



We Will Rock This!

**Linus Dolder
Switzerland**

Linus Dolder has been an environmentalist from an early age. It all began with a letter that arrived at his house one day: it wasn't meant for him. It was actually addressed to his mother, but Linus saw it first. This was before he knew how to read, but his interest was piqued by the picture on the envelope: it was of a dead turtle, tangled up in a fishnet.

Linus asked his big brother to open the letter and read it out loud to him. What he heard shocked him: it was a report about how big industries were emitting chemicals and toxic waste, and using the planet as a garbage dump. "I just really wanted to do something about it," Linus says. "I wanted to know why these companies were doing something so destructive; something that would cause so much damage."

Now 17, that feeling of outrage, he says, has remained with him to this day.

Linus sprang into action. He got together with a couple of friends and started baking. Their idea was simple – they would bake delicious cookies, sell them, and donate their earnings to environmental organizations, for projects that were fighting against climate change. Sometimes, Linus would also play the accordion. His parents supported him, not only by allowing him to take over the kitchen for his baking projects, but also by challenging him in his convictions.

"They're supportive, they often say, it's great what you're doing," he says. "But they also question me, and help me to reflect on what I'm doing." The animated debates over many family meals helped Linus strengthen his ability to justify the positions he takes. They would talk about activism and civil disobedience or discuss the roots of the climate crisis in our economic system. Once, Linus wanted to discuss Obama's foreign policy at 7am, before his mother had had her coffee. "She was a bit overwhelmed, although she is normally an early riser," he says. "I think these discussions were kind of a nice training for activism."

One day Linus started to realize how the environment right in his own back yard was rapidly changing. Since he was a small child, he'd loved looking out his bedroom window at the snowy peaks of the Bernese mountains, rising majestically above the clear blue water of Lake Thun, a layer of snow and ice covering the mountaintops. But he began to notice a change in the picturesque landscape. He could see that the snow and ice, which had appeared so ageless and so immovable to him all of his life, was slowly starting to disappear.

Linus knows these mountains well: he is a good skier, and he often hikes in the mountains with his family. He cherishes a memory from one family trek to the Aletsch glacier, the largest glacier in the Alps, near his home. His parents had taken a picture of him and his brother there, with the mighty glacier in the background, when they were young children. Ten years later, they took another picture of them, standing in the same place. This photo would prove to Linus that the climate crisis had arrived at his doorstep. Something had changed.

"There was no glacier in the background anymore," he says, sadly. "It was just gone."

Once he realized that the snowcaps on the summits of the Bernese mountains really *were* slowly disappearing, baking alone no longer seemed a sufficient response. So, in December 2018, right before the Christmas break, Linus once more got together with a couple of his friends: and this time they decided they would call for a climate strike in Thun.

It was a Wednesday night when Linus asked around in his school who would join in a climate strike the next day. Sixty people said they would join. But that wasn't enough for Linus and his friends-- they wanted to have an even bigger event. So they printed flyers, sent a press release to the local newspaper, asked everyone to tell their friends and family, and to help them spread the word in their sports clubs and music groups. For the next event, 800 people turned up.

"We all felt so empowered, because we just put tons of effort in," Linus says. "We got young people to take to the streets all over Switzerland. We got them to raise their voices. It felt so great!"

Although Linus got the climate strikes started in his hometown, he feels that much more needs to be done. As a youth movement, he and others have managed to spread the word and get their message out: *Climate Action Now!* "That should have been the point where the government takes action," he says. "But I feel like we are the ones who have to do it, because we are the ones left that will be left with the pieces if nothing happens."

With its 40,000 inhabitants, the small city of Thun isn't exactly the most likely epicenter of climate activism in the country. "Switzerland has the second largest GDP per capita in the world," Linus says. "To me, that means it has a special responsibility in the fight against climate change. It's just so frustrating that they seem to not care." He adds, "We now *know* that this can be different: the climate strikes have moved online because of COVID-19. This has led governments around the world to take unprecedented action."

For Linus, this goes to show that if governments want to act, they can. He points out that industrialized countries, including Switzerland, have contributed the most to the situation we're in. So they are the ones who should be leading the effort to fight climate change. But at the moment, they are failing to fulfill even their meager commitments to help less developed countries with the loss and damages caused by the climate crisis. In 2015, at COP 21 in Paris, a hundred billion dollars were pledged to support the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. But the money has never arrived.

"One hundred billion dollars is actually the budget that's spent on nuclear weapons every year," said Linus. "That's just kind of killing me, how they set priorities."

Luckily, Linus is not alone in his outrage. In an article for the German newspaper *taz*, Linus described his experience participating in the events surrounding the COP 25 negotiations in Madrid in 2019. There, climate strikers from all continents came together to share their experiences and perspectives on the climate crisis. They got up at seven in the morning for working sessions on strategy and communications, and met with activists and politicians. They even met with Svenja Schulze, the German Minister of the Environment to plead their case and demand urgent action.

"Campaigning is interesting for me," Linus says. "Thinking of which groups of society you want to address, what the message is, what the key points are if we want them to come to the strikes."

In March 2020 Linus went to Brussels with Fridays for Future representatives from all across Europe, to demand urgent climate action from the European Union. "It was amazing to see people out on the streets for climate justice - we will fight until we win," he says. Since many of the events had been cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the European parliament instead came to meet with these youth, to discuss the European green deal. "The Green Deal carbon emissions reduction targets are too low, 55% by 2050 is NOT enough," Linus says. "Governments must increase their ambition for 2030 targets if we are to keep global temperatures under 1.5 degrees."

Of course campaigning and activism take time. That is why Linus's high school agreed to give him academic leave for one semester. He is now a full-time activist and plans to spend some of his time in France to work on his language skills. He knows that this will be time well spent. "With good campaigning and smart strategic moves, we're actually able to change some things," he says. And he adds, "There is nothing, at the moment, that makes me happier."

Linus's dedication to activism means that he has less time for his hobbies, like photography, basketball, and skiing. But he knows that it is a race against time to save the snowy peaks he loves. He also knows that he is not alone in this fight. "To all the amazing activists and trailblazers out there: we will rock this," he says. "We will keep fighting until we win!"

And to everyone else, he adds, “You do have a voice; and of course you want a future. So use the former to protect the latter!”

In the Andes and the Alps I have seen melting glaciers.

At both the Earth’s poles, I have seen open seas where ice once dominated the horizon.

Ban Ki-Moon, United Nations Secretary General

Call to Action: Speak up. You will find people who are willing to stand with you in the fight against climate change. www.fridaysforfuture.org. You can follow Linus on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/linusdolder> and @linusdolder

Stone Soup Leadership Institute
www.stonesoupleadership.org
www.soup4youngworld.com