



Climate Change Trailblazers

It was an honor to be invited to Greta Thunberg's first public event in the U.S. On September 9, 2019, Naomi Klein hosted a dialogue, "The Right to a Future," with Greta and other youth, including Xiye Bastida, Vic Barret, and Xiuhtezcatl Martinez. When Greta arrived on the stage, she was cheered by a standing ovation from the local students and enthusiastic Black youth from the "Compton Kidz," along with elders like Amy Goodman, Bill McKibben, and Chip Comins.

It was in that moment that I knew—now is the time for this new Stone Soup book.

People were waking up—finally!—and ready to meet these brave young people who are passionately committed to waking us all up!

From the moment Greta arrived on a sailboat in New York harbor on August 28, it was international news. On that same day the Stone Soup Leadership Institute's young people were learning to sail off the coast of Massachusetts, so they could only imagine what it must have been like for Greta to be on a sailboat in the open Atlantic Ocean for two whole weeks. Greta was their hero. They admired her courage for taking a stand against the use of fossil fuels by refusing to travel by plane. They had recently heard the 16-year-old's speech on a video at the Institute's Sustainability Summit.

Greta had embarked on this journey to the U.S. to join with other climate activists and lend her star power to their efforts. Then, at the UN's Climate Action Summit, she sounded a wake-up call, quoting the now infamous IUCN World Conservation Congress report that warned that we only had 11 years to radically change the trajectory of our planet or risk setting off a disastrous and irreversible chain reaction.

A few days later, our Institute youth joined the Global Climate Strike, the largest single-day climate protest in history. Four million people turned up to 6,000



events in more than 1,000 cities across 185 countries. Youth from around the world came together to demand urgent action to protect their future. Greta's clarion call had resonated with them:

***We children are doing this to wake the adults up.
We children are doing this for you to put your differences aside
and start acting as you would in a crisis.
We children are doing this because we want our hopes and dreams
back.***

Later that year, when Greta received recognition as Time magazine's Person of the Year she challenged the media to focus on all of the young people who are standing together with her. While writing this book, it's been an honor to connect with so many of these Climate Change Trailblazers from around the world: Jamie Margolin (U.S.), Lilly Platt (the Netherlands), Nicki Becker (Argentina), Alejandro Martinez (Spain), Joel Enrique Pena Panichine (Chile), Arshak Makichyan (Russia), Iqbal Badruddin, Pakistan, Vihaan Agarwal (India), David Wicker (Italy), Linus Dolder (Switzerland), and Jean Hinchliffe (Australia). Each of them is shining the light brightly, blazing a path, pointing the way to a more sustainable world.

But young people have been sounding the climate change alarm for decades.

Back in 1992, 13-year-old Severn Suzuki became known as "The Girl Who Silenced the World for Five Minutes" when she spoke at the UN Summit in Rio de Janeiro. "I am here to speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet, because they have nowhere left to go.... And now we hear of animals and plants going extinct every day, vanishing forever."

It was 1997 when Julia "Butterfly" Hill climbed to the top of a beloved ancient redwood tree to save it from being cut down by a lumber company. She had only planned to stay there a week. But once she was up there, she realized she wasn't going to come down until she had succeeded in saving that tree and the trees surrounding it. Her two-year battle was ultimately successful—and led to her worldwide fame as an environmental activist.

In 2008, Alec Looz became the youngest person trained by Al Gore's Climate Reality initiative. When he was just 12 years old, he'd watched the movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*. "It was a turning point in my life," he says. "Before that I was aware



of climate change in a roundabout way. But that made it real for me. And I wanted to do something about it.”

When 14-year-old Slater Jewell-Kemker saw this same documentary, she decided to make a film about climate activists. It took her more than a decade to finish her award-winning documentary *Youth Unstoppable*.

As I write this introduction, I received a heart-wrenching message from David Wicker in Italy.

*Time is running out, and after two years of activism,
with close to no “real” and strong climate action yet,
I’m afraid I’ll also have to focus on what happens next:
how can I help make sure people survive and
people are taken care of when the worst hits us (which is already happening in some parts of the world)?*

These brave young climate activists urgently need our support. NOW!

They are going to wonder why you, who had the chance to be heard, didn’t speak up. It doesn’t have to be that way. We could all start acting as if we were in the middle of the crisis we are in fact in. You keep saying that the children are our future, and that you would do anything for them. If you mean what you say, then please listen to us. We want you to start speaking up and telling it like it is.

Greta Thunberg
excerpted from *A Letter to Everyone Who Has a Chance to Be Heard*
Our House Is on Fire: Scenes of a Family and a Planet in Crisis

