “Work is something that most people focus on anyway.”

The ultimate rule, however, is that there are no rules. Ted Leonsis, for instance, loaded his list with business goals, from producing a TV show and conducting an IPO, to becoming a partner in a venture capital firm and owning a professional sports team — something he had not yet done on the afternoon in 1999 when the president of the Washington Capitals called to see if he’d be up

for buying the squad. “I told him I would pass,” remembers Leonsis. “I didn’t think it was a good investment. Then I went home and wondered what would happen if I died with 100 of my 101 items

completed and didn’t buy my professional sports team.”

You guessed it. Leonsis became the proud owner of the Washington Capitals. Though his business instincts were correct — the team has lost money since he bought it — he still has no regrets. *It’s on his life list!*

JOHN GODDARD HELD HIS BREATH underwater for two and a half minutes and learned to play the violin. He broad-jumped 15 feet, retraced the travels of Marco Polo, and studied

primitive cultures in Borneo. He would’ve learned about dragon lizards on the island of Komodo, but his boat broke down 20 miles offshore.

The granddaddy of the modern-day life list, Goddard is 80 years old and made his first list in 1939, at the age of 15, inspired by adventure writers of the day — his preferred subjects included the Great Barrier Reef, the Egyptian pyramids, and the African jungle.

According to his first list, he wanted to appear in a Tarzan movie, climb the Matterhorn, and become an Eagle Scout. Over the years he expanded the list to 600 items — and so far he’s accomplished 530 of those goals, including diving in a submarine, becoming proficient in the use of a lariat, and owning a horse, ocelot, and coyote. He does not yet own a cheetah or a chimpanzee, but they’re on the list.

Goddard, who did a bit of teaching and helped finance his adventures via writing, photography, and lecturing, insists that without the life list, his existence would have been astoundingly dull — in other words, he would never have led the first expedition down the entire 4,160-mile length of the Nile River. “I would have ended up like so many other adults, with lots of regrets,” says the boundlessly energetic man, freshly returned from a jaunt to the Middle East, where he hopes eventually to kayak the River Jordan from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. “Maybe these regretful adults should have written down their goals.”

Goddard attributes some of his success to visualizing each

MY LIFE LIST



JESSE JAMES
Monster Garage

Break the land-speed record for a clean, zero-emission car

Jump Snake River Canyon

See South Africa on a motorcycle

Teach high school shop in a small town

✓ VISIT THE GREAT PYRAMIDS





CLIMB EVEREST

“WHEN YOUR LIFE IS ABOUT TO END, HOW WILL YOU KNOW WHETHER OR NOT YOU WON? THE WAY I LOOK AT IT: IF I FINISH MY LIFE LIST, I WON.”

challenge along with the anticipated outcome. “On the screen of my mind, I picture the event and how I will do it,” he says. “It gives me a blueprint to achieve my goals.” And achievements lead to more achievements: “When you capsize in the rapids while exploring the upper river in the Congo, which nobody had ever explored before, you end up with confidence that allows you to unlock the limitations inside you.”

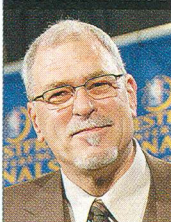
Those waters in the Congo were filled with crocodiles that certainly would have feasted on Goddard if not for two factors: The currents were so rough and the river bottom so dense with jagged rocks that the crocs were deterred from venturing over. “Thank heavens,” says Goddard, “because they were man-eaters.”

Among the scores of other things he checked off over the years are learning jujitsu, milking a poisonous snake (he got bitten in the process), and lighting a match with a .22 caliber rifle. “To be honest, the reaction I get from some people is, ‘Goddard, don’t you ever relax and have fun?’ They don’t realize that nothing is more fun than having these adventures.”

