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The Player

JENNIFER PATTEE, 43

Founder, Basic Training,
San Francisco

Take a stroll through the Hayes Valley neighborhood of San Francisco, and you might see something surprising: grown-ups on monkey bars. Most weekdays, scads of the city's chronically deskbound—stressed financiers, bleary-eyed techies—spend their midday break playing in the name of fitness. Their guiding light is Jennifer Pattee, who was once a desk jockey herself. While working as a graphic designer at Apple and IDEO, Pattee spent much of her time the way many of us do: sitting. (At a desk. On her couch. In her car.) She gained weight and battled anxiety. Many suffer worse fates: It's estimated that, worldwide, 5.3 million deaths a year are caused by physical inactivity (roughly the same number smoking causes). Fed up, Pattee quit her job and, in 2008, founded Basic Training, an outdoor fitness company, to motivate a sedentary workforce with exercise that's fun. "Kids run, climb, jump rope," she says. "But they don't call it working out—they call it play." And they don't play on a treadmill, which is why Pattee's workouts take place in the streets and parks of San Francisco. She counts off pull-ups on low streetlights and tricep dips on the edge of a picnic table, or leads jogs in neighborhoods chockablock with Victorians. (She also runs happy-hour classes that end at a local bar. We'll drink to that.) Last summer, with \$55,000 in Indiegogo and corporate sponsor funding, Pattee and her partners turned a parking lot into a playground for adults. The worker bees swarmed, swinging from monkey bars and doing squats in the sunshine. "Exercise doesn't have to be 'no pain, no gain,'" Pattee says. "I want to come up with something so fun that people are inspired to get out there and do it."

—Jenna Scatena

It takes vision to confront a problem and decide to fix it. And that's a quality these women have in spades. In tackling the troubles they've encountered—a crippled school system, a global health crisis—they've proved that anybody, anybody, can effect real change. Our response? Ladies, take a bow.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Maarten de Boer



A large, close-up portrait of Jane Chen, a woman with dark hair and brown eyes, looking slightly off-camera with a thoughtful expression. She is wearing a dark-colored top with a white, textured patterned shawl or wrap.

The Inventor

JANE CHEN, 36

Cofounder, Embrace, and CEO, Embrace Innovations, San Francisco

Your challenge: Invent an incubator that costs less than 3 percent of what a state-of-the-art hospital incubator does—a device affordable enough to be used in the developing world. If you succeed, your efforts will help save some of the estimated 15 million babies born prematurely every year.

This was the assignment Jane Chen and three classmates received as Stanford graduate students in 2007. None of the four was a doctor—Chen was studying business, and her partners were engineers—but after conducting preliminary research, they gamely packed their bags and moved to Bangalore, then traveled throughout India, interviewing mothers, midwives, and doctors to perfect their prototype. “The essence of design is empathy,” Chen says, “making something that fulfills the needs, desires, and circumstances of the customers you’re trying to serve. We couldn’t have come up with a design sitting in Palo Alto.”

The incubator would have to be portable and closable, include a viewing window and use an intuitive temperature gauge rather than a numerical thermometer (they settled on a red/green light indicator). After hundreds of iterations, the group produced the Embrace infant warmer, a sleeping-bag-like swaddle with a dispensable pouch containing a waxy heat-regulating substance. The material is heated by either hot water or 30 minutes of electrical charging and remains warm for up to six hours. To Chen’s satisfaction, it has so far helped about 150,000 preterm infants in nations from Afghanistan to Haiti. “I know that we’ve helped spare so many women the worst kind of pain, and aided babies in need—there’s no better feeling.” —JS

Sure, there are a million reasons to say no to the job, the passion, the big bold move that calls to you. You can't just start over now! You're too old, too broke, too far down the path you're already on! Besides, where would you even begin? But as these five women will tell you, there's one excellent reason to make the leap anyway: *Nothing feels as good as becoming who you were meant to be.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Alessandra Petlin



