



Giraffe Heroes Project

#StickYourNeckOut

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Dear John,
Here, in the Summer of 2025, we bring you quick looks at nine people who are sticking their necks out, being compassionate and courageous in a world that can seem all too full of humans being inhumane and of too many people willing to join them or just look away. May their bravery light up your day.

As long as there are Giraffes, there's hope.

—Ann Medlock, Founder



A privileged Nigerian, **Favour Abatang** was a college student when she visited a health clinic and saw that many of the pregnant women patients weren't women at all—they were girls, one of them only 12 years old.

Abatang learned that 10 *million* Nigerian girls weren't in *school* much less college, that many of them were teens when they became mothers.

Knowing that traditional patriarchal culture sees women as trading chips and breeding stock, not valued citizens who can contribute skills and intelligence to the public life of the nation, undergrad Abatang created a nonprofit to show girls more options, convince them to stay in school, and help them do that.

The [Her Voice Foundation](#) counters the forces of tradition with the bold idea that girls can contribute more to society than babies. Proponents of arranged child-marriages are totally against Abatang and Her Voice, but thousands of Nigerian girls have been assisted and are living fuller lives, as participating citizens of their nation.



Troy Hendrickson, a senior US official working with the TSA, ICE, and Customs and Border Protection, recommended against renewing the services of a contractor responsible for providing health care to people being held at the US border for processing.

Hendrickson reported that the company's services were a disaster, at a cost to taxpayers of \$25 million a *month*. They were under-staffed and many of the people they did hire were unvetted, unlicensed, and unqualified. Salaries for personnel were below market rates, though executives were highly paid.

People above him in the chain of command changed his negative rating to “exceptional” and blocked him from further involvement in the process of approving a new 1.5 **B**illion-dollar contract.

Soon after that, an eight-year-old girl in a CBP holding facility died for lack of medical care. The child’s mother had pleaded for attention to her daughter’s heart condition and sickle cell anemia; the company did nothing.

The [Government Accountability Project](#) has joined Hendrickson in demanding that Congress make sure that no other detainees suffer from such neglect.

Hendrickson's supervisors continue to advocate for the massive new contract and to harass and sideline him. The incompetent, over-charging company is still a candidate for the new, larger contract.

Appalachian born and bred, **Mary Anne Hitt** has spent her entire adult life opposing the industry that has employed thousands of her fellow Appalachians—coal mining. An outspoken, highly visible proponent of clean energy, she's stood firm against critics from mining companies, despite the many people in the region who've seen her as threatening their livelihoods.

Hitt has led [Appalachian Voices](#), [SkyTruth](#), and [Climate Imperative](#), nonprofits that are in the forefront of researching coal's damage to the environment, disseminating information on the climate emergency, lobbying for legislation that stops mining, and organizing people to work for clean alternatives.

It's a daunting task that takes her away from her husband and daughter more than she'd like, but her dedication is credited with being one of the reasons the US now uses more energy from renewables than from polluting, planet-killing coal.



Airman **Cian Westmoreland** targeted drone attacks in Afghanistan that he was told killed 200 enemy combatants. While considering the bonus he'd get for re-enlisting, he read a UN report that more than 300 civilians had been killed in those same attacks.

He left the military.

Despite the risks, he decided to speak out against drone warfare. "If you break the security clearance, if you speak to a journalist or an organization or leak documents, they send you to jail for espionage."

Nevertheless, Westmoreland's been talking to media, speaking at conferences, educating, lobbying legislators, breaking the silence about the civilian

deaths in automated warfare, which he predicts will only increase.

Westmoreland is currently assisting detainees on the US/Mexican border.



When **Anthony Pedro** was serving time for robbery in California, he was trained as a firefighter and sent to help stop many a fire. His time served, Pedro was refused jobs fighting fires, being unlicensed and a convicted felon.

Eager to work, and experienced, he was sleeping in his car, unemployed, when he could have been helping save forests and buildings.

It took years, but Pedro finally got credentialed as a professional firefighter and is now determined to create an easier, faster path for his fellow ex-cons who want to serve as firefighters.

His nonprofit [Future Fire Academy](#) trains them in the latest tactics and equipment, helps them get certification, and then jobs. He's also lobbied for changes in state laws so former prisoners can train as EMTs.

In a time when the climate crisis is setting too much of the US on fire, Anthony Pedro is making sure there are enough well trained pros to fight back.