By the 1970s Goddard was a well-known life list proselytizer, traveling to school auditoriums in Southern California and preaching the gospel to wide-eyed kids. When he showed up at West Covina High School, near Los Angeles, David

Rogers, currently a professor of geological en-

MY LIFE LIST



PHIL JACKSON
Basketball Coach

- Write the Great American Novel
- Motorcycle around New Zealand’s South Island
- Live to see a great-grandchild

OWN A FERRARI

gineering at the University of Missouri, was one of the receptive audience members. Back in the spring of 1970, in that darkened assembly hall, the 16-year-old Rogers found himself mesmerized by a film that Goddard shot while climbing the world’s highest waterfall, 3,212-foot Angel Falls in Venezuela.

Inspired by Goddard, Rogers made his own life list: 126 items long, including climbing the east face of Mount Whitney in winter, hiking from Jerusalem to Jericho (to retrace the steps of Jesus), and running the Colorado River.

Now 51, Rogers has completed 91 challenges from his list of 126 written nearly four decades ago. “I don’t even know who I’d be without the life list,” he says. “We all have the potential to do amazing things. But you have to create a flight plan for your life. You won’t follow it exactly. But without it you’ll never get close to where you want to go.”

As Rogers’s own life proves, you don’t need to be rich to do this. On his modest professor’s salary, he has completed numerous adventures, such as climbing Mount Fuji and rowing his own boat through the Grand Canyon. “But I haven’t climbed Mount Everest, and I won’t,” says Rogers. “It simply costs too much.”

Ever resourceful, he used a stint in the military to help him complete some items, such as catapulting off an aircraft carrier in a jet and trapping back on. He knocked off those two during a brief tour of duty on the U.S.S. Enterprise in the Pacific.

Rogers’s stint as a naval intelligence officer provided

MY LIFE LIST



TONY HAWK
skateboarder

- Do a frontside varial geytwist revert
- Learn to ride a motorcycle with confidence
- Build more public skate parks in low-income areas
- Experience weightlessness

him with an opportunity to do amazing things that were not exactly at the top of his colleague’s to-do lists. “My peers told me that I was crazy for volunteering to go on a trip to China,” he remembers, adding that he considered rafting the upper Yangtze (too perilous, as it turned out), but he did explore the Taroko Gorge in Taiwan and walked a chunk of the Great Wall. “And when they needed someone to go to Peru, I volunteered — so that I could explore Machu Picchu. It was on my list.”

PART OF MAKING A LIFE list is opening yourself up

to difficult tasks — in fact, they ought to be things that scare you a little. A life list is not just about achieving your goals, it is also about overcoming your fears. If there are no challenges that make you queasy, then it’s not a great life list.

Those with the best lists encounter adversity all along the



CATCH A FOUL BALL

way — and they don’t always overcome it. Goddard, for example, saw his kayaking partner get swept to his death in rough African waters. Keoghan endured bouts of intense claustrophobia in subterranean Mexican caves. And Rogers describes his proposed 1,200-mile trip [continued on page 124]



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LIFE LISTS *continued from page 88*

from the top to the bottom of the Yukon River as “the big bust.”

“It was nice out of Whitehorse,” he recalls, “but it got slower and slower and reached the point where there were 70 billion bugs per cubic meter. Then, after 250 miles, the water became very shallow and the experience turned so miserable that I just couldn’t hack it — even though I went farther than I would have if it hadn’t been on the list.”


Does an aborted attempt like that still get checked off? “Heck yes,” says Rogers, emphasizing that it’s as much about the experience as it is about the achievement. “If I attempt it but don’t complete it, it still counts. This list is for me, not for anyone else.”

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE AN INTENSELY TURBULENT air flight to give you the opportunity to take stock of your life. Tim Draper, 47, a venture capitalist from Northern California, had precisely this experience eight years ago while flying from Hawaii to San Francisco. He happened to be sitting next to his friend Ted Leonsis, and, as they were caroming through the air, Leonsis brought up his life list. By the time the jet’s wheels touched down, a relieved Draper was already figuring out what should go on his list: visiting 100 countries (he’s at number 52), driving across America, and reading 1,000 books (he’s saving that challenge for retirement) made the initial cut.

