

I've tried 100 ways to

THERE is no textbook way to deal with divorce, but Ian Usher would admit that his coping mechanism was somewhat drastic. When his wife walked out on him, he vowed to purge himself of everything he owned that reminded him of the happy years they had spent together. It wasn't only material possessions he wanted to get rid of, but less tangible assets of his life that had contributed to their shared identity.

With this in mind he put his house and all its contents, his car, motorbike and jet-ski, even his job and his friends, on internet auction website eBay. The package – which he named A Life For Sale – made headlines worldwide.

Within hours of going live it had attracted an incredible 1.75 million hits. Bids reached £1.2 million and for a while it looked like not only was he

by **Antonia Hoyle**

going to eliminate every last memento of his marriage, but he was going to become a millionaire in the process.

Yet by the time Ian's auction closed in June 2008, it had left him feeling as flat as his imminent divorce. The £1.2million bid turned out to be a hoax and the second highest offer of £230,000 was withdrawn. Six more bidders who had put in six-figure offers backed out.

Ian's plan disintegrated into a highly publicised failure. Then, as quickly as he had become a global phenomenon, he was largely forgotten. He could have been forgiven for licking his wounds in private and putting any future hare-brained

schemes firmly on the back burner. But the seed of adventure had already been planted.

Ian, a Briton who had moved to Perth in Western Australia with his wife Laura in 2000, decided to sell his belongings individually and use the money to achieve 100 of his lifelong ambitions in as many weeks.

They range from the altruistic – raising £30,000 for charity and working in a soup kitchen in Vancouver – to adrenaline-fuelled activities such as swimming with sharks off the coast of Japan and running with bulls at a Spanish festival. And there were quirky endeavours, such as securing a part in a Hollywood movie, riding an ostrich in South Africa and learning to juggle with fire clubs in Los Angeles.

His adventures have taken him around the world, Disney has bought the film rights to his story and he has now nearly completed his extraordinary list. His divorce has been finalised and, ironically, his extensive travels have forced him to contemplate trying again for a settled, more conventional existence.

'None of this has been about proving a point or getting back at Laura,' he says. 'It has been my way of dealing with my heartache and it has certainly given me something to focus on.'

'Sometimes I wonder how much of it has been about filling a gap. For all the wonderful things I have done and people I've met, there is a sense of loneliness and I'm still grappling with heartache now.'

'I still love Laura and there is a hole in my life where she was. Completing my goals has been exhilarating and exhausting. But I've been doing a lot of thinking about my future and I am ready for another relationship.'

Ian, 46, is staying with his mother in Darlington for a week before he flies to the US to complete his final goals. His arms – covered in bruises and scars – bear testament to his various pursuits.

He is both affable and romantic, with an air of childlike wonderment at the world – a result no doubt of his recent rootless existence.

He was born in Barnard Castle in Yorkshire. His father, Foster, was a sales rep, his mother, Cynthia, a nurse. He has a 44-year-old brother, Martin, who lives in London and works for the Government's immigration department. Ian went to the private Barnard Castle School, leaving at 18 to work on a kibbutz in Israel before studying for a bachelor of education degree in Liverpool. Subsequent jobs included working as a youth trainer for British Rail and setting up a jet-ski hire company on the beach in Scarborough.

There, in 1993, he met Laura Hancock, a 17-year-old art student, and they married in November 2000.

Laura shared Ian's passion for travel and, like him, flitted through various jobs to fund their plans to see the world. 'We shared the same outlook on life,' Ian says. 'We wanted to fit in as much fun as possible. We both loved Australia for the weather and the laid-back attitude. Laura's mother was Australian so it was easy for us to move there.'

Once they arrived in Perth in 2001 they settled into domesticity. They bought a home together. Ian found work as the manager of a store selling rugs, and Laura sold sunglasses for a living. With a mortgage and a lifestyle they both loved, Ian's thoughts turned to starting a family.

But Laura clearly felt otherwise, and, in January 2006, she stunned him by moving out. When he initially disclosed his heartache Ian refused to reveal exactly what happened, alluding at the time only to a mysterious 'shocking and awful discovery' he made one evening.

Today, he is less circumspect. 'Laura found somebody else, and I found that out before she told me,' he says. 'It was a betrayal of trust. It came completely out of the blue and I was devastated'

'I thought she loved me, that we would be together forever and have children. In the space of five minutes everything

He famously tried to sell his life – home, car and even job – on eBay when his wife left him. When that failed Ian Usher set off round the world to realise his 100 lifelong ambitions to ease the pain of his divorce. Now, two years and thousands of miles later, he admits defeat ...

changed.' Two years later, he was no closer to achieving closure. 'I had an idyllic life but the woman I wanted wasn't there with me and everything around me reminded me of that,' he says. 'A part of my life was over.'


'Laura and I had divided our assets. I wanted to walk away from Perth with a T-shirt, a pair of shorts, my wallet and my passport.'

