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10 Ways to Change the World from your armchair

One of the worst famines in Ethiopia's history happened when I was just eleven years old. It was big news at the time and I remember, very clearly, being inundated with my first images of swollen-bellied children, their hair tinged orange from malnourishment. The camera footage showed clips of people curled in the fetal position, alive, but looking just like the skeletons of my fifth-grade anatomy books. I was struck and perhaps even traumatized by the gaunt mother who, looking pleadingly at the reporter, pointed to her breasts and then down to her tiny infant, lamenting in a language I had never heard before, that she had no milk to feed her baby.

I was shocked. I wanted to do something.

It was the first time in my young life I felt what I now call, "A Humanitarian Duty." I knew I was privileged to have enough to eat and a roof over my head and two parents who loved me. Though, aside from occasional service opportunities close to home, it wasn't until I was eighteen that I made my first trip to the third world country of Western Samoa to serve *outside* my sphere of influence. More importantly, it wasn't until I was much older, that I realized I didn't need to leave the country to make the "world" a better place. I realized I could make my mark and lift others both in far-off lands *and* in my own backyard.

Still, there are many of us, who, for one reason or another, at one *time* or another, live lives

that don't allow us to take full swathes of the calendar to serve even in our *own cities*. That quandary led me to research ways that I could make the most impact with tiny investments of available time from my home. As a result, I happily came up with, *Ten Ways to Change the World From Your Armchair*.

1. Shop for a Purpose

We're so blessed to experience global communication on a level that's never been seen before. There are hundreds of organizations who have partnered with local tribes, women's groups, local humanitarian groups, and other artisans, to bring indigenously produced products to the world's privileged. The internet is able to link consumers and producers in a way that allows you and me to buy a bracelet or a bag or a scarf, made by the hands of a woman or man halfway across the world, in the comfort of our own homes. Check out these organizations that are bringing beautiful artisanal products to us and blessing the lives of others with their bridges of commerce:

globalgoodspartners.org is an organization that sells beautiful bracelets and other handcrafted items. The proceeds of sales go toward things like water filters, smokeless stoves and solar energy kits for the rural women of Guatemala.

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ayindisa.com is owned by a man I met on a humanitarian mission to Ethiopia. It was there that he felt compelled to start Ayindisa, an organization that also sells beautiful artisanal products to bring necessities like water wells to rural Africans without clean water.

2. Write Letters to Women in Prison

A couple years ago, I stumbled upon an opportunity to write to letters to women in prison. At first, I was a little apprehensive, after all, these women are criminals, right? As one leader of this organization put it, "Most of these women are in for making bad choices based on being with a violent partner or out of desperation to take care of their children." That changed my perspective and I decided to give it a go. I was given the names and addresses of two women in two different prisons, one in California and one in Texas. Both of these women turned out to be remarkable and it softened and changed my perspective on people in general. I became a more empathetic person and really looked forward to getting their hand-written letters in the mail. One volunteer said of the service, "My pen pal's simply written letters never cease to inspire me. She has given new meaning to the words: courage, tenacity, and remarkably, faith." The program's director has this to say, "As of June, 01, 2015, a total of 709 incarcerated women have found an outside woman penpal through this program. But 40 women are still on our waiting list for

an outside penpal." If you're interested in writing to a woman in prison, please contact jeanne@pieper.com.

3. Sign a Petition

I'm certain you've seen your share of petitions circulating around the internet, and you, like me, may have gotten to a point where you largely skip past most of them, but if you search various petition sites to find issues that are close to your heart, you can really make a difference by putting your name to one of them. Do petitions really work? A young woman started a petition on change.org asking for big companies to take a harmful chemical out of the sports drinks that are popular at her school and she won! A mom wanted more options for her daughter who loved to play with legos, so she started a petition asking LEGO to expand a line of women scientists. She won! On a more serious level, several people whom have been wrongly imprisoned have been set free due to the public scrutiny that petitions can offer. Avaaz.org is another petition organization that focuses more on global issues. Last year, one of their petitions saved the Masai people from being evicted by the government from their ancestral lands. You see? They really do work and you can add your voice, too.

4. Promote and Share Small Organizations

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There are so many people and organizations who are doing good, but not enough people know about them. Usually, they're either underfunded or working so hard on their missions, they just don't have time for social media sharing. "Adopting" an organization or group whose work you are passionate about and sharing their websites, social media pages, and fundraising or donation campaigns, is a wonderful way to help them succeed. I work with two small organizations whose leadership work tirelessly to serve people:

NaturopathsWithoutBorders.org
and GivingSaves.org

The first serves thousands of people a year with health care they wouldn't otherwise have access to, and the second is an organization that funds *one* orphanage in Haiti with about \$1000 a month. You see, they're both small, but if anyone reading this takes an interest in their causes, they're able to help that much more. Find a small organization you feel passionate about, and adopt them for a week or two to spread the word for their cause.

