



Giraffe Heroes Project

#StickYourNeckOut

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In the US, where our offices are, it's the season of giving thanks. It's also a time when a lot of us who live here are deeply concerned about the state of the nation and the world.

We understand, so we're sending you quick stories of seven people you'll be grateful to know exist. Enjoy them and know...

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

—Ann Medlock, Founder





After his 25 years as a US Army Green Beret, **Anthony Aguilar** thought he'd seen the worst humanity could do in wars. Then he went to Gaza.

Because of his experience in "special operations," Aguilar had been recruited by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) a nonprofit backed by the Israeli and US governments to distribute humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza. The pay was excellent, and Aguilar was sure he could be of service, providing security for the operation.

But he quickly witnessed what he called "needless killing by Israeli forces" of unarmed civilians, including children, who came to GHF sites seeking food. He saw GHF contractors firing automatic weapons into crowds of civilians at the aid sites, and that the sites had been "designed as death traps," positioned in active combat zones and enclosed with razor wire, a setup he knew violated the Geneva Conventions.

Aguilar objected. GHF offered him promotions and pay raises, but Aguilar could not stay in the job, and refused to be silent about what he had witnessed. He resigned and began speaking publicly about what he had seen.

GHF fought back, claiming he had been fired and that his allegations—despite video and other evidence—were false. Aguilar, undeterred by the attacks on his character and threats of harm he's reported, continues to bear witness.



As the head of the Kingsland, Texas library, **Suzette Baker** was ordered by county library officials and the County Commissioner's Court to remove books from her library's shelves—many of them by or about people who are LGBTQ, Black, or Indigenous.

Baker refused, insisting that public libraries exist to serve everyone, not to shield a few from ideas they dislike. She was fired, and became a symbol of the growing fight in the US over book bans.

She sued for wrongful termination and won, sort of. A Fifth Circuit judge ordered *some* of the banned books returned to the shelves. Baker was awarded damages for the loss of her job, but the County admitted no guilt, and banned her from doing the work she loves in any County library.

Baker is working in a hardware store but is sure she did the right thing. "You don't have to like the books in the library. *I* don't like some of the books in the library," she says. "I wouldn't take them off the shelves though, because it's censorship."



When **Anshu Gupta** left his secure corporate job in Delhi in the late 1990s, it was more than a career change—it was an act of conscience.

One winter day, Gupta had met a man who made his living collecting and cremating unclaimed bodies—people who had died homeless and alone on Delhi’s streets. The man was paid a few rupees per cremation by local authorities. “Winter,” he told Gupta, “is my best season.”

That stark sentence—people dying of cold in a city overflowing with wealth—shook Gupta to his core. He founded **Goonj** soon after, not confining his attention to Delhi but going to a deeper geography of inequality: cities with too much, villages with too little.

Goonj became his way to bridge that divide—turning urban surplus into rural strength. Gupta and his team mobilize city residents to donate usable goods—clothing, utensils, school supplies, tools, even building materials. In village after village, those goods become a kind of community currency: people receive them in exchange for collective work like repairing roads, digging wells, building bridges, or restoring schools.

The system rejects charity. Goonj works with rural people as partners, not passive recipients.

Because Gupta speaks out against urban apathy and charity-based aid, he's been a thorn in the sides of government bureaucrats and other aid leaders who find his views threatening.

Goonj now operates in over 4,000 villages across 25 Indian states. And Gupta is sure that working *with* the poor as they improve their circumstances is a better idea than dropping charity on them.



screenshot via the Detroit News

A lifelong Republican, Michigan lawyer **Aaron Van Langevelde** found himself at the center of one of the most turbulent moments in American democracy, a moment that required him to make an important decision.

In 2020, as a member of Michigan's Board of State Canvassers, he faced enormous partisan pressure—including from allies of then-President Donald Trump—to block certification of Joe Biden's clear victory in the state.

Citing his duty to the law and the Constitution, Van Langevelde cast the decisive vote to certify Michigan's election results, ensuring that every legal ballot counted.

His decision upheld the integrity of Michigan's election. It also cost him his position and brought him threats of harm.

Van Langevelde's quiet courage, grounded in principle rather than politics, has been hailed by legal scholars and election officials as a model of integrity in times when truth and democracy are under siege.



High in the mountains of Guatemala, where once-green hillsides have been stripped bare by fire and mining, **Armando López Pocol** is planting hope—one tree at a time.

A lifelong resident of the region, Pocol watched for years as wildfires and extractive industries devoured the forests that sustained his community. In 1999, he founded the Chico Mendes Reforestation Project, named for the slain Brazilian environmentalist who inspired his vision of resistance through renewal.

Working with almost no funding, Pocol and his volunteers have planted more than 650,000 trees, nurturing new forests where scorched earth once stood. Their work is a direct challenge to the powerful interests profiting from deforestation.

Mining companies have tried to buy his silence; government officials have pressured him to stop. He has refused both bribes and intimidation.

For Pocol, reforestation is not just about trees—it's about reclaiming dignity, protecting life, and proving that ordinary people can heal the land when governments and corporations will not.



In the hills of Appalachia, where Black mothers often face the twin burdens of isolation and neglect, nurse-midwife **Staysha Quentrill** delivers more than babies—she delivers justice.

Quentrill provides culturally respectful and competent maternal care to Black women in some of the region's most underserved and overlooked communities. Her work revives the legacy of Black midwives who once safeguarded their communities against systemic neglect, offering care rooted in dignity, history, and belonging.

Doing this work isn't safe or easy. Quentrill has been harassed for speaking out about racism in local hospitals. Yet she continues—driving miles of mountain roads to reach patients, sometimes the only Black healthcare provider for hours around.

She knows that Black women giving birth in Appalachia are part of a national tragedy—Black women everywhere in the U.S. are dying from pregnancy-related causes at rates that shame the nation.

But Quentrill doesn't just attend births, protecting women and newborns. As part of the Black Appalachian Activism Network, she connects maternal health to

broader struggles she champions—environmental justice, racial equity, and clean water—issues that determine whether families thrive or merely survive.



As a young Maasai girl in northern Tanzania, **Ndinini Kimesera Sikar** was ordered to marry a 60-year-old man. Tradition said she had no choice.

But Sikar chose to run away from home—three times—before finally convincing her father, a man with five wives and 30 children, to let her go to school. She became the first girl in her community to attend university, the first to get a professional job, and the first to tell other girls they could claim their own futures.

What began as one girl's rebellion against forced marriage grew into a lifelong movement for women's equality. Sikar founded the Maasai Women Development Organization (MWEDO) to challenge the traditions that keep women from owning land, accessing education, or controlling their own lives.

Under her leadership, MWEDO has built a school for girls, opened a medical clinic serving remote Maasai communities, and created forums where women and men—including government leaders—confront the barriers that hold women back.

Today, nearly half a million Tanzanian households have been touched by Sikar's work. Through persistence and courage, she's redefined what it means to be a Maasai woman—not a possession to be traded, but a citizen with rights, and a voice.

**We're grateful for all the people who stick their necks out
to make things better for their fellow beings,
and to *you* for sharing our stories about them.**

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

AND HANG IN THERE!

**We post Giraffe stories in social media every day
from the vast storybank we've created over the decades.
That storybank is on our website,
along with all the other freebies we've created over the years,
all yours for the taking.
*You'll like it all. We promise.***

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