



How To Live?

Contemporary
snapshots

by Nell Porter Brown

Life happens. Decisions are made. Where do the two converge? How do you reconcile your “destiny” with more practical needs? “Many people are interested in finding out what their calling is, and most of the things they are drawn to involve other people,” says Cheryl A. Giles, M.Div. ’79, professor of the practice in pastoral care and counseling. “‘Vocation,’ ‘calling,’ I don’t think of these as religious terms

with a capital ‘R,’ but instead as spiritual terms: a human calling exists at the very basic, fundamental part of us. And what I’m seeing when I talk with people these days is a sense of their seeking peace within themselves and peace within the world.” In the following six snapshot profiles, alumni with different histories share their ideas, lifestyle choices—and the obstacles they have encountered—in making thoughtful decisions about how to live healthily with others in an increasingly complicated world.

MURAD KALAM ’95, J.D. ’02.
Writer, lawyer, Cambridge.

At Harvard, Murad Kalam (formerly known as Godfrey Williams) focused on creative writing. One teacher was Jamaica Kincaid, who pushed him to think more seriously about his work, and about himself. “‘You’re going to be a writer and publish novels,’” he recalls her saying. “‘You’ve got this whole world inside of you.’” It struck Kalam as true; he ran home and wrote the words down. But in those days, “I was part of this self-marginalized group of black poets,” he says, laughing at the pretension.

“I was this arrogant, cynical, artist-jerk who smoked cigarettes.” Kincaid gently laid low his artsy persona, asking him why he wanted to hang out with artists—“They all hate each other.” More important, he says, she told him that “there is no such thing as black writing or white writing, there’s just good and bad. People who write and read fiction care more about the story. And I really needed to hear that.”

He soon began writing what would turn into his senior thesis. That body of work culminated in *Night Journey*, the story of a young boxer in South Phoenix, to be published by Simon & Schuster next year.

His creative “edge,” Kalam, 29, reports, is partly the result of growing up in a multiracial family (his father is a Jamaican immigrant and his mother is white), moving around the country, and experiencing the see-saw nature of his family’s finances. Kalam has envisioned a novel featuring a protagonist not unlike his father, who, as a teenager, was whisked away from his native island by Baptist missionaries after he poked his eye out on a breadfruit tree. Landing in a Texas hospital in the heat of the civil-rights movement, Winston Williams stayed in the United States and became a doctor. “A Dickensian character,” Kalam notes wryly. “He was a very ambitious boy and an overeducated, 1960s liberal.” Also a good doctor, he was not a great businessman.

Financial setbacks and changes in the medical business caused the family to relocate a lot before settling in the Phoenix suburbs, where Kalam went to high school. At different points, he witnessed some “ugly, blatant racism. People would come in and see my mother as the receptionist in my father’s office and wait for an appointment, but when my father came out, they refused

Harvard Magazine presents “Up Next,” an occasional new section focusing on the lives, interests, and choices of younger alumni. “Up Next” is scheduled to appear again in the March-April 2003 issue. In the meantime, the editors welcome your comments at yourturn@harvard.edu.



Murad Kalam

DAVID CARMACK

to see a black doctor," he explains. "It made me so angry. But all of my experiences growing up really made me as a writer."

Writing became his life, yet the life of a writer was not very appealing. For one thing, he did not want to struggle for money. "I have a fear of failing, an insecurity about money," he says. "I saw my father's education protect him, in part, from racism." Hence, the decision to attend an Ivy League college and go on to law school—"which taught me all about how the world works," he says. "I really do want to practice law, work in the world, have colleagues. And if you're a writer, you need a profession."

He graduated in June, having secured a job at a Washington, D.C., law firm (as did his wife and law-school classmate, Rashann Duvall), and was ready to move when news arrived that he had been granted a Fulbright scholarship to write his second novel in Egypt, starting in November. (The job has been deferred to 2004.) Although his grant application was submitted months before September 11, Kalam's proposed novel could not be more pertinent. "It's about an Egyptian lawyer, a really decent guy, a modern Arab, and it follows his life before coming to America," says Kalam. "I'm trying to understand these major questions: Can you have a just society? Can two societies, east and west, coexist? And it's about how modern Arabs look at America."