FROM HEDGE FUND ANALYST TO RUM DISTILLER

Bridget Firtle

30, Brooklyn

Take a girl with a knack for math and barrefuls of gumption. Raise her in a house with a Prohibition-era speakeasy in the basement. Stir in a granddad who owned a Brooklyn bar. Add a twist of business school, a finger of finance-world chops, and several dashes of can-do spirit. Bridget Firtle, a self-taught distiller of artisanal rum, might call the result her signature cocktail: It's the story of her life. After earning her MBA at Binghamton University in upstate New York, Firtle landed a position as a research and investment analyst covering the consumer staples sector—food, beverages, household goods—at a New York hedge fund. "I developed a niche in the global alcohol market," she says—a duty that brought the burgeoning trend of domestic small-batch distillery to her attention. Yet few boutique distillers were making rum, Firtle's favorite liquor. ("Rum, fresh lime, and

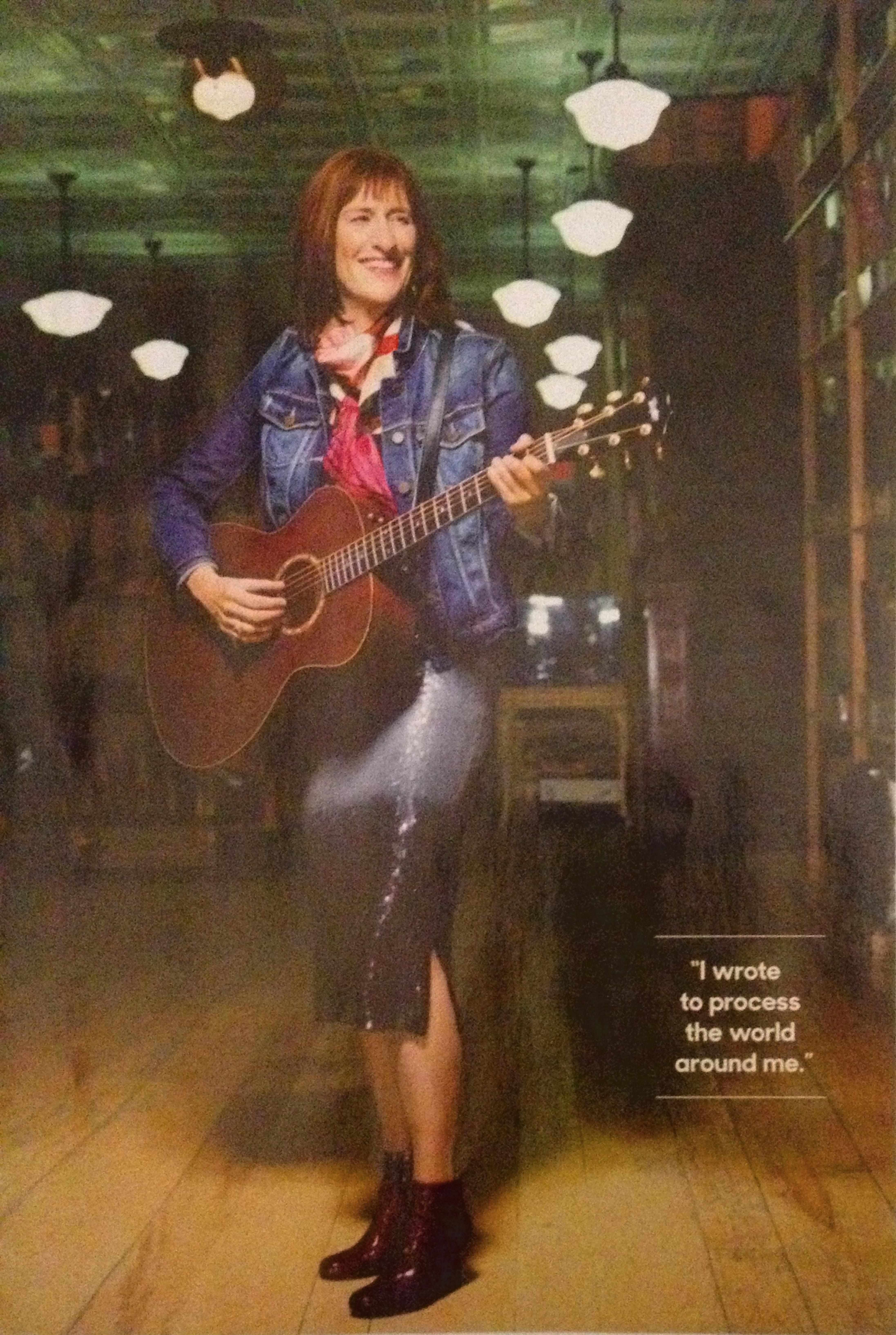
sugar—that's the holy trinity," she says.) She decided somebody ought to. And so after trading stocks by day, Firtle began price-comparing copper stills at night. She moved in with her parents to save start-up capital and hunted for an industrial space in Brooklyn. She found one after looking at about 30 properties, then appointed herself head distiller of the Noble Experiment NYC. She taught herself the finer points of fermentation and distillation science (eukaryotic microorganisms and anaerobic respiration, formation of aldehydes...). And bottling. And also marketing. And distribution. Firtle's hard work shows in her white rum, Owney's NYC, which is made with only molasses, yeast, and filtered New York City tap water, a nod to her hometown. In fact, little about her operation isn't rooted in her spirited background. Says Firtle: "How could I have done anything but this?"

