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# How Greta Thunberg's Lone Strike Against Climate Change Became a Global Movement

The 16-year-old Swedish activist's #FridaysForFuture protests have galvanized young people around the world

By **KATE ARONOFF**





**Greta Thunberg at a nature reserve outside Stockholm in January**

Photograph by Anna Tärnhuvud



At the end of a record-hot summer in Sweden last August, then-15-year-old Greta Thunberg decided she would not be going back to school. Frustrated by the lack of attention paid to the existential threat of global warming — not least by politicians campaigning for upcoming elections — she set up outside the Swedish parliament with a water bottle, her rucksack filled with books and snacks and a homemade sign announcing her “School Strike for Climate.” “I tried to bring people along to join me,” she says — she’d been inspired by the Parkland, Florida, students who walked out of class to protest gun violence — “but no one was really interested, and so I had to do it by myself.”

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Thunberg wasn’t alone for long. By the end of the first week, her strike had drawn coverage from Sweden’s biggest newspapers. As reporters flocked and she handed out fliers bearing the message “You grownups don’t give a shit about my future,” supporters dropped by to join the homespun

protest on their lunch breaks. After three weeks of missed classes, Thunberg finally went back to school — mostly. She still strikes every Friday.

Now she's become the unexpected founder of an international youth movement. Since the summer, tens of thousands of students in nearly 300 towns and cities from Australia to Uganda to the U.S. to Japan have joined her #FridaysForFuture protest. In Belgium, at the end of January, more than 30,000 students walked out of classes. A **worldwide strike** is planned for March 15th, with events planned in more than 50 countries. "Before I started, I didn't expect anything," Thunberg says. "I could have never imagined this reaction. It's crazy."

Her stark truth-telling and cherubic face caught fire online after she spoke at the U.N. climate talks in Poland in December, where, "Emperor's New Clothes"-style, she called out a room of statesmen and dignitaries three and four times her age, telling them, "You are not mature enough to tell it like it is. Even that burden you leave to us children."

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Thunberg's movement comes amid an onslaught of increasingly dire warnings about the climate. Scientists recently announced that the world's oceans are warming **40 percent faster** than was previously thought. In October, the Intergovernmental Panel on **Climate Change reported** that global temperatures could rise by the dreaded benchmark of 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels in just 12 years. "We are living in a very interesting time, where something is going to happen," Thunberg says. "Change is on the horizon, but to see that change we also have to change ourselves."



At home, Thunberg persuaded her parents to swear off air travel and stop eating meat. “They were frequent fliers and high consumers,” she says. “And then I showed them articles and films and I told them about the situation. You can’t really stand up for something without walking the walk. That’s what I did.”

Thunberg has Asperger’s syndrome, and has cited her neurodiversity for her dedication to the issue. “I see the world kind of black-and-white,” she says. “Everyone says that there is no black-and-white issue, but I think this is. Either we go on as a civilization or we don’t.”

Although she finds all the sudden personal attention a little strange, she says, “As soon as they write about me they have to write about the climate, so that’s good.

“In five years, I hope I don’t work on the climate because that would mean that everything is OK,” says Thunberg. “But I probably will, and many other people will because of where we are at. We see the consequences of it today, and we will see it more clearly then.”

*Read more from Rolling Stone's **Women Shaping the Future** issue.*

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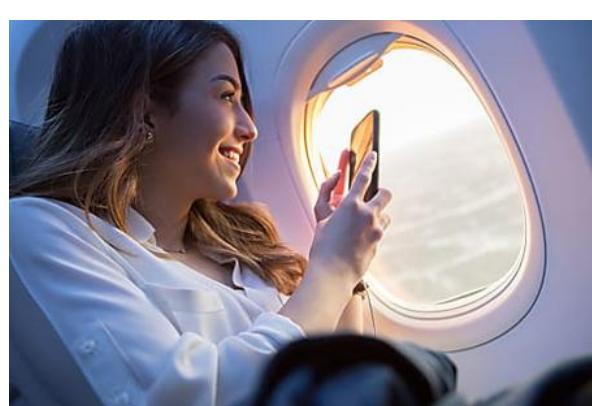
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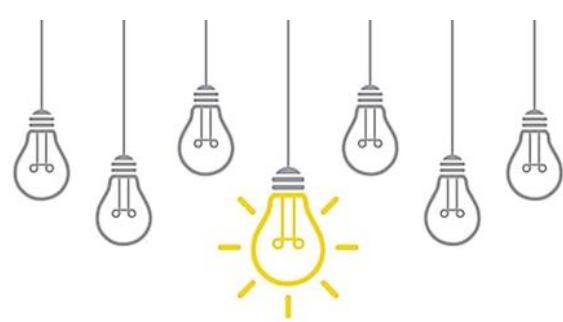
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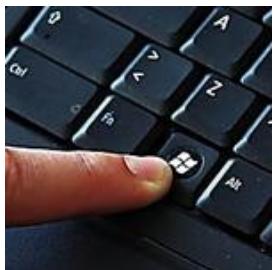
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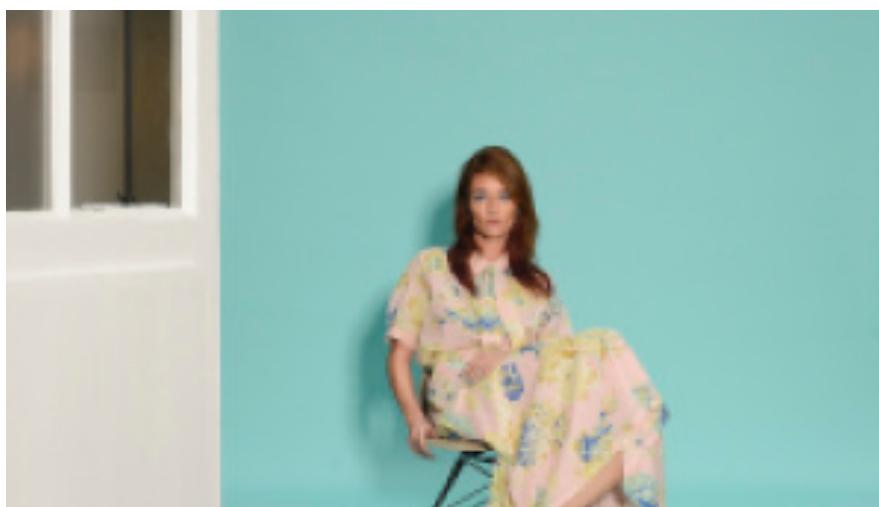
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