# How To Buy a House As a Poor PhD Student

—- by Natalia Bielczyk, September 2015 —-

***Warning:***

***The following text is biased, opinionated, may contain bold statements, be offensive to some groups, and cause emotional distress.***

**My Why**

I wrote this story down because a few people asked me how did it happen that I managed to buy a house in a foreign country at such a young age, and why I actually did that. It is an almost 4-year long story and it might sound like a cheesy, motivational fairy tale when I think about it.

However, it is hard to make a fair point without telling how it all started because the momentwhen an idea happened to come to my head, was a consequence rather than a reason to act.

**The End of Childhood**

First to say, when I was studying at the University of Warsaw, I was awful with money. I was never saving them, and I always used to find yet another reason to spend it as a part of "self-development": for travel, for a new dress, for a camera, for another extra-course on languages et cetera.

I perceived all my education process as a childhood, and that's how I found myself in Nijmegen four years ago: with plenty of personal items and less than 500 Eur on my account. But once I gotmy first paycheck, my perception of money drastically changed. From that point, it was something acquired rather than given, so whenever I was spending money, I perceived it as throwing my personal achievements to dust.

Then my behavior changed by 180 degrees and I became quite shorthanded, which was potentiated by the fact that everything in the Netherlands seemed very expensive compared to the pricing in Poland. And that's more or less how I started accumulating savings in my account.

You know, looking for investments and occasions is like anything else: you learn it slowly over time, and there are no shortcuts. Even though it doesn't seem to be worth the effort, you start with small things, like looking for a bar that has the best quality-to-price ratio for the beers.

Then you learn the strategies which will, at some point, result in a big stake. First good deals on beers, clothing, furniture, then something bigger, like cheap flights and all sorts of travels, and then, after all, serious properties. You are not likely to succeed in something as complex as buying a good house if you do not succeed in something like booking the best (meaning, cheapestand closest) room at the conference, right?

The important part is to treat it like a game and to likeit. Many people treat money and saving them as a necessary pain and effort while in fact it can befun and a source of satisfaction, it is all a matter of attitude. Also, one can treat it as a part of personal development. When I was looking for good bars, I didn't even think about buying a house, but when I look back, the deal I made is a result of the fact

that I was consequently making these small steps all the way.

It is also very important to work on your attitude to wealth. Many people have a contradictory view of it, which hinders their performance in getting well off. On one hand, they think it would be good to be well off, but on the other hand, they perceive rich people as snobbish, self-oriented, and walking in the clouds. If you believe that a typical rich person is a repulsive personality, you will subconsciously miss occasions to become one.

So, change your attitude. Well-off people such as Warren Buffett or Bill Gates are most often also modest, hard-working people with a great sense of humor. Philanthropists who still live a simple life and do not spoil their children with money at all.

Coming back to my story, I think that over these years I was generally pushing things in the right direction, and of course, losing some opportunities is a natural part of the process so I cannot blame myself for those.

The only thing I would have changed if I got back to four years before might be keeping more thoughts to myself. While you are comparing options on your mind to getthe best deal on bees or so, you do not necessarily have to report it to the people around with all the details. They might easily get a disgruntling feeling that you are a very calculated person who might also bargain in interpersonal relations, and that's a big turn-off for them. People are very fragile with money-related issues, that's for sure.

**My Housing History in Nijmegen**

Anyway, next to my new strategy with money, I was also terribly unlucky with the housing. I was unlucky already before: while living in Warsaw during my studies, I lived in 8 different places within 6 years.

When I came to Nijmegen, I was first placed in some really shady, small, and dirty room downtown, where I was supposed to pay 500 Eur per month for really bad conditions - including a landlady that was an alcoholic who used to walk into my room at midnight to have chitchat when she was really drunk.

So, after a few weeks, I found another room and I just run away from her. Next, I took an unfurnished room in a big house occupied mostly by students at Graafseweg. The spot was good but I was unlucky to be a direct neighbor to two partying guys who didn't mind having loud music and parties until 6 am every other working day. It was so bad that once my ex entered my neighbor's room through the window and cut the cables of the speaker which bought us some silence for a few days.

