GRETA THUNBERG HOLDS ACCOUNTABILITY AND HOPE

By Herman Greene

Greta Tintin Eleonora Ernman Thunberg, age 16 and self-described as being on the autism spectrum, has directed her intense powers of focus on, and her clear, forceful speech to, climate change. In her recent speech in Charlotte, North Carolina, she said:

For well over a year young people have been striking from school every Friday, demanding our leaders take responsibility and unite behind the science.

The people in power have not yet done that. They continue to ignore us and the current, best-available science.

So we have no choice but to go on as long as it takes. It is we young people who are the future, but there is not time for us to grow up and become the ones in charge, because we need to tackle the climate right now.

We want to be able to say we did everything we could to push the world in the right direction. We have something just as powerful, our voices, and we need to use them.

This is our future and we will not let it be taken away from us.

(Charlotte Observer)

A video of her speech is available here.

In September, speaking in New York at the United Nations Climate Action Summit, she said:

My message is that we'll be watching you.

This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!

You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!

For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight.
You say you hear us and that you understand the urgency. But no matter how sad and angry I am, I do not want to believe that. Because if you really understood the situation and still kept on failing to act, then you would be evil. And that I refuse to believe.

The popular idea of cutting our emissions in half in 10 years only gives us a 50% chance of staying below 1.5 degrees [Celsius], and the risk of setting off irreversible chain reactions beyond human control.

Fifty percent may be acceptable to you. But those numbers do not include tipping points, most feedback loops, additional warming hidden by toxic air pollution or the aspects of equity and climate justice. They also rely on my generation sucking hundreds of billions of tons of your CO2 out of the air with technologies that barely exist.

So a 50% risk is simply not acceptable to us — we who have to live with the consequences.

To have a 67% chance of staying below a 1.5 degrees global temperature rise – the best odds given by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] – the world had 420 gigatons of CO2 left to emit back on Jan. 1st, 2018. Today that figure is already down to less than 350 gigatons.

How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just 'business as usual' and some technical solutions! With today's emissions levels, that remaining CO2 budget will be entirely gone within less than 8 1/2 years.

There will not be any solutions or plans presented in line with these figures here today, because these numbers are too uncomfortable. And you are still not mature enough to tell it like it is.

You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.

We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not.

(NPR.org)

A video of her speech is available here.

Her words in January 2019 to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, have been immortalized in this widely shared image with her words:

Thunberg takes it upon herself and her generation to bring about change, while demanding of older people, especially those in power, that they act. She articulates what other young people must have felt but had not said: “We are watching you. You are failing us. We will not let you get away with this.” Speaking for the older people, I say this is accountability we knew we had but had not allowed ourselves to accept.

We older people say and hear people say, thank God for the young people, maybe people will listen to them. They give me hope. And we hear Thunberg’s words, “We don’t want you to be hopeful. . . . I want you to act as if your house is on fire. Because it is.”

And I am heartened by her words, and I am challenged anew to do the Great Work.