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## Crunch Time to Make A Change

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It seems like every day I wake up to a ding from my phone signalling a new setback on environmental protections. Twelve years rings through my head; twelve years until the earth is damaged beyond repair. The haunting images and videos of whales caught in plastic fishing nets and orangutans fighting bulldozers rock me to the core. The future seems to be decided by those who will not be here to see the impacts of their harm. Now, with social media spreading news faster than ever, teenagers are no longer shielded from the world's problems, and can see not only the environmental issues, but women's rights, LGBTQ+, and gun protections being neglected and repealed before we can raise our voices and make a change ourselves. The expectation that we will be the change makers and the ones to fix the problems depends on one question: can we get there in time?

As someone who grew with the love of animals deep within my family's values, I wonder how people seem to disregard the importance of how animals' well-being directly correlates with our own. Whether it be visiting wildlife preserves, or almost falling out of a boat to try to see the dolphins more carefully, my experiences taught me to lead with love, and prepare for a life advocating for the animals and the environment I care about so much. During my sophomore year, I started my path to help marine mammals by founding a club to raise money and awareness for the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito. The Pacific Coast Critters Club fundraises by selling "fish food for Rowdy", the mascot seal we are saving. I cannot count how many times I have shouted "One dollar buys one pound of fish for the seals", trying to coerce the land-locked Sacramento-natives to care about marine mammals. Last summer, I participated in a program called COSMOS at UC Santa Cruz and gained experience in Marine Biology both in the field and classroom, like doing a thermodynamics lab with a bottlenose dolphin, or identifying animals while whale-watching. The program, led by college professors and research scientists, confirmed that this is the life I want to pursue. With practical skills and experiences under my belt, the environmental problems we face no longer seem so out of reach; instead, they serve as inspiration to create radical progress in the future.

Now, it's game time, and teenagers are growing up to become unstoppable voices in our society. Boundaries and barriers are being broken due to our unwillingness to take no for an answer, as we are magnifying our platform on social media and beyond to create real change. We will be seen and heard, and the voices of minorities and women will bring new energy to tackle our nation's problems. And for those growing up as we stand up and speak out, I hope they find their passion and pursue it unequivocally – drowning out the noise of those with limited conceptions of what's possible.