Anyway, then my ex moved to the city and we moved in together to some – finally – cozy studio which we furnished together and we were peacefully living there… until he run away before the wedding. I was living in that place for another year or so, and it was very comfortable. However, I was afraid that, since everything in this place recalled the ex, I would never be able to get over this story, so I finally moved out.

The next place  I occupied was very cheap, spacious, and close to the campus. The standard was low, but what was truly annoying was the landlady who was visiting the house almost every day, who was making a lot of comments about everything I was doing. She also used to threaten me that if I don't

like something, I should leave. Also, despite the promises, she didn't give me any rental contract and I was pushed to pay her cash which didn't give me any sense of security.

Some day during this process, I was passing by Xenos in the city center, and I spotted a beautiful closet desk:

I felt like I would badly want to pee over such a thing, so I bought it, and I was moving from place to place together with this closet desk since then. I thought to myself, "One day when I have a house, I will put it there." I didn't have any conscious plan to get a house yet, but I think I was slowly facilitating the thought that one day I would have one.

**On Financial Wealth and Happiness in General**

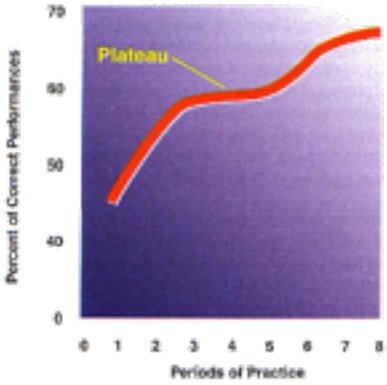
Also, the stock exchange made me think a lot. I usually do something new at every birthday. For my 28th birthday, I started playing at Polish stock. For the first two months it was going awesomely well but then, all of a sudden, in March 2014 Putin invaded Ukraine, and the Polish stock exchange sank by 10% in just one day. I got my stomach so twisted that I promised myself never to try the stock exchange as the only channel of investment. And so I started mind wandering about safe investments.

You know, in such conditions — conditions in which you feel a lot of insecurity - your brain will ultimately produce some survival strategy. So, you might think: "ok, I don't give a damn, it is better to just rent my own place and pay 1000 Eur per month as some of my colleagues do, and just focus on work in peace, and forget about any investments." Ooooor, you might think: "you know what? Apparently, landladies are on the right side of the fence, so let's just become one. And that will be my safe investment."

Safety is important, no one would argue with that statement. But there is much more to it because safety is something that is placed really low on Maslow's pyramid — much lower than science. To me, happiness is a table standing on four legs:

- Fulfilling work,
- Social life and family,
- Health,
- Wealth.

With three legs, this table can still stand. It's shaky though. But without two legs, it will fall. This is my table, and other people have their own tables. For instance, for many spirituality is very important, and not as much for me since I somehow squeeze in my prayers between sports and science.




Anyways, getting back to my table, only the first two are really important to me, and this is similar for most people. Many scientists fully concentrate on getting these two because they are, indeed, the goals whereas the other two are the only means to reach these goals. However, it is very important to keep all four legs standing, for at least two reasons.

First, being wealthy reduces the primal fear of being homeless, hungry, and broke, and also reduces stress associated with everyday work as well as tensions in social contacts. There is a saying that marriage starts because of love and ends because of money, and there is something true to it.

Also, a wealthy person can patiently look for a nice job, and work mostly because they like it and not because they fear being jobless, which improves the life quality by a few levels. Health and wealth improve self-confidence and that also improves performance, especially in contact with others. I met a handful of great scientists who do a magnificent job behind closed door, and then go out to the crowd and speak out to the public, and all of a sudden all their deep fears and lack of confidence comes out and destroys their hard work.

It is a sad view to watch someone who does not feel good in their own skin, or who feels pressure to persuade the audience that their research is valuable only because of their contract and the safety of their family.

And, the second reason why keeping healthy and wealthy is important is that these two are measurable. If you have an ambitious research project in which the progress is very nonlinear, you often cannot evaluate how far you are at a given moment. Projects can be frustrating, especially when you already passed this initial stage when you were learning about the literature, you started trying to

solve the research problem but the finish line is not yet visible. This is a plateau phase and it is the most frustrating thing there is. Furthermore, the final output of your research project often depends on some anonymous reviewers' taste or so.

