

BY JULIE JACOBS

# *Pursuits*

*Chasing  
originality,  
powering  
growth*

*“You know, there’s only so  
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—ERIN O'MALLEY



Erin O'Malley

ADAM TAYLOR

# Look around and take note:

An ever-growing group of Americans is proving vital to our society. Its members are educated, employed in a variety of industries, and engaged in a lifestyle that values individuality, originality, and participation. They're steadfast in their goals, resolute in their attitudes and ideals, and just plain happy with the paths they've decided to follow—so much so that they are reshaping commerce and communities.



Alexandre Gertsman

They are the “Creative Class,” a concept coined by Richard Florida, director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management. *The Rise of the Creative Class—Revisited: 10th Anniversary Edition* (Basic Books), a new edition of his 2002 best seller, was released in 2012. Florida’s also a New York University professor, senior editor at *The Atlantic*, and founder of the Creative Class Group, which “empow-

ers communities, organizations, and people to harness their innate creativity to achieve greater prosperity and well-being.”

“Creative workers will invent new technology, develop increased expertise, and stimulate scientific thinking. They will drive our future prosperity,” Florida says.

Members of the Creative Class are determined to achieve their dreams and enjoy the fruits of their labors,

Without creativity, “our world and our society ... cannot function.”

—ALEXANDRE GERTSMAN

whatever their occupations, Florida believes. They offer a special knowledge that adds creative value to whatever they contribute to the world, whether they are writing books, producing television shows, opening galleries, or developing new products or groundbreaking business strategies. And through it all, they fulfill their innate need for self-expression.

Consider Erin O'Malley. The TV producer's parents encouraged her to explore the arts—a discipline in which she now hones her creativity with a business bent. O'Malley, a Northwestern Mutual client, remembers being moved by theater, poetry, and television as a child. She attended an arts high school where she acted a lot, but little by little, she says, she found she preferred working behind the scenes—the directing, the organizing, the “putting it all together.”

O'Malley studied film in college, then settled in Los Angeles to pursue her calling: TV production. Married with two daughters, she has built a flourishing career, collaborating with such comic luminaries as Larry David and Sarah Silverman. She now serves as co-executive producer of the Fox hit sitcom *New Girl*.

“[My shows] matter so much to me,” says O'Malley. “My thing is getting into [people's] brains. [People] have a story to tell, and then I just try to do the best I can to make their story possible, and that's where my creativity comes in. You know, there's only so much money we have, there's only so much time we have, and I have to creatively figure out how to achieve their ultimate goal.”

Just as O'Malley's family encouraged her in the arts, Nickolas Butler's friends and family cheered him on to tell

## Cities with a Creative Vibe

To identify America's “most creative” cities, *Forbes* ranked the top 10 among the 50 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Metropolitan Divisions in the country, based on activity per capita on project-funding platforms Kickstarter and Indiegogo and music sites Bandcamp and ReverbNation. *Forbes* reported that the goal was to “capture organic creativity, since many artistic and musical types have ‘day jobs’ outside of creative pursuits.” The results:

- 1 San Francisco
- 2 Boston
- 3 Nashville, Tennessee
- 4 Austin, Texas
- 5 New York City
- 6 Portland, Oregon
- 7 Los Angeles
- 8 Seattle
- 9 Detroit
- 10 Oakland, California

stories. This spring, the Northwestern Mutual client published his first novel, *Shotgun Lovesongs* (Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2014). Before finding creative success with words, Butler held a range of jobs: telemarketer, hot dog vendor, maintenance man, and grape picker among them. Through them all, he held on to his dream.

The married father of two and Wisconsin resident, who had written short stories, poetry, and nonfiction, did not set out to write a novel. His intention was to create a series of novellas, but after conversations with friends and his agent, he opted for a longer format to tell his story right. Following two years of intensive writing and a third of

