

I remember when I was little running to catch the bus in the rain, shoelaces kicking up water which splattered onto my legs in big muddy glops. In my bones I felt the cold which evaded the impractical thin jacket I always wore. A half asleep energy clung to me, but through it I ran, heart pumping warmth in a thumping rhythm through my body. Early winter mornings always feel like that to me, a mix of damp cold and life giving warmth, a moment of both tiredness and drive to go, to survive. I think I protested every Friday for climate justice for the same reason. I was scared, in my anxiety I was cold, and the only way I could heat myself up was to fight. So here I was, sitting on the max watching the rain pelt the windows as I rode towards city hall. I wasn't alone on these mornings though. Next to me, head resting on my shoulder, was my twin sister, our hand painted canvas banner resting in a tube between her legs. I hoped that today I would finally feel the change, a momentous shift, like the side of a glacier breaking off. I hoped I would feel the moment that our work did something, and then maybe I won't have to run to be warm.

Every day of my 8th grade year I protested for climate justice outside city hall, rain or shine. Most of the time it was just my sister, my friend, and me, although sometimes other people joined us. During that time of my life I needed to believe I could change something for the better. The year before I struggled with crippling anxiety and depression which I was recovering slowly from. In school and on the news I was told of the existential crisis of climate change. The impending doom of the world, as I saw it, was a source of much of my anxiety. So I started to protest. My days at city hall were mostly filled with rain and quiet streets. However they were also filled with protest songs and chanting with my friends. Every time someone honked or even when we were cussed at or flipped off it felt like we were doing something. Every time I ment with Ted Wheeler, the mayor at the time, he promised climate justice for Portland. I remember in one of our meetings he talked about how passionate he was about climate justice as his daughter had just flown to the galapagos islands to see the last giant tortoises. It took everything in me not to laugh at that, *what* he chose to highlight his passion—jetting to the galapagos to see the last Giant Turtles. But I still had hope that he would make a change for Portland. He ment with us every month, maybe he was doing more than mouth service. Changes did happen, the city of Portland denied Zenith energies request to build pipelines under front avenue in 2019 during the time I was protesting. Later in 2021 they denied Zenith's request for LUCs. But the big change I wanted to see never happened, we never got a victory so big I could stop fighting, I know now it was naive to think I ever could, but I was 12 and I needed to have that hope that everything would be okay.

Now I look back at that year fondly. It was the first time I dedicated myself to working for a better world, something that brings me so much joy now. It taught me how much realistic change three 12 year olds can make in a year (we all can't be Greta Thunberg), but it also taught me I can have an impact. I did help change peoples minds and I know I brought awareness to the importance of climate justice. Every week for a year hundreds of people saw us protest, saw three 12 year olds, walking through the rain, soaked, but still chanting and holding our banner. I know that our dedication changed the minds of a few, and inspired many more to take their own action. Because of our time protesting we were featured in a documentary, "Necessity", which thousands more watched. I spoke to an audience of hundreds

at that documentary's first showing in portland. I know that in the end I reached thousands of people. I also know it wasn't enough. We are still hurtling towards the climate point of no return. However I know that I won't stop. Since 8th grade I have found more causes I am passionate about like equitable healthcare, which is why I hope to become a neurologist, and alongside that I am still fighting for climate justice. I go to climate protests yearly but the biggest changes I have made are at my highschool.

It wasn't till my sophomore year that I walked into my highschool for the first time. Covid 19 had made it so my first year of highschool was entirely online. When I finally was able to actually go to school one of the first classes I took was sustainable agriculture. There I learned about our piddly school garden, 8 raised beds complete with fill dirt from the previous year's renovation of my school. When I first looked at them they harbored weeds and hard packed dirt. Nevertheless I loved my plot of soil and I began to love the garden and sustainable agriculture. So when a job to take care of the garden over summer break became available I took it . That was the beginning of my love and borderline obsession with the garden, a project I would spend two years and countless hours on. Through the project my friends and I turned 1/4 of an acre from waist high weeds into in-ground garden beds and a herb spiral. I even built a wooden trellis by hand for it. When we decided to take on the project we knew what we wanted, a fully sustainable garden. That meant setting up a composting system and putting in drip irrigation. Making the garden into a fully functional space taught me much about hard work and resourcefulness. I called landscaping companies for donations of bark chips and compost and formed a friendship with the school's custodial staff to save the cardboard required for sheet mulching. I cleared 1/4 of an acre of weeds by hand with just the help of my sister and moved 14 cubic yards of compost over two days with the help of my friends. However, what was more rewarding than seeing the progress the garden made was seeing the impact it had. We donated hundreds of pounds of green beans, squash, and zucchinis to the school and its food pantry that serves our low income community. I know that the work I put into that garden helped feed people. I also know that the garden increased the excitement and education of sustainability at my school. I personally lead garden walks with classes to teach them about sustainable gardening and the impact it has. The garden inspired me to propose a shaded fruit tree space as an initiative to earn a sustainability grant for McDaniel highschool. We ended up getting it and now that project is being carried on by more students who have the opportunity to be excited about sustainability. Often I would see people resting in the garden in between classes and I know my sophomore self in sustainable agriculture would have absolutely loved working in a garden that could actually support more than a few radishes. I am so glad I was able to carry on my drive for climate activism and express it in a new way in highschool. Being able to transform land into something that gave back in so many ways to the community I love felt like the big change I was searching for in my fight for climate justice. We still may be hurtling toward the point of no return but I know I can make a difference. For my community. For my land. For my world.

I am dedicated to helping the world prevent and recover from climate change. Despite the complexity and the huge momentum in the wrong direction, more and more people are opening

their eyes to the existence of climate change. Humanity can do great damage to our climate, but also, if their hearts are in it, they can rise to great challenges. My heart is in it, and I will fight to increase the awareness of climate change and bring more people to the cause. How can we give up on our planet?