5. Money Matters

There are a number of exotic places I'd like to go and a number of unique things I'd like to experience in the way of serving others, but the truth is, the humanitarian organizations who are doing the very best work need *money more than service* to keep going. The problem is

finding organizations who are truly using the money in an effective way. One place to start is this website: www.charitynavigator.org They rate charities based on tax documents, which are a matter of public record. Not all charities are listed. There are a number of legitimate charities doing good work that don't fit their criteria for rating, but it's an excellent place to start. It's also a helpful place to understand more about some of the larger charities. For example, did you know that *Feeding America* is one of the largest charities in the world, spending over 2 billion dollars to feed over 46 million people, regularly? Giving regular amounts of small money to well-balanced charities can do wonders for the world and can be done from the comfort of your own home.

6. Give a Microloan

Microloaning, though it has been around for years, is a relatively new concept to the general public. Again, with global communication being easier than ever before, organizations like kiva.org and zidisha.org are able to connect those of us who have a little extra to give with entrepreneurs in places where other types of financing just aren't available. My son and I had never given a microloan before, so together, we went to a microlending site, sifted through the various projects, and found a woman we wanted to support. Her name is Laloleta and she is from Western Samoa. I picked Samoa because I

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lived there several years ago, and he picked Laloleta, because she had a food business and is a single mom (sound familiar?). We're excited to see where it goes and how it helps her. There are many microlending sites and many of them have been criticized for the percentages they spend on administrative costs, so make sure to do your homework, but remember, a \$25 loan can go a long way when you're living in a third world country!

7. Start Some Good Crowdfunding

Surely you've heard of kickstarter and gofundme campaigns? You see a new one nearly every day on social media. Crowdfunding is one of the most powerful forms of funding because it leverages the sum of several smaller parts to create something big that most of us could never do alone. I love that I can give just \$5 to a project that I consider fascinating. But, how is that changing the world, you say? First of all, there *are* many projects listed on those sites that will definitely change the world, but there's one site I look to, specifically, when I want to find something that will alleviate poverty or hunger or violence in the world: StartSomeGood.org. It's a crowdfunding site dedicated to helping social entrepreneurs and nonprofits. It's easy for me to find a cause that is close to my heart and then give a little cash to it. One success story that stands out is about a man who started a "shower bus" for homeless people so they would have a safe

place to take a shower and to get clean for job hunting and interviews. Check it out, I'm sure you'll find a project you can't wait to support.

8. Write a Postcard to the Elderly

The elderly people of our nation tend to get marginalized. They are a vulnerable population. Too many think that because they're old, they aren't intelligent and don't care to be social. The truth is there are thousands of elderly people who long for interaction and activity, but they have limited resources. Several studies show that loneliness is more detrimental to physical health than obesity and a number of other diseases. Lonely seniors are more likely to have mental health degeneration and to die sooner than their peers. It's heartbreaking, isn't it? But there's something you can do about it: Write a postcard to the elderly. I'm sure you can come up with your own list of advanced seniors who would love to hear from you, but there's a beautiful website that will also take your postcards and deliver them straight to lonely elderly people for you: www.lovefortheelderly.org Head over and sign up to brighten someone's day! And don't forget that you can buy postcards, stamps and pens online, too.

9. Email a Soldier

No matter your political leanings, the fact is that there are many soldiers stationed

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overseas away from their families and friends, and they are often lonely, too. There are several organizations that allow you to write letters to soldiers, but here are two that are larger and serve more than most:

www.forgottensoldiers.org
www.adoptaussoldier.org

The mother who started, Adopt a Soldier, tells the story of sending her soldier son HUGE care packages every week so he was able to share with everyone around him. She realized there were many soldiers who were alone and didn't have anyone to send them anything, so she started this organization, which now links donors to soldiers. While the care packages are appreciated, they are optional, the letters of encouragement and love are what they are most seeking.

10. Make a Blanket for the Needy

When my daughter was younger, she had to have emergency ear surgery for a hidden infection that had started in her ear and had traveled dangerously close to her brain. I became sick to my stomach as the doctor told us to drive to the hospital right away and she would meet us there. The surgery went perfectly and she healed quickly, but one of the biggest impacts of the whole experience, was that among all the sterility of the hospital gowns and bleached bedding, a beautiful homemade blanket was laid across my baby

girl when she was wheeled in from recovery. She has grown up and moved out now, but she still has that blanket. It came from the lovely organization projectlinus.org. While this organization makes and donates blankets specifically for critically ill children, there are a number of organizations that will happily take blankets: homeless shelters, food banks, women's shelters, police stations, etc. You may be wondering how you can do this from your armchair? Ordering material online is now as easy as a couple clicks, and there are a number of ways to make blankets from the comfort of your recliner. Check out these tutorials for super easy blanket making techniques:

<http://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-Make-a-Tied-Fleece-Blanket/>

and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Or8kn2hQOU>

Thanks for Changing the World!

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