



TURNING POINTS

The direction of a CA career can sometimes depend on a single decision, opportunity, or challenge. **Robert Outram** talks to seven CAs about the time when their lives took a different course



ELAINE HALLIGAN CA
DIRECTOR, THE PARENT PRACTICE

Key moments in a career often come when a great opportunity presents itself. Sometimes, however, it's an apparently insurmountable problem that creates the turning point.

Elaine Halligan CA was working as an accountancy lecturer and looking after her young son, Sam, and finding it a challenge.

She says: "I don't think I'd ever done a job that was so exhausting, so bewildering, so confusing and overwhelming, and I just continually felt guilty when I got things wrong. I didn't enjoy my time as a mum."

Her son's behavioural issues led to a range of diagnoses, from "PDA" (Pathological Demand Avoidance) to "ODD" (Oppositional Defiant Disorder). "We called him the Alphabet Kid," Halligan recalls.

As she explains, however: "What was really happening is that he was extremely anxious, because he had specific learning difficulties... it took us some time to work out that Sam's issue was that he was severely

dyslexic. By that time he had been expelled from his third school, at the age of seven."

Halligan sensed that the diagnoses were wrong and set out to learn herself what the solution might be. Her opportunity came when a place was found for Sam in a Time Out behavioural centre.

Halligan says: "It was there that I started learning about behaviour management. That's when the magic started to happen. I literally saw, within a matter of months, Sam's whole disposition change. I realised that the behavioural management tools that I was learning were absolutely transformational."

The Parent Practice was founded by Melissa Hood, another parent who was also struggling with raising her dyslexic son. Halligan joined Melissa and they are both now directors. Based on three

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Above: Elaine Halligan with her family

core principles – "be positive, be firm and be consistent" – The Parent Practice helps families to bring out the best in their children. These principles apply, Halligan stresses, whether you are dealing with very severe challenges or just the everyday ups and downs of parenting.

As she puts it: "For many people, I think there may still be a stigma about accessing positive parenting skills, because they have this idea that it's for failing families. Nothing could be further from the truth."

Although there are still only eight people in the business, The Parent Practice is one of the largest private providers in this sector. Halligan has now written a book, *My Child's Different*, about her story.

She says: "My CA training is still important, to this day... I absolutely understand cash flow. I understand the importance of budgeting. I understand the importance of strategy and five-year strat plans. All my training has definitely stood me in really good stead."

Halligan says, however: "No one ever said that I had transformed by putting all these variables into spreadsheets.

We deliver talks in the workplace and schools, accessing hundreds of parents every week. The regular, positive feedback warms your heart and that's why I love the work I do!"

➔ **My Child's Different (Crown House Publishing, £12.99) is available from most outlets and will soon be released as an audiobook.**

**GRAHAM STIRLING CA
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
GRANT THORNTON
SINGAPORE**

Graham Stirling's career turning point took him from a temporary secondment in Singapore to a more permanent role in the city.

Stirling, who trained with Grant Thornton in Glasgow, says part of the firm's appeal for him was the fact that it offered the chance for international assignments while being "small enough that I didn't feel like just a number".

He adds: "I'd been travelling and fell for an Irish girl, Laura. She was living in Dublin and I was in Glasgow – it was a long-distance relationship. We planned to move – either Glasgow, Dublin or somewhere else. Then she was offered a job teaching in Singapore."

There was already a relationship between GT's Glasgow and Singapore offices, and an opportunity came up to help the Singapore team look after clients they had in common.

The one-year secondment soon turned into two years. Then came an unexpected development – it was announced that Foo Kon Tan, GT's member firm in Singapore, would be leaving the Grant Thornton international network.

"The CA qualification is like having a second passport. It has international recognition"

Rather than selecting another local firm to partner with, GT decided to build its own practice in Singapore, from scratch. For Stirling, it was an easy decision.

He says: "For me it was a no-brainer – it was a unique opportunity from a professional perspective. Personally, neither of us was ready to head home after two years. Never underestimate how quickly an international experience can fly by! We still have many more places in South East Asia we want to see and we have made many good friends. Laura has also progressed significantly in her teaching career."

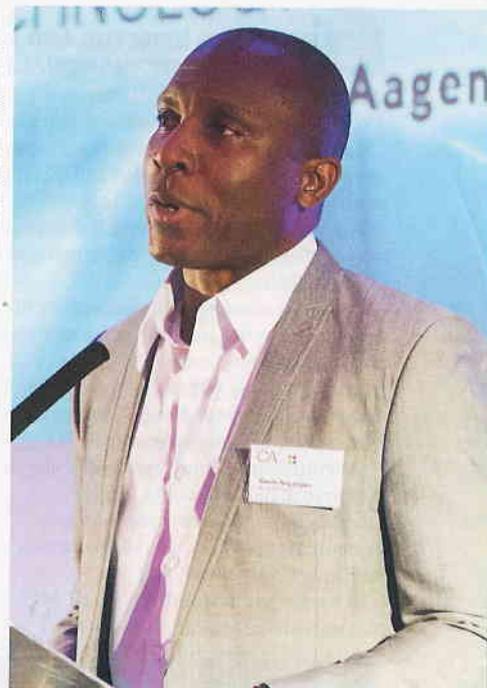
He adds: "I was in the right place at the right time! I had to get involved in questions like 'How do you get an audit licence (or professional indemnity insurance) in Singapore?', as well as bringing clients on board. It's been enjoyable and challenging."

Stirling is now Chair of the ICAS Singapore network and has organised a number of well-attended events recently.

He comments: "The CA qualification is like having a second passport. It has international recognition."

Above, right: Baron Anyangwe at the launch of The CA Agenda this year

Below: Graham Stirling in Singapore



"I wanted to use the skills I had learned for good. The issue was whether to do that through work, or through volunteering"

**BARON ANYANGWE CA
CONSULTANT, NORTH
HIGHLAND**

Baron Anyangwe CA is a management consultant at North Highland and a former ICAS Council Member. Having trained as a CA at KPMG within the Corporate Tax function, he later moved to IG Group to work as a trader. As he explains, it was a very different environment.

Working on the trading floor lived up to its reputation in terms of pressure, noise and colourful characters – something Anyangwe thinks was well depicted in the film *The Wolf of Wall Street*. But after a couple of years of feeling he was not achieving the wider purpose that he had always felt called towards, Anyangwe took up an opportunity through Accounting for International Development (AFID) to volunteer with two small NGOs for a month in Burundi.

Anyangwe says: "I had always felt like I should be using my skills for the greater good, particularly on the continent of my birth, and this provided a fantastic opportunity to use my finance skills to help build the financial

management capacity of two small NGOs who were making such a significant impact in their local communities."

His time in Burundi really influenced his thinking about "purpose". As he puts it: "It confirmed my view that I wanted to be purposeful about what I do with my time – whether that means having a purpose-driven career, or working for a purpose-driven organisation. Purpose has increasingly become the driving force behind the things that I do in and out of work. And for me, purpose is all about having a wider impact and making a positive difference."

Anyangwe has been using the guiding principle of purpose in the choices he's made in both his professional career and outside of work. At work, he has supported a social mobility charity (upReach) to improve its ways of working and to identify opportunities to scale it. Outside work he is a People Committee Member at Crosslight (a debt advisory charity) and a Finance Committee Member at London Metropolitan University.