—Jenna Scatena





"Rum,
fresh lime,
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trinity."



**"I wrote
to process
the world
around me."**



FROM ATTORNEY TO
SINGER-SONGWRITER

Lucy Billings

61, Nashville

How many roads must a woman walk down before she can call herself a folk singer? Well, before Lucy Billings moved to Nashville in 2014 with her acoustic guitars and a 22-year-old Siamese cat

named Thunder, determined to write songs for a living, she'd been a cowgirl, scientist, and attorney. (So, three roads, it seems.) Billings taught herself to play at age 10—her parents had caught her strumming a tennis racquet the year before and gave her a real live six-string. Her fledgling songs were melodic accompaniment for the poetry she composed.



FROM MODEL TO PSYCHIATRIST

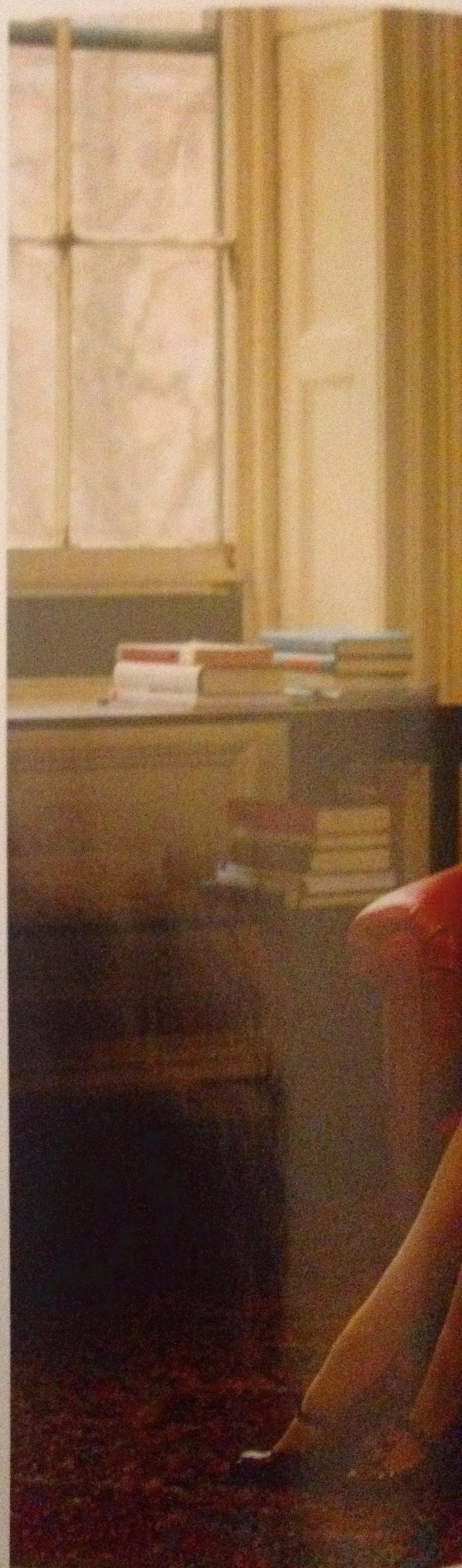
Lauren Helm, MD


50, New York City

In 1982, as she stared down the idle summer months between high school and college, Lauren Helm decided to find a job—preferably one that didn't involve desk work or early mornings. Helm's mother, a former model and actress, suggested she visit the thrumming Ford modeling agency. By September, Helm had been photographed by Richard Avedon for the January 1983 cover of *Vogue*. *Elle* and *Vogue Italia* covers followed. "I decided to postpone college for six months," Helm says, "which turned into 12 years." She lent her angular face and full lips to campaigns for Versace and Valentino, whiled away interminable hours in airports from Milan to Tokyo, and, over time, even became comfortable in front of the camera. "I was pale, with a big forehead," she says. "I thought I looked like a squid. But that's not what others saw. The first thing modeling teaches you is that you have no idea what you look like."

Helm's vision of herself evolved in other ways, too. "No one thinks they can model permanently," she says. "I wanted to do something challenging and useful, and I wanted to take the attention off myself." When an acquaintance said offhandedly that Helm would make a good doctor, "I thought they were right," she says. After graduating from Norwich University, a Vermont college whose adult degree program allowed her to keep traveling for work, Helm left modeling at age 31 and enrolled in Columbia's postbaccalaureate premed program, then its med school. During a rotation in psychiatry, she discovered a deep