Banker **Bianca Tylek** knows a lot about money, and about the hardships endured by those who have none. The child of immigrants who struggled to survive in the US, she walked away from the new life that opened to her thanks to the drive that won her scholarships and posh jobs. She turned that drive to making things easier for those who are struggling.

Tylek became an advocate for prison reform when she learned that inmates were being charged as much as \$25 to call home and that two corporations have contracts to provide 80% of US prisons with phone service. One of them had made \$800,000,000 in just one year.

Tylek knew that maintaining family connections greatly increases prisoners' chances of re-entering society successfully, so she founded [Worth Rises](#), a nonprofit that advocates for free calls from prisons.

She's lobbied, testified, challenged the corporations, and used media to educate the public. The result? Five cities and five states—so far—have ruled that calls from prisons must be free. Families have had an estimated additional two billion minutes of talking with imprisoned loved ones.

Tylek is now campaigning to make it illegal for prisons to force inmates to work for nothing or for a tiny fraction of what their labor is worth, aka slavery.



In a time when the climate emergency is putting agriculture in crisis all over the world, **Byron Kominek**, a US ag expert advising and assisting farmers in other countries, inherited his grandfather's farm in Colorado.

He'd never been there, but he gave up his good job abroad and headed to an American hay farm he knew was played-out and money-losing.

Thanks to everything Kominek knows about farming on a changing planet and to his investing every minute and every penny he's got, his solar-powered [Colorado Agrivoltaics Learning Center](#) is now not only raising crops and livestock for the community, it's powering 300 nearby homes.

Farmer Kominek is showing the world that solar

panels and farming are a match in a warming world, the panels not only providing power, but also shade for grazing livestock, and shelter for crops from the sun's intensity.

He's hosting tours, speaking at conferences, spreading the word in media, always remembering what a chief in the Cameroons once told him: Societies really have only people and land, and it's the people's responsibility to make sure that neither is neglected. Words Kominek is living by.

Sonia Daptardar has “gone” all over the world from her home in North Carolina, thanks to reading. She knows that books can take you anywhere. When she was 12 and sure that reading is important to all young people, she founded [Seeds of Reading](#), a nonprofit focused on getting kids everywhere to read, read, read.

It was an “odd” thing for any kid to do, especially a child of an Indian family in the US, already considered odd by many of her schoolmates.

Nevertheless, she persisted. After using her own savings to incorporate the nonprofit, she proceeded to set up book readings on Instagram and Youtube, getting more and more kids watching, learning. Now in high school, she's expanded to running workshops, doing a talk show, and making donations of on-paper books to poor communities.

Daptardar has endured skepticism, mockery, and isolation, all while trying to balance her academics and basic needs, such as sleep. She's sure it's worth doing because thousands of kids across the globe are now exploring that world, through books.





In 2011, **Randal Plunkett**, an Irish filmmaker, poet, and writer, was suddenly Lord Dunsany, having inherited a title that came with one 1,600-acre estate, complete with a crumbling castle built in 1142.

Cushy, right? Turns out to be pretty harrowing, because Plunkett isn't your usual lord of the manor. Since he took over, people have threatened to burn the place down, beat him up, and/or slash his tires, calling him a waster, a decadent, a fool, all because they say he's "neglecting" the land.

Plunkett doesn't see it that way. A vegan, he won't raise livestock as previous lords did. He also stopped harvesting timber on the land, as has been done for centuries. Instead, he's re-wilded most of it, banning all chemicals, and removing invasive plants with his own hands.

The place now teems with wildlife, including species that haven't been seen in the region for decades. The Dunsany estate is now [Ireland's largest nature reserve](#).

Plunkett has been offered millions if he'll sell even part of the vast acreage, but he refuses, despite being strapped by all the expenses of maintaining a castle that's almost 900 years old. He keeps it all going, sort of, with admission fees from visitors and earnings from his films and books.

Protecting a chunk of Ireland's natural heritage means more to him than becoming a millionaire.

**We hope you'll use the links in these stories
to learn more about each of these Giraffe Heroes.
Maybe you'll even be moved *to support their fine work.***

**And did they give you some ideas about ways
you can stick your neck out to make the world a better place
for your fellow beings?**

**Do whatever you can to be a light
in all the darkness.**

AND HANG IN THERE!

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