Social life is also very much opinion-dependent. If you came to a foreign country where people value other things than the values you were grown up with, building a social life is very hard and tricky and might take forever, since you are dependent on other people's acceptance. Especially if you have a bright personality and like to "do things differently," you might be very popular on very unpopular depending on other people's tolerance boundaries.

Therefore, it is deadly important to have a hobby that gives a constant sense of progress and is independent of other people's opinions. If you had a certain amount of money on your account a year ago, but now you have a house that is worth roughly ten times more, and pays for itself, that's objective progress and no one can tell you shit since money is pure numbers.

The same with sports — if you can run a 100m distance faster than last year, no one can even try to persuade you that you are not doing well. And again, both of these things (meaning, investments and sports) make you feel better and your mind and your body, so they support research and social life too.

So, I pictured the table in my mind and started looking for houses in Nijmegen. With a sick determination.

**Looking For a New House**

I had never bought any property before so I started with a *tabula rasa*. First, I browsed for information and I found the Polish agency in dem' Bosch (www.domek.nl) who is a koop makelaar and a mortgage organizer in one. I was lucky to bump onto them since they made lots of efforts for me at a very reasonable price. They collected my documents and they were evaluating my approximate mortgage capability on the fly so that I could always call them and ask what is my current capability.

You ought to know, that mortgage capability depends on your income, age, history of employment, history of loans, personal situation et cetera but also on the temporary interest rates which can vary a lot from day to day — what makes it all even more stomach-twisting. But the good news is that you can get a mortgage even if you don't have tenure, it depends on your history of employment from the last three years.

To the bank, it is important to know that you had a stable income and that your salary was constantly increasing, and even if you are a single PhD student, your capability may well exceed 150,000EUR. Also, you might get a very high mortgage if you are involved in a stable relationship but this is tricky: a partner that makes a decent income will pull you up but a jobless person or a student can pull you down.

But also, it is good to have koop makelaar since they know the law very well and that they make you alert to the upcoming changes in the law. The rules for assigning mortgages change roughly every 6 months, and it is better to see the changes forthcoming. This knowledge truly saved my butt.

Anyways, with the koop makelaar onboard I started looking for the houses. It is nothing new to say that you have to specify well what you want at the start (and then the whole universe will secretly join the forces to help you acquire that goal … bla bla). I thought about a rental from the very beginning so I

deliberated my target group first. There are two groups of students in this city: partying people who try to squeeze into the city center and workaholics who care mostly about being close to the university. I decided that I am interested in the second group, and so, I wanted something that is definitely:

- Close to the university,
- With a relatively big area and distribution of rooms that would give at least 4 rooms to rent,
- Not very luxurious and can be subject to a makeover I would also enjoy it,
- With a substantial garden, preferably oriented to the West,
- With a potential for enlarging the house in the future,
- ”Cute” and with a soul,
- Offers some perks important to students like proximity to a grocery / bus stop,

…and last but not least the factors that were completely irrelevant to me were the following:

- Whether or not it has a garage,
- Whether a parcel is overly big,
- Whether it has a lot of spare area like a big basement,
- Whether someone died in the house,
- Whether it has a douche or a bath.

Once I had this list set, I decided to stick to it and not make too many compromises. So I started searching. It wasn't easy because the area of particular interest to me, a quarter to the West of the campus, is not very big yet very popular. Also, when the interest rates got lower around the end of 2014, the market which was frozen for a few years before, got rapidly vivid and the number of people running for houses started increasing.

**My First Attempt**

During the Christmas break, a really nice house appeared on the default website with housing offers in the Netherlands, www.funda.nl. It was close to the university, cute and pretty, well kept inside, functional, and perfect for rental. It also had a nice garden, and once I saw it online, I was very motivated to go and see it in reality.

I made an appointment at the beginning of January in order to see it. It was the first day I was having appointments to see houses, and a third house I was going to see, so I didn't have enough experience to make a quick decision if it is a really good deal or not. Its bathroom was quite an obscure shower, the kitchen was dim and old, and the colors in the living room were quite depressing, so after all, I was hesitating for a while, but finally, I started bidding.

Officially, in the Netherlands, just one person at a time is allowed to bid for a house. However, theory and practice are two different things. In practice, the makelaar representing the owner wants to sell at a so-so satisfactory price in the shortest possible time in order to make a maximal profit, so this rule rarely holds if there is more than one customer interested.