Draper takes his life list seriously, but he is acutely aware that it is no substitute for life itself. “I look at the list as a great thing to have added to my life, but I don’t want to be ruled by it,” he says. “It simply pushes me to go a little further than I ordinarily would.”

His life list led him to run his first marathon, ride an elephant, and plant a garden. “I changed as soon as I made the list,” he acknowledges. “Instead of wandering through life, experiencing it, I felt like I was on a little bit of a mission. That was the original change. The later change is more important, though. Sometimes, in your day-to-day life, you get on a track and get into a rut and the list pulls you out of it. In the course of completing an item on your list, you wind up doing something completely different from what you ordinarily would.”

Pressed for an example, Draper remembers his commitment to playing chess in downtown Manhattan’s Washington Square Park, a magnet for low-limit chess wizards. “I had two free hours in New York, and I had to get that one off my list. I played a guy who was a great hustler. His strategy was to pee on a tree after making a big move. Then he’d come back to me and ask me what I did. It was hilarious. I lost, but I didn’t care.”

Draper was checkmated, but happily ticked off item number 29 from his list. It was not a loss to him. After all, as his friend Ted Leonsis once said, “When your life is about to end, how will you know whether or not you won? That is a difficult thing. The way I look at it is this: If I finish my life list, I won.” 

KYLE MAYNARD *continued from page 81*

jobs. “I said, if that guy can get up and train each day, there’s no excuse not to go a hundred miles an hour and skate through fuckin’ brick walls.”

Maynard’s parents, devout Christians, wince through smiles. “We hear that a lot, though usually with less cursing,” his father says once we’re seated. “Maybe they were delirious from hunger.”

I ask Kyle how he copes with the attention, which, as near as I can tell, is constant. His website is clogged, his cell phone keeps ringing, and wherever he goes, he’s buttonholed by people who stop to tell him their stories. As a young man famous for surmounting hardship, he’s become a kind of lodestone for the disadvantaged, or in some cases, the merely unhappy. That kind of onus can oppress a kid who’s six months past his prom, and who, in his first year of college, is juggling a full course load with a varsity athlete’s schedule.

“Well, no, it’s great that people get hope from my story, and if it helps even a couple of ’em, that’s amazing. But —” he pauses a moment, and I lie in wait for his first harsh utterance all week, “the truth of the matter is, it feels hollow sometimes. I don’t really deserve all this.”

The chatter around the table stops dead. “What do you mean?” asks Anita.

Kyle fusses with his shirttail, picking the words carefully; it’s clear he’s been brooding on this a while. “Look, there’s hundreds of thousands of wrestlers in the country right now, and out of all of them, I’m maybe above average. And for this kind of spotlight — going to parties at Hef’s mansion and winning an ESPY and all that — I feel like I should be great. Hands or no hands.”

“Isn’t that a little unfair?” says his father. “You’ve done a lot of things in a real short time that nobody in their right mind thought were possible.”

“But that’s exactly my point,” he counters. “Just because I’ve done ’em means that anyone else could’ve, if they were in this chair. And as far as being a hero, I don’t think so. That’s the guys in Faluja, fighting and dying.”

This launches a discussion of sensible goals, the mere mention of which makes Kyle bristle. He has already game-planned the next 10 years, culminating in a career in on-air journalism as a news anchor or sports-talk host. That much, his parents stand behind; it’s the step before it that scares them stiff. After graduating, it is Kyle’s avid intention to become a steel cage fighter, competing on the Ultimate Fighting circuit à la his idol and mentor, Randy Couture. (Kyle met the reigning light-heavyweight champion at one of his matches in Las Vegas. They get together when possible, usually at Couture’s bouts.)

That no one has entered this savage sport without limbs to kick or punch with doesn’t faze Kyle. Any wall can be scaled or jumped over, he says, if you put in work and embrace pain. “Whenever I get tired or my lungs start burning, that’s when I kick up the jams,” he says. “Because pain, to me, is just