

The opportunity was too good to refuse, so Ricciardi left his job the next morning. "It was at that moment I realized it was what I wanted to do for my life, and whether I was going to make money or not, I decided I would be there," he says. Since then, Ricciardi's career as an international artist has skyrocketed. Most recently, the artist set up shop at his own gallery in Yorkdale Shopping Centre, calling the exhibit *Less Isn't More* as a nod to his all-or-nothing attitude toward art. "I always joke that I left my nine-to-five to work 9 a.m. to 3 a.m.," he says, "but I'm doing what I love." For others wanting to chase their dreams, Ricciardi says, "If you are spending every single spare second in your 24-hour day executing your passion, then naturally the time will come to pursue it full-time." — MP

A BSS student who climbed Kilimanjaro

At just 17, Chiara Picão has climbed three of the world's highest mountains to support equal access to education for girls around the world. The Grade 11 Bishop Strachan School student came up with the idea for Literally Climbing Mountains for Girls' Education after a sequence of fateful events when she was only 12 years old. First, an inspiring experience at We Day, then the shooting of female education advocate Malala Yousafzai and finally a trip to Pico Island where the highest mountain in Portugal stands. "At that point it clicked for me: I'll never face that sort of mountain of injustice because that's not something I face here in North America. I'm very privileged and I'm allowed to go to school," she says. "Of course I could throw a fundraiser. I could raise awareness with pamphlets, but what better way for me, as someone who has a lot of privilege, to raise awareness than to put a mountain in front of myself and try to conquer it?" Indeed, Picão conquered Pico Mountain that summer, and began collecting donations through WE in support of girls' education around the world. Since then, she's climbed two more of the world's highest peaks — Kilimanjaro and Elbrus. "I've always been told to work toward doing what you love, and there's nothing I can think of that I'm more passionate about than creating a better world and fighting for equality," she says. — MP

The biking busker

While working as a high-level business consultant, Bologna-born Antonio Piretti had it all, and yet something was missing. "I had everything, from a superficial point of view, you can desire: cars, beautiful clothes, everything," he says, "but I was not happy. I wanted more emotions in my life." Piretti decided to pursue music. "I understood finally that what gave me the most impact was music, song. So I said to myself, if this is what you like the most, you have to start from scratch." The Italian had never touched an instrument in his life, so he started slowly with singing lessons in 2004, expanding into guitar the next year. In 2009, Piretti moved to Toronto to be with his Canadian girlfriend, making it his mission to earn a living as a musician. "I went along on my bike, Queen Street, King Street, Dundas — all over the city — and made copies of my CDs with a business card inside and handed them out," he says. In 2017, the melodic rock musician biked from Vancouver to Halifax in three months with his guitar clocking 120 kilometres a day to bring music to Canadians from coast to coast. He released his latest album on Jan. 10 and is now learning piano in preparation for his next Canadian tour. "I'm Canadian and I feel that, and I love Toronto. It's a beautiful city with a lot of energy," he says. Piretti has no regrets about quitting his job. "If you kill your dream, you also kill a part of yourself," he says. "Where is your heart going? There is where you will go. There is where you have to go if you want to be yourself." — MP

The globe-sailing family of three

Delphine McCourt and her husband Robert first set sail on their boat *Wahkuna* in July 2013. With their mutual desire to experience new places and a new way of life, they left their jobs (she was a French teacher, and he retired from his post as a director of engineering) and sold literally everything they owned (house, car, furniture and most of their clothes and belongings) to move to their boat full-time. Their first cruise was down to the Sea of Cortez on the west coast of Mexico. While in Mexico, they found a stray dog who wouldn't leave their sides. He instantly became part of their family, and he, Güero, is the voice of their blog. Currently they are anchored at Simonette Sur Mer north of Port au Prince, Haiti, on their journey toward the U.S. Virgin Islands. "Our long-term plan is to make it to Europe. We have been full-time cruisers for the last four and a half years, and we hope to continue cruising in Europe where it will be easier to visit family and friends," says McCourt. — NG

Helping patients in Africa for a decade

Dr. Adrienne Chan, an infectious disease specialist at Sunnybrook Hospital, always had an interest in global health and the intersection of social justice and human rights. So it was only natural for her to take the first opportunity she had to work abroad as a physician. First stop, Zimbabwe in 2005. "I was working with a physician who was working in a hospital outside of Harare, which is the capital of Zimbabwe," she says. Not long after, she received an opportunity to set up programs for HIV-positive patients in Malawi, and moved there in 2007 for three years to co-ordinate the HIV clinic and run the medical program with Dignitas International. "Now I go back and forth several times a year to the Dignitas project in Malawi," she says. "When we started, there were only about 4,000 patients who were HIV positive on treatment that we would support, and now the program supports over 170,000 HIV positive patients," she says. In order to make a big difference, Chan says one has to commit to being in a region long-term. However, her commitment to patients in Malawi did not stop her from putting more on her plate. In 2014, during the Ebola crisis, Chan joined a team of doctors travelling to Sierra Leone to train front line health-care workers. Although she's now back in Toronto, Chan says she'll continue to work in Malawi. "My commitment to Dignitas is a long-term commitment. It's hard to say no if a good opportunity comes up that can help." — NG

From Canada to Mexico on foot

A globetrotter at heart, Jordan Bower's love of travel took him to places like Thailand, Australia and India throughout his twenties. After watching *Take a Seat* — a film about a man biking from Alaska to Argentina on a tandem bicycle, offering rides to people he met along the way — the Earl Haig grad embarked on the journey of a lifetime: a 316-day walking trip from Canada to Mexico. He walked alone down the coast through Washington, Oregon and California to the Mexican border. Through the people he met along the way, the trip opened Bower's eyes to the idea that everyone has a story to tell. "The more I talked to people, the more I would learn that not only do we have stories, but we live in our own stories," he says. Bower believes that all people will benefit from doing something that gives them perspective on the life they are living and why. "A retreat doesn't need to last a year, but it does need to deliver some important and deeply personal insight about what you're doing on this planet." — MP