Since the market got vivid with 1st January, there were a few people interested in this house. And I was quite an inexperienced bidder. I put down a bid, my offer was rejected, then again, then again… and after three rounds I heard from the makelaar that most probably, this house won't be sold at any price because it belongs to two brothers who inherited it from parents and who are arguing if to sell it or keep it.

"Weird stuff" – I thought to myself but I stopped bidding at that point. The house was then sold a few days later to someone else… for a few thousand Euro more but within my mortgage capability. I was angry like hell, but I could not do anything about it anymore. And so I continued searching.

**The Spring**

Unfortunately, the initial bidding turned out to be beginner's luck. I was looking at funda.nl every day, and no more houses like this one were appearing. They were all moreexpensive, uglier, and worse placed. You know, once you lose an opportunity, you maniacallycompare any other deal to the one you've lost.

Then I started looking for other options, like buying an apartment. I visited a few apartments in a neighborhood, they were pretty and the price per square meter of an apartment was actually lower than in the case of a house, but there was a serious problem with them. Namely, itis not something that you can easily sell.

All of the apartments that I visited had already been offered for over 6 months whereas a good house in a good location is selling out in a matter of weeks or even days. For a foreigner like me, this is much of a difference because I don't know what I will be doing in the future. I am also not sure what the

European Union will look like in a perspective of 30 years so I need more flexible investments than an apartment in the Netherlands.

So, I was waiting and waiting, and waiting for my window of opportunity. A good thing about this waiting time is that you acquire heuristics that tell you what is a good quality to price ratio, and what is not. After a few months of seeing houses and reading about them, I had such a good sense of the pricing that, given the pictures of a house and the street name, I could assess how much it would be sold for, +/- 20,000Eur.

But it was, of course, not makingme any happier or less homeless. In the meantime, I had to abandon my room, ironically because the house I was living in was being sold by this pretentious landlady — and since I had no formal huur contract, I couldn't really execute my rights. I had to find something else quickly. I hired some garage to put most of my stuff there and moved with most necessary things to a little room in a house with some nice Donders people. And then I left for Easter.

**The Turning Point**

And so the Easter came. I was slowly realizing that I will never reach my aims in a way I planned to, because ever since the market got vivid in January, it was harder and harder to geta house. People just jumped at houses, and the prices started rising accordingly. My mortgagecapability was also rising, but that didn't help because it was a result of low interest rates, so it was rising the same for everyone.

And so Easter came. I was slowly realizing that I will never reach my aims in the way I planned to because ever since the market got vivid in January, it was harder and harder to get a house. People just jumped at houses, and the prices started rising accordingly. My mortgage capability was also rising, but that didn't help because it was a result of low interest rates, so it was rising the same for everyone.

At some point, the houses were selling out so quickly that I could not even see them — I was making an appointment with the makelaar, coming to the place, and the makelaar was telling me that the house had been bought just a few hours before for cash.

I also told a few people about my plans. As my parents often say, this is not wise to talk about plans before you finally get there, but it is always hard for me to keep opportunities in secret, I just like sharing. In January I was convinced I am going to buy that first house, so I did tell a few people… and then the rumor spread, and more people got interested in the same: buying a house next to the university, and renting rooms. So, I kind of shot my own foot.

And now I had to be a little bit like David Copperfield. He has his famous trick in which he makes a plane disappear — a plane that is surrounded by a ring of people holding their hands. And so I had to make a nice house disappear from the market, despite a handful of people around me sniffing out for it.

All of this made me think that I have to come up with a brand new idea for how to get a house. One day when I was passing by Hatertseweg, I saw a house that was not announced on funda.nl, but had a board with contact information exposed in the front instead. That made me realize that some people try to sell a house without a makelaar to avoid paying around 2% of the house value as a makelaar's fee. I talked about it to my mother and she said that I should take an advantage of the fact that I live close to the quarter that interests me… and that I should ask around.

Every nationality has its strong and weak spots. The Dutch are credible, punctual, generous, and practical, but they are also very correct, too correct sometimes. They usually put the red 'Nee' labels on their mailboxes, to indicate that they don't want any correspondence other than personal.