These are personal questions. Kalam has

embraced orthodox Islam—not the Nation of Islam, he points out. (His wife is Christian; interfaith marriages are accepted in Islam.) As a junior, during an enforced vacation in Phoenix when his father lacked that semester's tuition payment, he picked up a copy of the Koran. "I found it was the most beautiful thing I had ever read," he says. "I thought, 'This could not have been written. It had to be real—it had to come from some place.'" That startling experience of the written word and subsequent conversations with Muslim friends convinced him to convert. His chosen name, Murad Kalam, means "desire of the pen."

"It opened my mind intellectually," he says of his chosen religion. "Islam has made me more tolerant of people and much more constructive, more responsible. So when I write about people now, I just try to understand them, whoever they are."

LAUREN GWIN '93. Environmentalist, graduate student, Berkeley, California.

"When I graduated from college I thought, 'I could go to New York and work in publishing—no problem.' I knew what that life looked like," Lauren Gwin, 31, says. "I decided to go to Montana and fish."

Thus began her tour of the West. She worked as a cook at a hunting and fishing lodge in Yaak ("It's way the heck up there"); quit to live in Venice with a professor's family; then moved to Bozeman to design custom vacations. There, she happened upon a formative job at the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. "We were the watchdog for the 18 million-acre Greater Yellowstone ecosystem," she wrote in her fifth anniversary class report, "with grizzlies, wolves, elk, deer, bighorn sheep, mines, cows, perfect but threatened rivers, and plenty of issues." Already turned on to the thrills of outdoor life, Gwin now soaked up the science of ecosystems, and observed firsthand the prickly political issues at play in land development. Jobs and locales changed (rapidly) after that: her

friends played the "Where's Lauren?" game. Themes emerged: she wanted to live her life in a beautiful place, be outdoors, and work on environmental issues. The lifestyle came first, she declares, but "I wanted to find something I cared about and work on it. I could not just live in a place and leech off it."

From Montana, she moved to Wyoming, then to Taos where she was hired to organize a music festival to benefit solar energy education. As a result, she became the "go-to grant writer/development person/fund raiser" for groups in and around the town. "At one point in 1996 or 1997 I had four jobs and other projects and was working about a hundred hours a week," she says. "I lived in this beautiful part of the world, which is the main reason I went out there, yet I was insanely busy."

Disillusionment struck, but not with the place. "I got tired of facilitating everyone else's projects. It was not *my* work," she explains. "I knew I could do more with my brain and that it was time to move." Most metropolitan areas were simply too far from the woods and mountains. But her brother, a musician, was living in Oakland and Gwin thought she could at least go sleep on his couch for a month and see if the Bay Area suited her.

She vowed not to take a development job, then ended up doing just that for the "relatively radical" Project Underground in Berkeley. "We worked in indigenous communities, specifically those threatened by mining and oil industries worldwide," Gwin explains. "The work was based on



COURTESY LAUREN GWIN

Lauren Gwin

the idea that there is a fundamental human right to a clean environment." When she returned to Montana, temporarily, to organize a national conference on the impact of sprawl for her old employer, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, she came into contact with the "big names and big brains" involved with land management and public policy issues, a specialty she liked.

"I definitely needed more qualifications; almost everybody around me had a master's degree," she says. Maybe 15 years ago, she says, someone with a liberal-arts degree could move up in environmental organizations, but today, "to get involved on a high level, you have to have some serious skills because they do serious stuff." She needed the tools for research and analysis, to sort out her own ideas, and to move beyond grass-roots organizing. Graduate school seemed the best choice.