satisfaction in treating psychological pain. "This felt like home," she says. Helm now works with the psychiatric team at a hospital in New York City and also runs a private practice with an emphasis on eating disorders. "Nothing is ever redundant in this job," she says. "You see extraordinary things, life-affirming, dramatic, poignant things. You get to talk to people, hear the narrative of someone's private universe. It's human. It's life, unfiltered, in all its range. And it doesn't involve sitting around an airport twiddling your thumbs." —J.S.

"Nothing is ever redundant in this job. You see extraordinary things, life-affirming, dramatic, poignant things. You get to talk to people, hear the narrative of someone's private universe."







BY JANE VIA
PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY D. STONE

Jane Via, PhD

BY JEFFREY D. STONE

When Jane Via PhD was named a bishop in 2013, she started many heads. She had joined her church's radical yet inclusive, women-only congregation, *The New Congregation Church*, in November of 2010. She had not been ordained herself. "I wanted to go to seminary because it's a tradition," she says. "But I joined a PCUSA [the Presbyterian Church]. We had committed to God's word as a living woman, but God had nothing to do with the Reformed tradition of priesthood. So they didn't accept her as part of the seminary. They took her, though. She passed the theological examinations there and became the first woman ordained to ministry in any church known, including the Methodist Church she taught part-time at the University of San Diego. (She didn't know other clerics.) She longed for a parish for Episcopalians who like her knew there couldn't be a bishop at the parish yet. She went to the Women's Episcopal Convention and met someone who organized female priests. She was ordained a deacon at the Diocese of West Virginia. Then she co-founded the Mary Magdalene Apostolic Community.

"I called our approach 'radical inclusivity' and welcomed anybody," Via says. Before long, she was ordained a priest by Bishop Michael Bly. Her bishop again demanded she resign. She refused. After a second battle with cancer, Via stepped down to become pastor emerita in 2014. The last half of her career reached her in late life: the church. "Sometime after 2010, I prepared and delivered a sermon. That's the kind of person the movement needs." —JS