

Not All Heroes Wear Capes

By Jena Fraver, July 2026

Heroism isn't always found in action-packed movie scenes. Often, it appears in the years of dedication spent quietly making our world a better place. We often say that 'not all heroes wear capes,' but we often forget that not all heroes wear combat gear or helmets either. Some heroes are living in a US embassy on the other side of the world, working hard every day to ensure the American dream lives on.

Mrs. Kristen Grauer is currently a US ambassador to Equatorial Guinea. She has spent the last 24 years serving our country all over the world. She is an American hero because even though she doesn't receive the same recognition as a soldier or first responder, Mrs. Grauer works tirelessly to ensure we keep the freedoms we enjoy as Americans today. Her passion for improving the quality of life for not just US citizens but people all over the world is both admirable and inspiring in a way words cannot describe. Even with bombs going off around her in Baghdad, Iraq, she is not afraid to risk her own life to protect our country. For the reasons I will present to you today, I believe Mrs. Kristen Grauer is one of the most selfless, brave, and passionate people serving America.

Mrs. Grauer was just starting her career when 9/11 occurred. Another young diplomat might have been shaken when they got the call that there had been a terrorist attack on their country, but Mrs. Grauer continued moving around the world, helping as many people as she could. Her courage is admirable, because most people in her position would have been dissuaded by the uncertainty and disaster the country was now facing. However, the courage that people like her showed amid the chaos helped foster the unity and patriotism that brought our country together.

September 11 was not the only attack that affected her worldview. Kristen quoted, "The real pivotal moment for me was not 9/11, but the 1998 Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania...I was fixated watching the carnage and coming to terms with the real risks our diplomats take." Even knowing how dangerous diplomacy could be, she has not hesitated to work all over the world to serve our country. "I've seen more 'action' than a lot of military service members who have never been stationed abroad, and while I'm extremely grateful for their service, I hate that most Americans have no appreciation for what the U.S. Foreign Service does or the risks we take too."

On the question of heroism, Mrs. Grauer shows great humility. "When do I feel like a hero? Not so much with the kinetic episodes. I get much more personal satisfaction by helping my subordinates overcome obstacles that we thought were impossible or cheering them up when they're down from being so far away from home. I feel like the movies show heroes in short-term moments, but there are also unsung quiet actors that help pick up the pieces everyday so that the team can keep moving forward. It's far less glamorous, but in many cases, I think it's harder because it just takes more resilience than a lot of people have."

Even in the middle of the 2016 AQIM active shooting beach terrorist attack in Grand Bassam, Cote d'Ivoire, she put herself at risk to ensure as many as possible weren't harmed. In her words, "I wasn't a hero, just worked hard to do my best to keep people safe."

Her unique perspective makes us question what a hero really is. Are the stereotypes surrounding heroism true, or is the definition of a hero one who faces fear and uncertainty but perseveres to benefit the greater good?

The courage, strength, and devotion to your country that it takes to be a diplomat is simply immeasurable. Mrs. Grauer's dedication, passion for helping others, and utter fearlessness inspires countless. She proves that even a girl from small-town Michigan can grow up to make a real difference in the world.