So, the Dutch people are too correct to break the rules and they respect each other's 'Nee'– which I used on my behalf. And so, I produced myself a leaflet – kind, neat but concrete – and decided to put one in every single mailbox in the whole quarter. Yes, that's correct: *every* single mailbox: at the nice house, ugly house, big house, small house, doesn't matter. There were roughly 900 of them.

A common misconception is that a seller only cares about how much money they will get from a transaction. But in fact, most people have loads of emotions and memories associated with the house, and they would prefer to pass their property to someone who is a nice, reasonable, hard-working person and who is doing interesting things in life, or to a friend… as opposed to an anonymous buyer represented by some makelaar.

This is how it often works in the Netherlands: the seller and the buyer both delegate makelaars to represent them, and these makelaars fight with each other in the name of their customers like pokemons in the arena. But this is not what most people want: they would rather prefer to see a person they are passing their house to.

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am a PhD student from Radboud UMC, doing research in neuroscience, and I would like to buy a house in this neighborhood. I live in Nijmegen for almost 4 years now, and I like this city more and more every day, especially this quarter of the city. I decided towrite this leaflet because some house owners decide tosell their house without involvement of a makelaar.
Therefore, I would like to ask: *do you know about anyone who is planning to sell a house around this place?*

With best regards,

Natalia Bielczyk, M.Sc.

Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition and Behavior
Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre
Nijmegen, the Netherlands

natalia.bielczyk@gmail.com
phone +31 611 523 739 (after 5pm)

In this place, I would like to make some general remarks about the image of scientists. A monotonous scientific life seems like nothing fascinating from the insider's perspective, but it is definitely fascinating for other people. As I noticed from travels to first-world and developing countries, being a scientist opens many doors (especially bedroom doors).

People who decided to be down-to-earth citizens and went for 'regular' professions still watch the Discovery channel, buy home telescopes and take kids to the zoo on Sundays because they believe that science is something sacred and special, and they want to be as close to science as possible. If such a "plain" person sells a house to a scientist, they feel as if they contributed something to society, as if they

made life easier for someone who is producing something for some public good. It sounds strange, but it is true.

And so I have put some little information about what I am doing in daily life, not just a bare purpose. I was tempted to also put some subthreshold message in there, like a sentence ‘I want your house’ coded in the first letters of each line, but I finally decided I can do better than that. And so, this is the outcome:

It sounds very funny now, but distributing these leaflets was a grind. April was very hot, and if you want to visit around 900 houses, from door to door, you have to make roughly 100x900m = 90km of walk in the burning sun, all of that after working hours. It took me two weeks, but I was persistent to visit every door in my target streets, with no exceptions.

One Friday evening in early May, I was standing at van Peltlaan bus stop, waiting for bus no 6. I was tired and I just wanted to go home. And then, all of a sudden, the bus driver ignored me and passed by. I was pissed, but since I had half an hour of spare time and nothing to do until the next bus no 6 will come over, I decided to keep on going with the leaflets. And so I sighed and crawled into the nearest street, which was, as I thought, way too expensive for me anyways.

Two weeks later, when I was just chilling in Argentina, I got an email from some gentleman who just decided to sell a house inherited from his mother. The house was located on that particular street. When I came back from Argentina, I went straight there, stinky and with my backpack on. It turned out that the house was perfect given my list of wishes, and that both the owner and me are travelers, so we found a common tongue quite quickly.

It was a funny meeting since the guy was definitely not a type of a seller: he was sorry for every little detail that was not in place, and he was fully convinced that his mother’s house was rubbish. Someone like an anti-makelaar, so to speak. I actually had to cheer him up by saying that the house is actually good and appealing, which he totally didn’t believe himself. But I saw the value in this house straight away. It was a typical granny’s house, full of old stuff and very old-fashioned, with a forgotten garden.

But it was also a pearl hidden under the dust. It was very close to the uni, but at the same time in a quiet, secluded street in the best neighborhood, it had a huge garden to the West, and it most definitely had a soul. There are these little, unspoken things that change all: the angle under which the light shines into the house, the overall style, the thoughtful construction.

So I immediately knew I wanted to buy it, and I said it clearly to the owner, many times. When you are negotiating the house, you can take one of the two main strategies. You might look for any shortages in the house and complain about them, in order to pull the price down. This is actually what domek.nl advised me to do, and this is what most people do.

