

Spencer Lippa's Mission FOR Climate Action

by Jeannine d'Entremont



▲ In August 2018, outside the Swedish parliament building, Greta Thunberg started a school strike for the climate. Her sign "Skolstrejk för klimatet" means "school strike for climate." Her actions and speeches created a global movement. PHOTO BY ANDERS HELLBERG, COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.



Inspired by Greta Thunberg, Spencer Lippa of Georgetown is a Grade 7 student who has been on strike from school every Friday since early Sept. 2019, to raise awareness about climate change.

▲ Spencer Lippa on strike for the climate, outside Ethel Gardiner Public School in Georgetown. PHOTO BY BART MANIERKA.

Spencer Lippa's best day on strike was also the coldest, a frigid minus 18 degrees Celsius, minus 25 with the windchill. Despite being layered with long-johns, pyjamas, jeans and leggings, six shirts, a parka, trapper's hat and ski goggles, the cold still bites. "The coldest, windiest, rainiest day of the week is always Friday," says Spencer, who turned 13 in February.

Usually, Spencer sits alone in front of Georgetown's Ethel Gardiner Public School with his hand-lettered sign that reads "School Strike for Climate." By midmorning on this day, however, a gaggle of local moms showed up, hot chocolate in hand, in a show of support. "There must have been 25 people," he says. "It was the best day ever. But there was no way I could drink five hot chocolates."

Determination

Spencer says Greta Thunberg inspired him. She is the 17-year-old Swedish girl whose school strikes for climate have become an international movement, galvanizing millions around the world to rally for climate action. Spencer says he is equally determined to make sure Canadian politicians and decision-makers get the message: Our house is on fire and we need to act like it.

"Greta is getting a big following," says Spencer, "but I'm not seeing any real action on the part of politicians, so I decided to strike. I would much rather be in school, but this is too important."

With a smattering of freckles and a toothy grin, Spencer's earnest enthusiasm is contagious,



▲ Green Party of Canada leader, Elizabeth May, with Spencer at MPP Mike Schreiner's campaign launch in Guelph. PHOTO BY JANEL BASCOM.

despite the gravity of the cause to which he's been dedicated the last five years.

Politics

Spencer has been an environmentalist since he was eight years old. That's when a leaders' climate debate on the radio piqued his interest. After quizzing his parents, he researched the political parties and compiled a report entitled *Spencer's Guide to the Federal Election*.

Convinced that the Green Party of Canada (GPC) has the best platform to save the planet, Spencer pleaded with his parents to be allowed to join the party. He persuaded them to donate half his allowance to the party -- \$10 a month. Party leader Elizabeth May officially welcomed him as its youngest member in

October, 2016. At his home in Georgetown, Spencer proudly displays the letter and certificate he received.

In the gifted program at Ethel Gardiner Public School, Spencer doesn't own a smart phone, nor is he on social media. "I prefer to talk to people face to face," he says. With help from his parents, however, he does maintain a website to publicize his activities and to raise awareness.

Spencer's first speaking gig was in December 2017, when he was invited to Green Party MPP Mike Schreiner's campaign launch in Guelph. "I got to meet Elizabeth May and she gave me a hug," says Spencer with a grin. Ever since, he has been popular on the local speaking circuit.

As an unofficial GPC

spokesperson and director-at-large, he filled in for Ralph Martin, the federal Wellington-Halton Hills Green candidate, at a Canada Day event during last year's federal election. While most kids are just happy to be sprung from school, Spencer spent last summer campaigning with Martin three days a week.

"It was really fun going door to door with Ralph and talking about so many things," says Spencer. "It didn't bother me getting the door slammed in our faces. I only got upset when people insulted Elizabeth May. Ralph said he could see steam coming from my ears."

"I'm proud to have Spencer as part of my campaign," says Martin. "I see him as one of my key youth members. It's important to listen to bright,



▲ Spencer shares a moment with Wellington-Halton Hills Green candidate, Ralph Martin, after a town hall meeting in Glen Williams. PHOTO BY JANEL BASCOM.



▲ Spencer on strike with another message. PHOTO BY BART MANIERKA.

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▲ Spencer addresses the crowd at a climate rally in Georgetown. PHOTO BY TED BROWN.



▲ Spencer says he never gets nervous about public speaking. PHOTO BY STEPHEN LIPPA.



▲ Spencer leads a climate rally held last fall at Ethel Gardiner Public School in Georgetown, which close to 200 people attended. PHOTO BY STEPHEN LIPPA.

young people like Spencer. He'll inherit a world that we will not and he's quite capable of providing advice from a youth perspective."

Activism

Spencer's activism has earned him accolades and opportunities. In April, the Ontario Community Newspapers' Association presented him with an Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year award. Wellington-Halton Hills MP, Michael Chong and May have invited him to visit them on Parliament Hill.

Most significantly, Spencer plans to head to Glasgow, Scotland in November as part of a Columbia University delegation to COP 26, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. This opportunity came about through a colleague of his dad, Stephen Lippa. Their business, Re-Venture, specializes in consulting on clean technology.

While Spencer's parents are undoubtedly his biggest supporters, they are quick to point out it was their son who inspired them to

become climate activists themselves. Says mom, Janel Bascom, a high school social science teacher, "Definitely, Spencer's interest came first. He was only eight years old when he first took an interest in the Green Party."

Since 2018, Stephen and Janel have been active members of The Climate Reality Project, an international organization, which former U.S. Vice-President, Al Gore founded. The family leads by example in other ways by recycling, buying used

clothing, avoiding buying plastic, and eating less meat.

Speeches

Bascom says she helps to scribe Spencer's speeches, but they are all his ideas. "He prepares and rehearses a lot before delivering a speech," she says.

"I never get nervous about speaking," says Spencer. "Mom calls it my superpower."

Older brother Nathan, 14, cheers from the sidelines. "I'm not sure about his politics yet, but I totally support him," he says.

When asked what gives him hope and keeps him going with his school strikes and other actions for climate, Spencer uncharacteristically struggles for words. "It's hard to explain. Doing little things is not enough. We have to do big things to combat climate change," he says. "I want to get politicians' attention. They're the ones who can make a difference by changing policies. People don't understand that we're going to have feedback loops. Once we reach a certain point, things will spiral out of control. I want to send a

strong, clear message. We have the ability to change things. It's not too late." **NEV**

Do you know of another young person who is a climate change activist? Let us know at editor@NEViews.ca or by mail to 50 Ann St., Georgetown, ON L7G 2V2.

Jeannine d'Entremont of Georgetown is a freelance writer and editor. She finds people fascinating and loves to help them tell their stories. Connect with her at jeannedentremont.com.

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