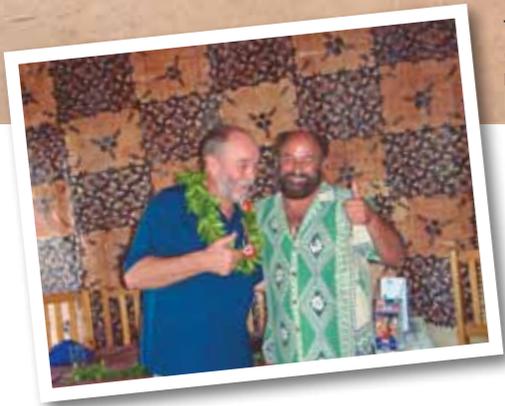




The 130ft twin-hull traditional Tongan canoe that Mark Belvidere is currently restoring to sailing condition in Nuku Alofa. Left inset: My first meeting with Mark Belvidere in Tonga two years ago during my Talisker Bounty Boat Expedition.



When I picked-up my Polaris Flying boat from Tamworth, I saw the latest Cavalon Gyrocopter from Germany. Wow, way cool! You can fit floats, it costs about \$135,000 and you can get a license to fly it for about \$5000.

MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK

Don hints at more adventures in Tonga and goes on a long road trip through the southern states, picking-up a hitchhiker along the way

My beard went grey some time ago; some would say (me included) before my time, as I still look at the world through younger eyes.

Okay, I have experienced my share of scary moments that

would turn anyone grey, yet I often consider myself lucky, not only to have been born in Australia but to have been able to pull off some of those adventures and business successes.

I also understand the concept of making my own luck. I am not

a gambler. I only ever buy the occasional lottery ticket or scratchy and I balance the numbers carefully when it comes to risk.

To pull off an adventure or even a fulfilling life, we all need a bit of luck, that's for sure, but there is more to it than that, starting

with "opportunity". So how do you increase your chances of good luck and find opportunity?

First thing to do is get out there and meet people. Believe me, people are everything and I do not mean on Facebook. Go places and do things that bring you face-to-face with living, breathing, sweating people. The more people you know and meet, the more possibilities there are of hearing "something" in conversation.

Then it is up to you to spot the "opportunity". It could be anything at all, an idea, a connection, some advice, a tipoff or an offer. If you comprehend that opportunity, then grab it with all the passion you can muster. Most people don't see them, even when it is staring them in the face and it is then gone forever. The ones who get ahead in life are often the ones who can pick it, then act on it.

The other way to increase your luck is with good planning and preparation and finally you need a person you can trust, or respect, to review your decisions before

you act. So many times I have been saved from bad decisions, just by talking it through.

AN OPPORTUNITY

Well there I was at a press conference in Tonga in April 2010, about to set off on my Talisker Bounty Boat Expedition. In the audience was a guy called Mark Belvidere. He was a square-rigger captain who owned his own pirate ship in Costa Rica running tourist trips and he owned an amazing eco-tourism resort in the Tongan Vava'u Island Group, called Treasure Island.

On top of that, Mark had a 132ft traditional Tongan twin-hulled sailing canoe (a Kalea) just down the road that he was restoring. We got chatting and then he tells me that he nearly broke the world sailing speed record in Tonga many years before and "by the way, my Tongan friend had just been locked-up for allegedly plundering a wreck!" "Really," I said. Hmmmm? I then went on to mention my treasure hunting exploits in the Philippines seven

years before. We were off!

Now, two years later, Mark is my business partner in our Tongan company Tonga Blue. In April, we are about to continue on a trail of adventure, which we hope will uncover some lost Tongan history and any anything else that maybe found within a few of the wrecks we have just discovered.

It has been a long road to get this far and now my life revolves around wreck-hunting permits, archeologically responsible processes and artefact conservation procedures. I would give my right arm to own a cannon, so the sense of anticipation is strong.

The Kingdom and people of Tonga always make for a unique experience, even without the prospect of a *Boy's Own* adventure and pirates! It was great to meet Mark. Now we both need some luck!

GREY NOMADS

I am writing this column from a motel south of Sydney, as my \$39 two-person tent does not



This may be the famed Marked Tree on the Murrumbidgee River, just outside Hay, NSW. Here Capt Charles Sturt began his 77-day journey and ultimate discovery of the Murray River in 1829. I visited the tree, just as the recent floods reached it, as part of my research for a possible recreation of Sturt's whale-boat adventure.

have power for my computer and it is raining outside. Flooding is everywhere. Wagga Wagga is going under.

I left Hobart in my van two weeks earlier in late February for some Melbourne meetings, then a long road "cruise" to Adelaide (Charles Sturt Expedition planning), then across to Tamworth to pick up my Polaris Flying Inflatable Boat and bring it back to Hobart before shipping it to Tonga.

I often admire the grey nomads with their caravans and motorhomes as a land-based cruising fraternity. They don't worry about the weather or dropping anchors, so don't worry about them dragging!

After battling floods all the way to Tamworth, I loaded everything from the hangar on top of and into the van, for the long haul south to Sydney. I found a great campsite off the Old Pacific Highway behind a Telstra mobile phone tower and ground station.

BASIL THE RAT

At 2am, I was woken by four police telling me that copper had been stolen from the Telstra ground equipment twice in the last two months so we should move on. Then they told me there was a rat inside my van, eating our food!

I have never had a rat on any of my boats and he must have come in with the gear from the hangar. We have been living with him for days now and still are. Meantime, we emptied the whole van except for the heavy mainframe and engine of the Polaris.

"Basil" was in one of the seats, a comfortable nest. I chased him out and thought he bolted through the rear door. We checked everywhere... gone! Lucky thing, as he had been eating bits of carpet, rubber door seals, bags, all just for fun obviously, as he had also been eating plenty of chocolate and potatoes too.

Just to be sure the rat had

departed I left half a block of chocolate on the dash that night as bait. AGHHH! It was gone in the morning! It is just a van, right, where can he hide? I am off to empty the van again, what bad luck, hey!

FOR THE RECORD

Fifteen-year-old Jessica Watson decided to contact me for the first time after chatting with a friend. We became great mates and the rest is history as they say. She sailed the boat I lent her, solo non-stop and unassisted around the world. Who she was and her solid planning and preparation gave her every chance of success.

In last month's column I mentioned that 16yo Laura Dekker was now the youngest solo circumnavigator, taking Jessica's claim to that title. Unfortunately, this upset a couple of people, who suggested her voyage could not be compared because Laura made stops and went through the



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Panama Canal.

When Jessica went around the world she achieved many firsts including: youngest solo; youngest solo non-stop; unassisted; first in a pink boat etc. etc. The list of sub-definitions can go on forever.

As the "youngest solo", Jessica took that record from UK solo-sailor Mike Perham, who made

My flying boat came out of the hangar into my van (top) with a passenger! Above: Mike Perham set off around the world in this Open 50 via the Panama Canal to become the youngest solo circumnavigator, just months before Jessica set-off to claim the record.

stops and went through the Panama Canal. He in turn took that "youngest" record from American sailor Zac Sunderland, who also made stops and transited the Panama Canal. Jessica is still the youngest person "solo non-stop unassisted", a much

tougher achievement (there are other versions to this claim too!) — but she is no longer the "youngest", Laura is, but who cares, they all had a great time and continue to challenge life and grew immensely from the experience. 🚢