

# Graduation: what next?

ARTICLE BRIANNA RANDALL | PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED

It's true: The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, but life's path is, for most of us, rarely so efficient. Rather, the trajectory we take more often than not resembles a meandering trail, a crisscross pattern or a series of concentric circles. At no time, perhaps, is this truer than following graduation from college or high school, as these four profiles illustrate.



# TANIA HEATER

## WHAT'S YOUR DEGREE?

Business management with a concentration in human resources from Louisiana State University.

## WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD DO WITH IT?

I thought I might use my degree to work while traveling, but all I really knew after graduation was that I wanted to go to New Zealand. So I did. I was born and raised overseas, and my parents instilled the value of travel in me early on.

## WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

I split my time between working for the Silk Road's catering department and sailing aboard the *Wizard's Eye*, a 40-foot sailboat captained by my boyfriend, Tyler Bradt. Tyler is sailing around the world on a five-year circumnavigation sponsored by NRS and Kavu, among others. The Silk Road is awesome and lets me take off for months at a time while we're at sea. I basically work to make plane fare to meet up with him, spend my money, and then start the whole cycle over again.

When I'm on the *Wizard's Eye*, it's not a free ride. Sailing is a lot of hard work. But I'm totally hooked. So far, my longest stretch on the boat was just over three months, from French Polynesia to Fiji, and my longest passage is eleven days—the one I just finished, from Sumatra to Sri Lanka.

I returned to Missoula in March to make more money. Tyler returns for a visit soon, too—as a world-class kayaker, he tries to spend a couple of months each spring paddling his home waters here in western Montana. For the next leg of his journey, he'll take *Wizard's Eye* from the Seychelles to South Africa. I'm hoping to join the crew in Madagascar.

I love sailing, and it'll definitely be a part of my life from here on out. And I know that I'll always jump on any opportunity to travel, since there's still so much to see!

## WORDS OF WISDOM:

People ask me how I can take off for such cool places: it's simple. Work til you can buy a ticket, and then go!

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# TONI MATLOCK

## WHAT'S YOUR DEGREE?

Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Art Institute of Chicago, a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Washington, and a master's in media arts from the University of Montana.

## WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD DO WITH IT?

I always knew I would pursue a life in the arts. However, my dad is a successful businessman, and he convinced me early on that I should also consider more lucrative projects so that I could pursue my passion. At his advice, I started buying rental properties in my 20s to provide guaranteed income. It's given me the independence to live comfortably as an artist, and also allowed me the chance to be as creative as I'd like with my artwork, rather than pumping out "production" pieces.

## WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

Well, I'm definitely still using my degrees to make art, and I own rental properties here in Missoula, too. But I've also added more to my plate: in the past year, I've launched a start-up business and become a mother. It all keeps me plenty busy.

My new business, Geek Puff, had its soft launch online last summer, just a couple of months before my son, Otto, was born. Geek Puff recognizes women for their brains more than their looks. Our website and downloadable issues are a space for women to find and flaunt their strengths in the STEAM (science, tech, engineering, art and math) fields. It's kind of like *Martha Stewart Living* meets Jane Goodall and Sally Ride—content by and for women that is aimed at reframing the perception of "smart" as pretty, chic and sexy.

## WORDS OF WISDOM:

Because I have experience as an artist and as a freelance entrepreneur, I'm used to finding my way. I know it can be intimidating to start something new, but it's very satisfying to get something out of nothing, so don't be afraid to try.

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# BOBBY GRILLO

## WHAT'S YOUR DEGREE?

Bachelor's in government and international relations from the University of Notre Dame and a master's in environmental studies from the University of Montana.

## WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD DO WITH IT?

I thought I was going to be a human rights lawyer and save the world. After graduation, I took the LSAT in preparation for law school. But before applying, I moved to Portland to take a break, and started an internship with a humanitarian aid organization, Mercy Corps International. After that, I discovered AmeriCorps, and joined their Northwest Service Academy doing watershed restoration work, followed by a gig as a naturalist with one of Portland's magnet schools. I quickly realized that there's plenty of work to do right in our own communities.

## WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

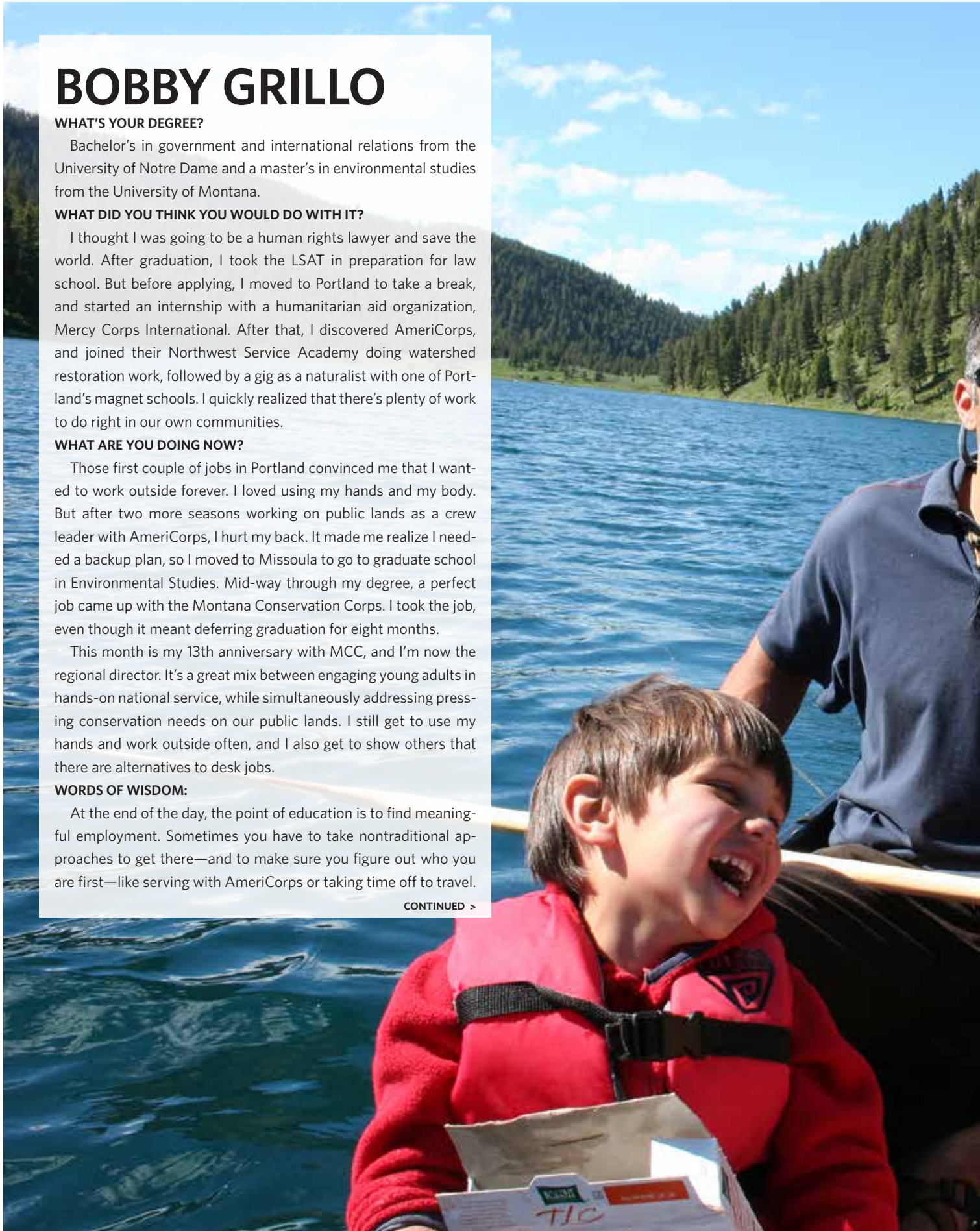
Those first couple of jobs in Portland convinced me that I wanted to work outside forever. I loved using my hands and my body. But after two more seasons working on public lands as a crew leader with AmeriCorps, I hurt my back. It made me realize I needed a backup plan, so I moved to Missoula to go to graduate school in Environmental Studies. Mid-way through my degree, a perfect job came up with the Montana Conservation Corps. I took the job, even though it meant deferring graduation for eight months.

This month is my 13th anniversary with MCC, and I'm now the regional director. It's a great mix between engaging young adults in hands-on national service, while simultaneously addressing pressing conservation needs on our public lands. I still get to use my hands and work outside often, and I also get to show others that there are alternatives to desk jobs.

## WORDS OF WISDOM:

At the end of the day, the point of education is to find meaningful employment. Sometimes you have to take nontraditional approaches to get there—and to make sure you figure out who you are first—like serving with AmeriCorps or taking time off to travel.

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# JEREMY SMITH

## WHAT'S YOUR DEGREE?

Bachelor's degree in history and literature from Harvard University and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Montana.

## WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD DO WITH IT?

I wanted to draw a comic strip.

During college, I drew a daily comic for the student newspaper. Even though I couldn't draw very well, I got better. It was a fun way to tell stories and make other people laugh. I decided to apply for a fellowship that would allow me to spend the year after graduation traveling to Europe to pursue an independent project to study and create satiric art—which basically means reading lots of cartoons and developing my own comic strip. It was a blast.

## WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

Turns out that it's hard to make a living with comic strips. When I got back, I thought I could do some freelance writing while I figured out what my "real" writing would be. I also moved to Missoula, and started pursuing fiction while earning my graduate degree from UM. Meanwhile, I continued to pursue this sideline of freelance journalism, and over the years my articles have appeared in dozens of publications, including *The Atlantic*, *Discover* and the *New York Times*.

I may have failed to get a comic strip published and failed to get a novel published, but both processes led me to a different type of storytelling that is just as exciting and creative.

My experience with nonfiction journalism evolved into my two published books: *Growing a Garden City* (called *The Urban Garden* in paperback), published in 2010, and *Epic Measures*, the book I've spent the last three years researching and writing, which just hit the bookstores April 7.

## WORDS OF WISDOM:

Sometimes, it's all about luck. For me, I have to find great characters who are taking action in newsworthy ways. So, keep your ears open for great stories, and don't be afraid to see where those stories lead you.

**UPCOMING EVENT**  
Hear Jeremy Speak!  
Partnership Health Center  
June 2 at 5:30 p.m.  
401 Railroad St., Missoula