But I personally think that people treat their houses as a part of them, and when you criticize the details, they feel like you were criticizing them. So, even if I have to risk that the owner will become aware that I badly want the house and they will stick to the original price, I still prefer to prize rather than criticize.

I think the best strategy is to show yourself as a poor scientist who really likes the house but doesn’t have enough money to buy it at the original price - this should give you the best chance of making friends with the owner and pulling the price down. And in my case, it was actually true so I didn’t have to pose anything.

After this weird meeting, he went for travel to China. Since the house did not get evaluated in the meantime, I didn't really know whether I could afford it or not. I had to get back to my daily activities, and then, in early June, I left for the OHBM conference in Hawaii.

After the conference, which was quite intense for me (to say the least), I flew over to the big island, in order to hike Mauna Kea in peace and quiet. And then, on 21st June in the morning, I received an email that the house was evaluated. The price was high for me, but not impossible to match, so I started mailing my parents in Poland, secretaries in my department for documents, my mortgage agency… The joke was that in just a few days, with 1st July, the rules for mortgage allowance were about to become much less favorable to me (and I knew that my mortgage capability will drop by 20k).

Therefore, I only had a few days to figure out the deal. It wasn't easy since I had 12 hours of time shift in Hawaii, and I was soon about to head back and spend most of the time on the flights. I bought a plane ticket for my mother and organized a stay in Nijmegen, and I was praying that everything will be fine. I had paid for the koop makelaar, but since the house owner decided to sell the house without his own makelaar, I felt it would be unfair to send a makelaar to negotiate the price for me. So I send my Mum over there instead. And I must say that hiking Mauna Kea while organizing a housing takeover in the Netherlands at the same time is the weirdest thing.

While I was struggling with the thin air in Hawaii, my mother broke all records of braveness. She not only took the first possible flight to the Netherlands, but also negotiated hard, and despite the deadline hanging upon us, she was able to push the price down by 10k. She also immediately made friends with the owner and his wife, with my housemates, with secretaries at my institute… When I arrived in Nijmegen from travel three days later, I only needed to go for dinner with the owners to seal the deal, everything else was already arranged.

In the meantime, a few strikingly lucky things happened. Firstly, the rate between the US dollar and Euro kept about the highest in history. My mum helped me financially a bit, and her savings happened to be in US dollars, which helped in this case. Also, on the way back from Hawaii I withdrew my resources from the Polish stock exchange, with 85% profit after 15 months, and this was just 2 days before the outburst of the Greek crisis which shook the stock again.

Also, the owners agreed to leave all the necessary furniture in the house, so I got plenty of things like beds, a washing machine et cetera. For free. After buying the house and paying for the central heating, I was left with like 1,000 Eur on my account and a house ready to live in, and I am pretty sure that if any of these things hadn't happened, I wouldn't have made it.

And so it is, my little house next to the university:

It was a long way, but it was worth it. Three rooms for rent, for now, five next year, and the rental prices are growing in the Netherlands, so the future is bright.

**On Luck**

The first thing that comes to your mind after such a story is that she had so much luck" or “that was blind fate.” One thing I want to say is that luck does not exist. “Luck”, to me, is three things.

Firstly, it is the effect of being sensitive to an opportunity, as Derren Brown showed in one of his TV programs:

www.youtube.com/results?search_query=derren+brown+secret+of+luck

Secondly, it is the ability to turn a lemon into lemonade. If I wasn’t tortured by my former landladies, I wouldn’t be where I am now, I am sure. Also, if I didn’t lose the first house, the one I had on the fork, I wouldn’t be determined enough to run for this next house and fight for it till my last drop of blood.

And thirdly, it is being brave and trusting yourself. I sometimes watch a very nice youtube channel by Evan Carmichael “Top 10 Rules For Success” — highly recommended. As you can easily notice, the most common advice that everyone — from Steve Jobs to Michael Jordan or Eminem - can give you is: “ignore the littlemen.”

In the meantime, many ‘caring’ people told me stories of other PhD students who were in a so-so similar life situation to me but hadn’t got a mortgage. People were also saying it is not worth binding yourself to one place with investments like this, or that this is all not worth doing because the interest that you get on a rental is lower compared to what you might get out from the stock exchange and so on and so on. The hardest thing was my dad who had always been a very cautious person and who does not have a sense of investment.