This fall, Gwin begins her second of five years in a doctoral program at the department of environmental science, policy, and management at the University of California-Berkeley. In addition to classes, she has attended a conference in Spain on forests and climate change, and is researching the history of land acquisition in this country for a professor. Her dissertation will focus on the role of public policy in the promotion of sustainable agriculture. "Everything just fell into place at Berkeley: the right professors, the best fellowship. And I got to stay home," she says, happily surprised at her disinclination to move. "I ride my bike to school every day—I hardly drive my car—I go to the farmer's market every week." She hikes around nearby Mount Tamalpais and along the coastal routes to the north. "I know the flowers by the season now; one of my favorites is *Eschscholzia californica*, the California poppy, even though it's common," she says. "It's so nice to live in a place long enough to know what you might see in bloom while hiking in the woods."

SAM FARTHING '91. **Database marketer, Raleigh,** **North Carolina.**

Two things make Sam Farthing just as happy as any success he's ever had at work: his family, and a good, old-fashioned pig pickin'. This fascination with pork is something Northerners may just not un-

derstand, he says, laughing. "What the good barbecue restaurants do is chop up a little of Mr. Brown, the crusty outside of the pig, and a little Miss White, the tender white loin meat, and you get a nice flavorful sandwich, the best of both worlds. It resonates," says the Virginia native. "When you get a good pig, it's like wine. It stays with you."

Farthing is happy to admit that, save for his quirky barbecue obsession, he's an ordinary guy. He enjoys a good job at IBM, even though "I won't change the world with it." Farthing sees classmates' grand aspirations realized and is glad for them, especially for his roommates, who are still good friends. But that is not *his* life. "I've just never been super-ambitious," he states. "I'm not on the fast track. I'm on the slow track, and I'm comfortable with that."

"I like to spend time with my family; to see my wife and four-year-old daughter snuggling in bed together in the morning," he continues. "That makes me happy. My daughter and I—we just have a lot of fun together." He met his Samoan wife, Ioana Toalepaalii, when he taught science to

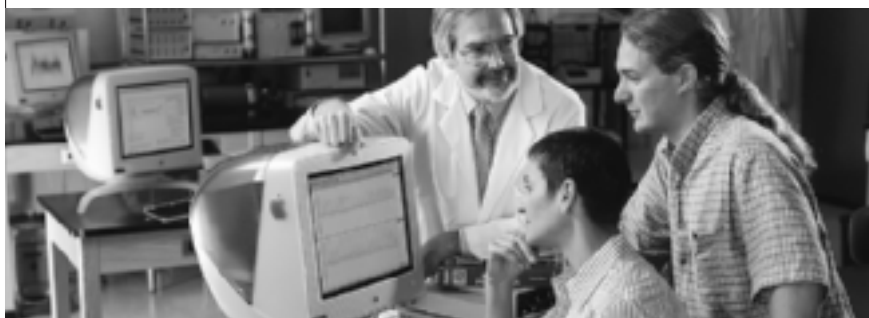
teenagers in Samoa while in the Peace Corps; she was a fellow instructor.

Upon returning to the United States, he earned an M.B.A. from Emory University and settled back in the South. (His daughter's name is Georgia.) An interest in statistics and information led him to his job as a database marketer. Part science, part art, the work entails keeping track of customers' buying behavior and forecasting who will need what product and when. "It requires me to be technical, but there is also a craft to it," he says. "I have to be a little creative."

Among the data sets logged into Farthing's computer are a couple of pie charts that might help his IBM colleagues—and others—decide just where and when to purchase lunch. Charts delineate an array of side dishes—hush puppies, mustard slaw, Brunswick stew, dumplings—served at some of the 553 North Carolina barbecue establishments he has located thus far. Spread sheets list his personal critiques cross-referenced with published reviews and family recipes. Analysis reveals that Farthing has visited 73 of the restaurants

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159 times. North Carolina barbecue, he reports, requires that the pig be cooked slowly for about 10 hours in a steel drum (cut in half lengthwise) over hickory-wood charcoals with only some thin pepper- or vinegar-based sauce, “no gloppy sweet stuff like you find in the Midwest.”