Nickolas Butler

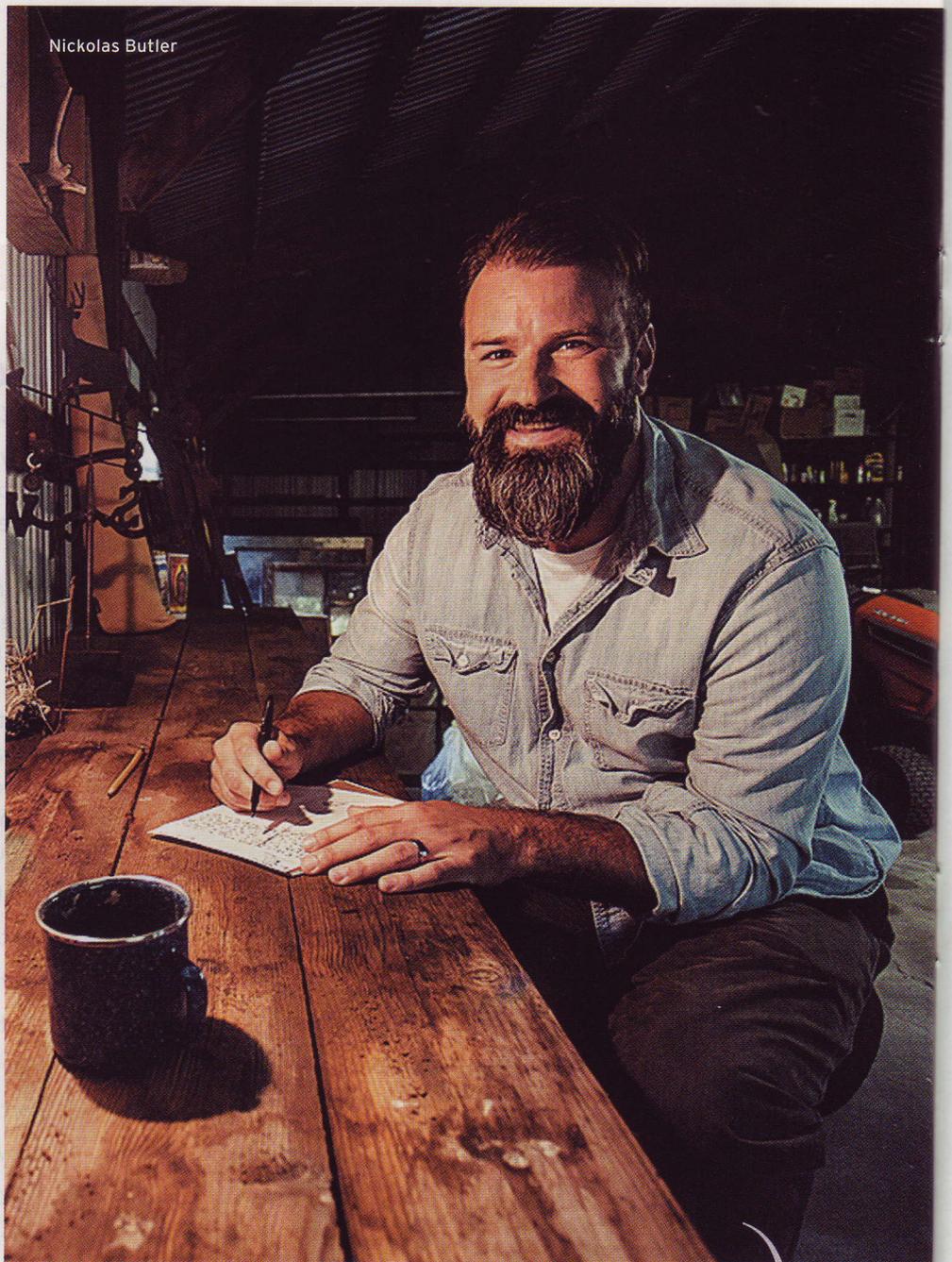
solid editing, Butler released *Shotgun Lovesongs*, which has received critical acclaim. (Writing in *The New York Times*, novelist Jonathan Evison called the book “big-hearted.”)

“I had to be a lot more patient,” says Butler. “It was learning that every day I might not have something to say. I might have to take a week off, or even a month off, and kind of accumulate my thoughts and then come back to the characters. But that paid off. Novel writing is so much harder than a short story or a poem, at least for me, but it’s also rewarding when you get to the end of it. You realize you’ve done something most people don’t do, you know?”

Where members of the Creative Class choose to live matters, too. While O’Malley’s professional world may be restricted by budgets, her personal world is anything but limiting, thanks to the California neighborhood in which she has chosen to live and raise her family. It is a place that offers a mix of influences in cuisine, art, and other cultural touchstones, and provides the opportunity to meet and mingle with individuals from different walks of life. Florida defines this kind of area as a “plug-and-play” community, highly attractive to members of the Creative Class because it allows them to move in easily and quickly establish an authentic lifestyle. Basically, it offers something for everyone.

