

ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY VOCATIONS

ALUMNI ESSAYS

With our efforts to keep CRMS students passionate about their lives and education, we reached out to alumni, asking them to tell us about what ordinary and extraordinary vocations are keeping them feeling fulfilled, being creative, and contributing to the local and global communities.

GEOLOGY ROCKS

by Burch Fisher '99

As I was belting out a high-pitched, lisp-infused “Gary Indiana” in the Music Man my freshman spring at CRMS, I was sure that my future success would undoubtedly exist in a Hollywood action role alongside the likes of Schwarzenegger, Stallone, and, worst-case scenario, Van Damme. Needless to say, a supporting role playing a child in the CRMS spring musical and my 160 lb. physique, big teeth, and veritable back hair did not parlay into a successful action movie career! However, despite these genetic setbacks (this is an abbreviated list), I have come to find the most exciting career I could have ever imagined. I am talking about GEOLOGY! That’s right, I am an earth scientist. Specifically, I travel to some of the most remote places on earth in hopes of deciphering linkages between climate and tectonics to see how these two phenomena interact to produce the orogenic landscapes we see across the Earth’s surface. My current work takes me to the Himalayas for a month each year (occasionally alongside CRMS friends like Kayo Ogilby) and is focused on how the Indian monsoon and the convergence of the Indian and Eurasian plates interact to produce the most magnificent topography on the planet. My job is unique in that a good week of work involves hiking to the Tibetan Plateau with 13 sherpas and collecting 1,000 pounds of rock and sand. If you ask me, that beats pretty much any other job I can think of -- including pretending to be a bad ass in Hollywood. I have been lucky to find something that truly motivates me intellectually, physically, and culturally as well. Being able to spend time in different parts of the world with different cultures has been just one of the many perks of the job and, certainly, an invaluable one in a world that is becoming smaller and smaller. So while I failed to become the action star I was destined to be, it looks as if I have found a job that even *The Rock* would be jealous of!



PLANES, MINIVANS, & AUTOMOBILES

by Beth Amsel '89

Though music had always been a constant in my life, both as a language and as a great source of comfort, I started college with the vague idea that I would go to law school and work in international politics. When I picked up a guitar at 22, however, those indistinct plans and my academic career were succinctly over. Singing, playing guitar, and writing obliterated everything else in my day-to-day life. Within 24 hours of starting to play, I had bloody fingertips from writing my first song. Within a week, I played my first open mic. Within a month, I had my first solo gig (with AO Forbes, to whom I will always owe an enormous debt of gratitude). I never questioned my career choice or its trajectory, never doubted that getting on stage was something I could or would do, never even thought of it as a choice. In the way youth is offhandedly brazen and a little arrogant, I inadvertently stepped into a wholly unexpected and unplanned life.



For seventeen years I’ve moved from gig to gig, writing compulsively and effortlessly some years and passing great chunks of time without writing anything at all. I’ve played large theaters and tiny living rooms, sometimes in the same week. I’ve played with musicians whose talent and generosity turned me back into a tongue-tied, blushing teenager. I’ve had years where I put 45,000 miles on my minivan and slept in more motel rooms, on more blow-up mattresses, and at more Flying J truck stops than I could even begin to remember, let alone count. In 2002, I spent more time in an Econoline van stuffed with people, instruments, PA equipment, and dirty laundry than I did in my own apartment. For the first two years I dated my husband, we spent only about six months together and were pleasantly surprised to discover, when I finally took a break and returned home, that we still actually liked each other. I’ve driven into unknown towns