The news that I am about the take a mortgage worth more than the belongings of all my family almost made him cry. He thought this was a clear suicide and he did not want to hear about my plans at all. It took him over half a year to accept that I am going to do this anyway, regardless of what he thought. In the end, he even bought me a bio fireplace and sent it by post to the Netherlands.

So, my advice would be: just don’t listen to stories of people who failed at investments; there are always plenty of them, the same as people who wanted to do science but failed et cetera. If you don’t try, you won’t make it — that’s for sure. If you don’t accept any risk in life, you might as well just crawl into some dark hole and die right now because you are not alive anyway. Of course, you will be winning, and then failing, and then winning again, it is not possible to always win.

When I applied for a mortgage at the end of June, the interest rates were very low, around 2.10%. But, my application was accepted the next day after the application and on that very day, the interest rates all of a sudden jumped to 2.50%. Since the rules were about to change in just a few days, I was pushed to accept this interest rate — which made me lose 8,000 EUR in one day. I spent a few minutes crying in the toilet and then went to the meeting with my supervisor as planned, and I didn’t allow this little incident to spoil my day. One day you lose 8 grand, another day you renovate the house and gain 50 grand on that, another day you lose again… That’s how it is.

One more piece of advice I could give is sort of trivial: go against the crowd. I came up with these leaflets and I was the only one; no wonder it worked for me. Actually, the house that I bought was standing there empty for a year and a half, and the owner might not even consider selling it if I didn’t create that thought in his mind by putting my little leaflet in his mailbox. Now when I did that, it might

be that more people come up with the same idea, so you have to find your own way. But the good news is that finding ways of outsmarting the Dutch is plenty of fun.

**One Last Thing**

I also think that the stereotype saying that a scientist has to be poor is a self-fulfilling prophecy. I met lots of colleagues in the bars, complaining about ending contracts, unknown future, and lack of income. My question would be: if you don't have money, why are you sitting here and complaining, instead of working or browsing for ways of making money?

Every scientist can be wealthy14, it is just that the stereotype and public marasmus make people not even try and actually confirm the stereotype instead. There is no upper limit on how much you can gain from investments, and there is no upper limit on how wealthy your kids can be. And you can do science full time, no problem.

Funny enough, one of the people who made a fortune in real estate was Arnold Schwarzenegger who came to California from Austria as a body-builder in 70ths with an empty pocket, and invested his first money in properties in California. He was buying houses, restoring them, and selling with profit. When he was becoming a movie star, he was already rich. He was doing bodybuilding, working physically, investing, studying business, and learning to act at the same time. As he writes in his autobiography "Total Recall" (2012):

> *'I once gave a talk in a University of California classroom, and afterward a student raised his hand and complained,*
>
> *"Governor, since the budget crisis hit us, my tuition has gone up twice. Now it's too high. I needmore financial aid."*
>
> *"I understand, it's difficult," I said.*
>
> *"But what do you mean, too high?"*
>
> *"I mean now I have to work part-time."*
>
> *"What's wrong with that?"*
>
> *"I have to study!"*
>
> *So I said, "Let's figure this out. How many hours do you go to class?"*
>
> *"I've got two hours one day and three hours another day."*
>
> *"And how much studying do you have to do?"*
>
> *"Well, each day, three hours."*
>
> *"Okay. So far I see six hours one day and seven hours the other day, counting your commute. What do you do with the rest of the time?"*
>
> *"What do you mean?"*
>
> *"Well, the day is twenty-four hours. Have you ever thought about working more? Maybe even*

*taking more classes? Rather than wasting your life away?"*

*The class was shocked to hear me say this.*

*"I'm not wasting my life away!" - said the student.*

*"Yes, you are. You're talking about six hours a day. The day is twenty-four hours, so you have eighteen hours left. Maybe you need six hours for sleeping. So if your part-time job takes four hours, you still have time for dating and dancing and drinking and going out. Why are you complaining?"*

*I explained how as a student I'd trained five hours a day, gone to acting classes four hours a day, worked in construction several hours a day, and gone to college and done my homework. And I was not the only one.'*

And so, this is it. Don't waste your life away.