O’Malley describes her neighborhood as “real urban and we can walk to restaurants and we can walk to the lake and down to the coffee shop.... Seeing the murals on the walls ... inspires me to do something cool [and reminds me] that there’s always more to say, more to do, another way to draw something, to tell a joke.”

Alexandre Gertsman resides in what many would agree is the biggest plug-and-play community of them all: New York City. Gertsman, another Northwestern Mutual



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client, is well known in fine-art circles as the “prime mover” behind the United States’ resurging interest in Russian art. After leaving the former Soviet Union in 1992, where he was an architect and freelance art critic and lecturer and had curated more than 40 traveling museum exhibitions of Russian art, he relocated to Manhattan. In 2009 he opened his gallery, Alexandre Gertsman Contemporary Art, in the borough’s NoHo section to showcase both established and emerging Russian-born artists. His daughter, a graphic designer, works with him on the gallery’s website, art books, catalogues, and event materials.

“I live in New York, [with] the Metropolitan Opera ... the New York Philharmonic, of course off-Broadway and Broadway shows. It’s a huge part of my life,” Gertsman remarks. “When I do events at my gallery—not only do I do my art openings, I also do some culture events—it’s very interesting for me to do that. It does promote culture and it does give me a huge satisfaction.”

Butler notes that while he does not live in a metropolis, artistic activities are increasing and creativity is thriving in his Wisconsin community of about 65,000. He and his family can visit museums nearby, and he takes pleasure from participating in a writer’s group he recently joined. He says he finds it extremely valuable bouncing ideas off other creative people and engaging in diverse conversations that are out of his comfort zone.

“One thing I think is kind of ironic about our country’s perspective on arts and creativity is that we don’t invest a whole lot into it,” Butler says. “Look at our economy, at the companies that are really driving our economy, [like Apple and Facebook]. Those companies are inspired and are being pushed forward by creative people at every level....I think we’ll be losing out on something if we don’t embrace it more.”

Creative Class figures underscore the claim that creativity serves as an economic engine. According to Florida, more than 150 million people worldwide make up today’s Creative Class. He says that 42 million are Americans, some 30% of the United States workforce, who account for more than 50% of wages and income and nearly 70% of the billions in discretionary spending. Over the next decade, Florida expects Creative Class jobs to increase by 10 million, further expanding the group’s economic power.

“Every human being is creative. For the first time, the basic logistics of our future economic growth will require us to tap into the creative human capabilities of everyone. Creativity is the core force of economic growth for the future,” Florida emphasizes. “Every job can and must be ‘creatified’; every worker must be empowered to harness his or her own inner entrepreneur.”

“I think the basic needs and necessities of the creative

communities will remain constant despite the change and evolution of the economy,” he continues. “As I wrote in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, the three ‘Ts’ of economic development—technology, talent, and tolerance—are the requirements for any community hoping to attract and retain creative workers.”

Without creativity, gallerist Gertsman says, “our world and our society ... cannot function. Of course, creativity never dies, because if it does, it means that actually there is no society anymore.... Art and culture and creativity will always be as long as we are civilized. Even in times of war, it still exists. Even in times of financial breakdowns, it still exists. So I think it is a very important part of our life.”

**Julie Jacobs**, a freelance writer based in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, considers herself a member of the Creative Class.

## Tips for Tapping Creativity

- **Get out of your comfort zone.** When Nickolas Butler feels stifled while writing, he often leaves his desk and goes out for a drive in search of adventures. Inevitably, he says, he meets someone new and has worthwhile experiences. “You’ll be surprised at what happens.”
- **Pay attention** to what other creative people are doing.
- **Trust yourself.** In her line of work, Erin O’Malley makes many difficult decisions, some of which require her to have colleagues make concessions. She says she draws upon her experience and always trusts her instinct. “I’ll pitch something that I know in my gut is going to be just as good, just as funny.”
- **Stay aware and observe** your surroundings.
- **Try something different.** Before moving to America, Alexandre Gertsman had been involved in the art world, primarily in a creative capacity. Upon arriving stateside, he accepted a job as an art dealer and manager and developed his business acumen. “I realized that combining my artistic background with business was very interesting. I gave it a try and it did work.”