

From Tragedy to Triumph

Michael Weingard has known heartache since the age of 10, but made it his mission to leave a living legacy of hope for others. Natasha Horrelt takes you through the crazy life of this extraordinary businessman and philanthropist.

THE 2004 TSUNAMI WAS A devastating turning point for Thailand and, some might say, the world. Although many were lost, those left behind came together to embark on a journey of hope.

One such person is Mark Weingard who lost his home in the tragedy. Ten years later the Englishman has rebuilt in the same spot. Iniala is a 10 room beach house resort with a design esthetic so unique it stuns anyone who enters. What is most enticing about the property, however, is something one can't see. It is the fact that 10 per cent of its room revenue (not profit) is donated to charitable causes.

"We are only here once, and we have to make the most of life," Weingard says. "It's not only for ourselves but also for people around us."

Weingard knows just how short life is having had his father die when he was just 10 years-old and his fiancée, Annika Linden, die in the 2002 Bali terrorism attacks. He also narrowly escaped the World Trade Center

attack on 9/11 after moving to New York because he was running late.

Convinced that he would die at 36 just as his father had, Weingard was determined to achieve as much as possible from a young age. At 19 he moved to London where he landed a job at a company that later became part of JPMorgan Chase & Co. A couple of years after his 30th birthday he was a multimillionaire and that was when he started giving back in a big way.

Weingard started the Annika Linden Foundation to assist the children of bombing victims and, in the past decade, Weingard and other firms have donated more than \$10 million. Renamed Inspirasia last year, the foundation now funds 16 education, health and rehabilitation projects across Thailand, India and Indonesia.

For Weingard, however, this won't be enough. He plans to build several more hotels across Southeast Asia that are expected to generate around \$10 million in annual giving.

"I want to show that business can work hand-in-hand with philanthropy and inspire other people to do the same. I have a duty to help people." ●

