

REAL TOOLS FOR RESILIENCE

**LIFE'S
TOUGH
BE
TOUGHER**



'Reminds us that
resilience isn't a rare trait
given to the few—it's a
muscle we all can grow.'

TURIA PITT

DAVID BUTTIFANT & NICK FARR

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PROLOGUE

NICK

The wind at 7500 metres is relentless. It stalks you. For a few moments it's silent, luring you into a false sense of calm; and then it returns, violent and furious, like a freight train slamming into your tent. Paul and I had been pinned down at Camp 3 on Cho Oyu—the world's sixth-highest mountain—for three days, but it felt like weeks.

Paul Carr and I were climbing partners, friends and Victoria Police colleagues. This was our final training climb before heading to Mount Everest the following year. But here we were: hypoxic, depleted and starving. The gas for our fuel stove was almost gone. We were running out of food and we were definitely out of time. And we knew it. But we didn't say it out loud. Neither of us did.

That silence still haunts me.

We were down to one Mars bar between us, and were still clinging to the fantasy that we'd make a summit push as soon as the wind died. It was madness, but that's what hypoxia (oxygen depletion) does. It strips your clarity but leaves your stubborn optimism intact. We were both experienced enough to know

the situation was now serious, but we said nothing. Admitting it would feel like failure. And failure wasn't something we talked about.

The hours dragged. We played cards. Swapped stories. Told bad jokes. But we were slipping. Our tent was coming apart. Our bodies were deteriorating. Even going to the toilet was a life-threatening ordeal and with no toilet paper left, I had to sacrifice my last clean pair of socks. Still, we avoided the conversation that needed to be had. Are we okay? Can we keep going? Do we pull the pin?

On the fourth day, things started to unravel quickly. It was around midday when Paul climbed out of our tent to collect some snow so we could boil some water and make tea. I followed him outside because it was my turn to make the tea and, even in my hypoxic state, I could tell he didn't look well. I told him to get back in the tent. He stumbled, looked dazed and said something I couldn't understand before crawling slowly back inside. I made us both hot tea, then tapped him on the leg to let him know it was ready. No response. I tried again but nothing. At first, I thought he'd fallen asleep so I allowed him to rest a bit longer. About 20 to 30 minutes passed and I tried to rouse Paul again. I shook him harder this time and he still didn't move.

I called out for help. Tika Tamang, our Sherpa guide, came into the tent, took one look and said flatly, 'Nick, Paul is dead.'

He said it again. 'He's dead, mate.'

But how could he be? He was just outside. He had just spoken to me. I'd seen countless bodies during my years in the police, but none of that experience counted for anything here. My brain, starved of oxygen, refused to understand what was in front of me.

I tried CPR. Fumbled with the oxygen mask. Shouted. Swore. Begged. But Paul was gone.

PROLOGUE

That night, I wasn't allowed to sleep. Altitude kills silently when you're that far gone. Tika insisted I move into his tent. I sat upright the entire night, shattered and numb, trying to understand why I was still alive and Paul wasn't.

This is where my story begins.

Not with triumph. Not with a summit. But with death in a tent high on a mountain during a savage Himalayan storm. This is my resilience story—but it's not the kind you hear about on TED Talks or see printed on posters. This is the other kind. The one forged in cold, silence, guilt and grief. The kind that doesn't look like strength at all. This is the kind of resilience that starts in places no one wants to be. The kind that begins with misery, ends in loss, and demands that you get up and push on.

Paul's death cracked something open inside me and there was no going back. It shook me to my core and hurled me onto a path I never saw coming. Suddenly, I was asking questions I'd never dared to ask before. About what it truly means to be vulnerable, to connect, and to be strong and resilient. Not the kind of strength that grits its teeth and pretends, but the kind that breaks, bends and still finds a way forward.

What began as raw survival, as pain that left me hollow, slowly started to shift. Bit by bit, despair gave way to something else—something that looked like meaning. Something that felt like purpose.

The lessons I took from that storm were carved into me. Those four days, trapped below the summit of the sixth-highest mountain in the world, stripped everything back. They were ruthless and relentless and they reshaped my life. They changed how I live, how I show up for the people around me—and how I help others face their own impossible summits.