

UPPER-INTERMEDIATE 1 – What Makes a Hero?

Track 1

RUBY: Someone I'd really like to meet is Madison Stewart. Not many people know about her – she's an unsung hero – but I'm a big fan of hers. She's an underwater filmmaker and has even taken part in a documentary, which talks a bit about her work. Madison Stewart – or Shark Girl, as she's usually called – firmly believes that people should be doing more to protect sharks and so she's been running a campaign for years to save sharks and to end the cruelty against them, raising awareness about the way companies kill sharks for meat. What's more, over the years she's put pressure on governments to end the shark meat business. I think that's an incredibly brave action – just one young woman against all those powerful companies and the government!

Madison's story is unique. She was born in Australia, near the Great Barrier Reef, so she's been swimming with sharks since the age of seven. She learned how to scuba dive when she was only 12 and at the age of 14 she was already filming sharks. She says that the ocean was like a classroom for her, because it contains a world of fascinating information ... Strangely, she's never been scared of sharks. On the contrary, she's always considered them her friends.

I admire Madison because she's a female explorer and activist. There are thousands of underwater explorers in the world, but they're almost all male. I also admire Madison because she knows what she wants and she fights for it.

Track 2

LI: Someone I'd really like to meet is Scott Neeson. I think he's an extraordinary guy! He's originally Scottish, but he moved to Australia when he was still a kid. After leaving school, he started his career in the film business there, but later moved to Los Angeles. By the time he was in his early forties, he was working as a successful marketing executive in Hollywood. He had worked on films like Star Wars and X-Men and so was very well-off and was living in a big house with cool cars and he was the proud owner of a boat. However, in 2003 he made the decision to give it all up.

A few months earlier he had visited Cambodia and that changed his life. While he was traveling there, he visited a huge rubbish dump in order to see the "real Cambodia", not just the tourist sites. At the rubbish dump, he was shocked to see young children picking up rubbish. Some were even sleeping in the dump! In some cases, the kids had no home, because their parents had abandoned them. On returning to the USA, he realised that he couldn't continue to live the life he had led before. He sold his possessions, set up an organisation to help these kids and emigrated permanently to Cambodia to manage the organisation. It's an incredible story – an incredible act of bravery, in my opinion.

For over ten years now, Scott's been working with Cambodian children and he's made a huge difference to the children's lives, winning several awards. When he was a child he never imagined he'd contribute much to the world. I think he's done something incredibly generous and brave! There's a message there for all of us, in fact. We too can achieve something great in the future...