The food evokes very early memories. As a child, every Farthing family celebration in Roanoke featured a pig cooked by the same man, who pulled up in a truck, early in the morning, with the big, black, steel-drum cooker trailing behind it. “He would roast that pig all day. I was maybe five when I started going out and sitting with the man—he had all these great stories—and I just liked it,” Farthing recalls. “I have a respect for the tradition and craft of it. All these joints are family-owned, and every one has their own family recipes and side dishes. There are no chains, or assembly-line prepared or processed food. A lot of the owners do it because they just like to make barbecue, not necessarily because it is a business.” Barbecue also crosses all kinds of social boundaries in the South, he says. “You go to any barbecue joint and everybody is there. It’s always been an intergenerational, interracial, interclass type of thing.”

That has been his life for the last six years. It might have happily continued, had Farthing, 33, not received a promotion in July that will move him and his family to Westchester, New York—a very un-Southern locale. “God is playing with my head again,” he says. “But it is a good thing. I

tend to go on cruise-control in life and this will be a big change and a good opportunity for me and my family.” A comfort-seeker, Farthing has been grateful for the occasional pothole. Harvard was not the smoothest ride. He played freshman football and began a pre-med course of study, but soon realized that doing both was too hard. Impressed by a course he took with Joseph S. Nye, now dean of the Kennedy School, he chose to concentrate in government. “I always

think that if you just live life, good things will appear and you have to be ready to accept them when they happen,” he says of Harvard, of meeting his wife, and of moving to the Manhattan suburbs. The only question is: Where’s the pig?

CHINA FORBES '92 AND THOMAS M. LAUDERDALE '92 Musicians, Portland, Oregon.

Pink Martini’s 1997 debut CD, *Sympathique*, is a quirky amalgam of sounds: rhumba beats thump alongside Edith Piaf-styled tunes, with a bucketful of jazz on the side. But just when listeners think they’ve “got it,” the music turns and robust, orchestral elements sweep in. “It’s global music, but not ‘world music,’” says Thomas Lauderdale, 32, the classically trained pianist who founded the 11-piece band in 1994 and is its musical director. “It is generally urban, kind of old-fashioned, pop-y, and it draws a lot upon the atmosphere of Hollywood in the late 1940s.”

However described, the band has immense appeal: the group has toured worldwide and performed with various symphonies around the country for the past five years. Two new CDs are in the works, says the quick-talking Lauderdale, one based on the Japanese concept of *ukiyo*, or “the floating world,” which “refers to an artistic and cultural renaissance

in Japan brought about by urban culture’s newfound wealth.” The other, shepherded by lead singer China Forbes (Lauderdale’s Adams Housemate) is more “groovy urban.” Both are due out next spring.

Lauderdale’s flamboyant, eclectic nature explains much of the band’s musical mystique—and his frustration with how time flies. A few current projects: teaching music with Forbes—pro bono—at a Portland high school that lost its music funding; writing a nonfiction book about a woman who disguised herself as a man for 45 years; developing an artistic scholarship fund; and creating a snow globe of the Portland skyline (“Every city should have one of its own”). Half Asian, Lauderdale grew up as one of four adopted children—his siblings are black and Iranian—on an Indiana plant nursery. The family moved to Oregon (deemed “greener and more liberal”) after his father, a Church of the Brethren minister, came out of the closet. (Lauderdale is also gay.) This atypical background, he agrees, may also account for his emphasis on “inclusion” and artistic and personal freedom—trans-Atlantic style. “Pink Martini and everything it does is very much wrapped up in the way I want to live—to be an ambassador and have a dialogue with people around the world,” he says. “And to be inclusive—writing songs that are as appealing to little kids and grandmothers as to Hollywood moguls and people growing up on a farm in Iowa.” The “embassy” is a central downtown building he bought to house the band’s headquarters and, he hopes, to host language classes, parties, film festivals, art openings, and other artistic and political activities.