So, inspired by one of his friends who had once joked about wanting to sell his life, he attempted to do just that. Ian's boss agreed to give the winning bidder a two-week trial at the rug store, and his friends said they would accept them into their social circle.

In March 2008 he set up a website outlining his reasons for the sale and what he was offering. 'I knew I needed publicity, but I was staggered by how big a story it had become,' he says. 'I was pleased, panicked and daunted.'

One regret is that, as the idea snowballed, he failed to take into account Laura's reaction to the sale and posted a private diary of their romance online. 'It got out of hand and she was angry with me,' he says. 'I overstepped the mark in terms of Laura's personal boundaries and I was sorry for the hurt I caused her.'

His elation at the interest in his site turned to despair when, 100 days later, the auction closed with no buyer. 'I was disappointed and my confidence was



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fix my broken heart



HELPING HAND: Ian with sponsor Richard Branson, top, and at work in a Vancouver soup kitchen on Christmas Day



LONE ADVENTURER: In the shadow of Everest and, right, at the Grand Canyon. 'It doesn't mean much without someone to share it with,' Ian says



LOST LOVE: Ian with ex-wife Laura at a fancy dress party in the Nineties

knocked, but I had already announced my 100-goal plan,' he says. 'Mentally I'd moved on. I knew if I didn't do it then I never would.'

He sold his three-bedroom house and belongings individually and, in August 2008, with only two rucksacks to his name, he boarded a plane to Dubai, where his first goal was to snowboard on the world's biggest indoor ski slope. He began to work his way through the objectives on his list, many of them typical thrill-seeking pursuits. He bungee-jumped and

went paragliding in the South of France, and wing-walked in London.

Others were less conventional. In Oklahoma he had a hawk eat out of his hand; he slept in a capsule hotel in Japan where the 'rooms' are the size of coffins and flew a helicopter in Hawaii. He saw the Seven Wonders of the World and learned to speak French and Spanish.

He was, in part, inspired by his father, who had died of bowel cancer in 1994, aged 61. 'He died with unfulfilled ambitions and I was determined

not to do the same,' Ian says. He wants to raise £30,000 for Australian organisation the Bowel Cancer & Digestive Research Institute by selling photos of himself completing his goals online. He has also attracted the attention of entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson.

After meeting Ian, Sir Richard offered to sponsor him for his latest offbeat challenge – the one for which he is in Britain this week – gathering five Ian Ushers together in one room. Sir Richard will donate £300 for each Ian Usher who takes part.

Although Ian was paid around £14,000 for the film rights to his story, he has still had to survive on a shoe-string budget. He has slept in hostels and on airport floors. He has learned to live without electricity and running water. He has suffered from altitude sickness at Everest Base Camp and was nearly kicked to death by a bull at the Pamplona Bull Festival in Northern Spain. Two days later he was racing with the bulls again. 'It was strangely addictive,' he says.

Certainly, he refused to be daunted by potential obstacles. On route to the Machu Picchu on the Inca Trail in Peru in January, torrential rain caused mud slides that damaged the

railway he was hoping to use. Both police and the tourist board told Ian it was too dangerous to travel. But while other tourists were flown out of the area by helicopter, Ian persuaded a taxi driver to take him to his destination. 'The timing was perfect,' he says. 'The clouds opened and for two minutes I had a perfect view from the top of the mountain.'

But the highlights of his adventures weren't always adrenaline-fuelled pursuits or trips to iconic landmarks. Recalling a visit to the Taj Mahal he says: 'On the way there I told the taxi driver what I was doing and asked him to take me to the cheapest hotel afterwards. He insisted on putting me up at his home. I shared one room with him, his brother, his wife, and their three children. They fed me hot chapatis and curry. They had next to nothing but showed me the best hospitality I'd ever seen.'

His lowest moment came at the Grand Canyon in November 2008. 'There was a stunning orange sunset and I was surrounded by couples, hand in hand, watching one of the world's most majestic sites,' he says.

'Being there on my own felt so wrong and I was overcome with loneliness.'

He has maintained sporadic contact with Laura, 34, who still lives in Perth and is in a relationship with the man she left him for. 'It's a good thing,' he says with no hint of bitterness. 'It shows it was the right decision for her. She says she's amazed at the things I've done. Some were activities we had wanted to achieve together, which made it sadder for me.'

In eight weeks Ian will complete his goals. He is thinking of returning to Britain to live in Scarborough, where many of his best friends are based, and hopes to forge a new career for himself as a motivational speaker. 'All I ever wanted was an interesting life; a life that's not ordinary,' he says. 'It's certainly turned out like that, although perhaps not in the way I expected.'

He also hopes that soon he will find a new partner, one with whom he could have children. 'I'm proud of what I've done,' he says. 'I've been struck by the kindness of strangers. The world is filled with wonderful people. But ultimately, it doesn't mean as much without having someone to share it with.'

● Ian can be contacted via his website: www.100goals100weeks.com.