Upon returning to Portland after graduation, he played solos with the Oregon



Thomas Lauderdale and China Forbes

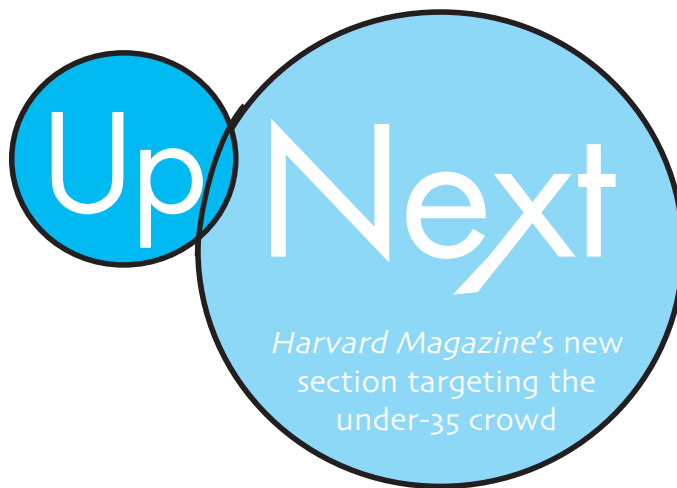
and Seattle symphonies and involved himself in various causes, including the fight against Oregon's anti-gay rights initiative, Measure 13. Finding the bands at political events bland, he threw together a new group: Pink Martini, which often featured Lauderdale in drag. The band was a huge success with its campy, lounge-style renditions of Big Band tunes, and themes from 1960s television shows like *I Dream of Jeannie*. Very soon, however, the music, though still fun and danceable, became more serious. "Camp," Lauderdale explains, referencing Susan Sontag, "can only go so far because there is a negative bitterness to camp that, hopefully, we don't have. In a very pure way, this music pushes forward the idea of hope despite all the sadness in the world."

Leading the band also brought major changes in personal responsibilities. "I couldn't be as flitty. I had to be more seriously engaged, diplomatic, and become more like a benevolent dictator. Music, like everything else that is artistic, is a very sensitive area for each of us, very personal," he says of the band members, who range from garage-band to symphony-level players. "I have to keep things on track, keeping the music pure as we become bigger, and not be distracted by the applause." Despite his disparate projects, Lauderdale's life mission is clear: "Ultimately, I'm just trying to be good," he says. "I have probably the same goals other people have for their lives—to do good things and to find a reason to like oneself at the end of the day."

For Forbes, 32, joining Pink Martini made "perfect sense." She had been performing folk tunes on the New York City club circuit (she recorded a solo album, *Love Handle*, and the theme song for UPN's sitcom *Clueless*) when Lauderdale called. "I never saw myself as Peggy Lee or Julie London—doing torch songs and jazzy, sultry standards in front of 17,000 people with a 11-piece band behind me," she says. "But it turns out that it combines my experience in acting, musical theater, and singing." She took voice lessons, experimented with a sassier persona, and unleashed a voluptuous range of sounds.

Life has run interestingly since then. "On the road, we're constantly going and it's exhausting. Sometimes the show doesn't end until 2 A.M. and we have to leave at 5

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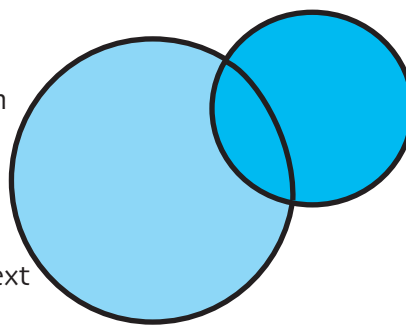
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A.M. to get on another plane," she explains. "The band wants to go out and meet people and dance. But one Brazilian rum drink or cigarette and I wake up with a sore throat, guaranteed. I am the one who wants to go to bed right after the show." In between shows and hours at the recording studio, Forbes says, "there is no routine. It's very random. I don't think a lot of people would like that, but I've gotten used to it." She recently began recording her own songs at home ("That muse doesn't come to me all the time") and takes care of her two dogs.

Forbes is newly married, to an optometrist (they met when she bought sunglasses at his store), and wonders when to have children. "Do I do it at a convenient time for the band or do I just do it when I'm ready?" she asks. "Our dream is for him to take care of the kids with me while I'm on the road. But we're not sure how that would work yet....I'll figure that out when it happens. The way I function is to act without thinking—I'm the opposite of Hamlet. I'm good at problem-solving when problems do arise. It's worked well for me so far."

Nina Bowman often worked 10-hour days, or longer. Jason, her baby, was in daycare. She and her husband, David, an attorney, each left work a bit early one day a week to pick Jason up. Otherwise a nanny provided the balance of care, and often worked until 8 P.M., when the couple came home. "It was not ideal," Bowman acknowledges. "During the week, I saw my son for maybe 30 minutes in the morning and a little bit at night."

Life went on until her husband's job demanded more traveling and Bowman often found herself racing alone between the demands of new motherhood and her career. One day, she recalls, an important meeting was scheduled at NerveWire, the technology consulting firm where she worked. "I was at the meeting and my cell phone went off and it's my son's daycare calling to say he is sick. My husband was out of town and I literally had to get up and walk out of the meeting after this gentleman had come all the way from Japan to see me," she says. "But there is no decision at that point—there is no choice. You have to go and tend to your child. It was a

major turning point. I thought, 'I don't know if I can do this anymore.'"

Any working parent—mother or father—can identify with this tale of necessarily divided loyalties. A successful career had always been a priority for Bowman. Before business school, she worked for Chase Manhattan Bank; then, after graduation, she took a job with the management services firm Accenture. She traveled almost every week for nearly four years, and was home only on the weekends; that was hard on her relationship, and she switched to a different job within company operations (no traveling) when Jason was born

in 1997. But during her six-month maternity leave, "I really went crazy," she says. "I missed work."

The truncated business meeting at NerveWire led the Bowmans to discuss cutting back on their work hours. In-

stead, the world of start-ups began to implode and Bowman found herself at home, a full-time mother. This time it was different. "I looked around a little bit for a job, then I realized, 'This is ridiculous, I need to be home and spend time with my son,'" she says. "I looked at all the things I had missed as I'd been plugging away up the corporate ladder." At first, used to a certain level of busyness, she ran around doing house projects. "I never let myself have any down time. But once I got over that and took time with my family, I knew that this was the right thing for me to do."

In April, her second son, Brian, was born. "It means that I am committed to being home awhile longer," she notes. There is internal struggle when she thinks about the expense of business school, the good friends and contacts made there, and the credo that "you should be constantly out there using your degree." She volunteers as a trustee at her alma mater, Brooks School, and is in touch with professional friends, many of whom, she's finding, are also at home with young children or are working part-time. "Maybe it's the market," she says. "But I have a tremendous network of women who are doing exactly what I'm doing. I've come to realize that I will go through spurts of working and spurts of being home."

Just why she is the one who ultimately cut back in her work hours is, she says, an ongoing marital discussion. "We're in that 'We're not sure what to do' mode," she says with a laugh. "He's not sure he would want to pare down his hours. It's still on the table. Egos do come into play; there's a lot that comes into play and we're no different from anyone else in dealing with these questions and family traditions."

For now, the 35-year-old Bowman finds herself surprisingly centered in her chosen lifestyle, knowing she will return to work some day. "Being home has given me a lot of time to be introspective and think about what is most important to me. The September 11 events have helped with that re-prioritizing. I'm thinking differently than I was before. It's not so critical to be at the top of the corporate ladder; it's just as important to know I'm developing strong children, using my brain, and doing something useful." ♥



Nina Bowman with sons Jason and Brian

DAVID GARMACK

NINA A. BOWMAN, M.B.A. '94.
Mother, consultant,
Milton, Massachusetts.

In the late 1990s, while in charge of corporate strategy for a start-up company,