

Opinion

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Greta Thunberg and the lessons of the sea

A trans-Atlantic crossing by boat can teach us about confronting the global warming crisis

ANDREW C REVKIN

GRETA THUNBERG, THE 16-year-old Swedish climate activist, represents many things to many factions in the fight to slow human-driven global warming.

Some see her as a manipulated totem. Others, as a hero. I'm among those who see great value in Thunberg's sharp prod to the status quo, though I see the greatest value in climate strikes pressing for global action if they are coupled with local efforts for clean-energy progress. (Why not, for instance, call attention to the mostly-fossil-fueled boiler rooms heating and cooling schools, homes and workplaces.)

Perhaps it's worth focusing on some lessons that might be learned from her choice of transportation. Thunberg and her father arrived in Manhattan on Wednesday after a 15-day crossing of the Atlantic from Britain as passengers on a spartan, high-tech multi-million-dollar ocean-racing yacht. She's here to help lead climate strikes on Sept 20 and 27 demanding an end to the use of fossil fuels and speak in between at the United Nations Climate Action Summit and other events. Her decision to make the trip under sail has been both hailed for highlighting low-emissions lifestyle choices and derided as showmanship. Indeed, the aviation emissions of an army of journalists flying to cover her arrival and the summit eclipsed any savings her crossing achieved.

But there are other lessons that can be learned in an ocean crossing like hers. In 1978, when I was 22, six years older than Greta is now, I serendipitously had the chance to sign on as a crew member on a 55-foot-long, partially home-built sailboat, the *Wanderlust*, that was circumnavigating the planet. A "crew wanted" sign on a wharf along the harbor in Auckland, New Zealand, led me to the vessel, which hailed from Sacramento and consisted of an unusual ferrocement hull (cement smeared on a steel frame) and an equally odd assortment of fittings. The mast was a surplus highway light pole.

I left the boat 17 months, 15,000 miles, 15 countries and several close calls later, in what was then Yugoslavia. The intervening experiences shifted my career ambition from marine biology to environmental journalism. Here's a bit of what I learned, lessons that seem applicable to efforts to build wider momentum behind cutting greenhouse gas emissions and reducing climate risks.



Sixteen-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg sails on the Malizia II racing yacht in New York Harbor as she nears the completion of her trans-Atlantic crossing to attend the UN summit on climate change in New York

Tight quarters need compromise

Our first long crossing, from Auckland to Sydney, Australia, was the stormiest. We spent eight out of 11 days on the Tasman Sea pounding into chaotic gale-driven seas. Without GPS or an autopilot, we had taken on extra crew members to handle the night watches. In cramped conditions day after day, everyone aboard felt unfairly overtaxed. But you learn to smooth rough edges, tamp hard feelings and not hoard the Hershey bars. This gets to my first point. In hashing out climate policy, accommodation is vital among those who have the same goal but differ on how to reach it. I'm thinking here, for instance, of clean energy advocates who disagree about the role of nuclear power in reducing emissions. It's vital to acknowledge the inevitability, even desirability, of having a diversity of climate solutions.

Panic doesn't help

When a rogue wave blew in a porthole crossing the Tasman, a piston-like column of green water blasted in every few seconds. A similar porthole incident happened more than a year later in the Red Sea. Each time, the skipper, who had spent years as a handyman in Santa Cruz, California, had an astonishing ability to assess the situation, identify a fix and hand out orders. When his calm demeanour caught my attention, I stopped flailing around and focused on my task.

Many pressing for a Green New Deal of any sort have tried changing the global warming hashtag from #climatechange to #climateemergency. Whatever you call this moment, it took more than a century for the world to become dependent on fossil fuels and, as the Paris Agreement on climate change recognised and Axios just reported, it will take decades to move the global economy to clean energy and cut or collect tens of billions of tons of annual emissions of carbon dioxide. Urgency has to be blended with patience.

Vastness has limits

At sea, I experienced the full sense of the size and depth of the oceans when we were becalmed for several days halfway across the western Indian Ocean. To cool off, wash and pass the time we went swimming — in water 14,300 feet deep. But vastness has limits. Long before today's "planet or plastic" campaigns, we encountered jarring evidence of the activities of man even on isolated island beaches that rarely saw a footprint. Anchoring off a remote beach on Mount Adolphus Island in the Torres Strait between Australia's Cape York and Papua New Guinea, we collected a dizzying array of plastic flotsam.

With the atmosphere, humans could be perceived as a minuscule influence, having raised levels of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from only 280 to 410 parts per million since the industrial revolution. But that increase has had an outsized influence on the global thermostat. It's

been three million years since the planet last hit that concentration and we're on the path toward doubling preindustrial carbon dioxide within decades.

Vastness can deceive

On a fateful night heading through the Gulf of Patras in Greece toward the Adriatic, I was alone at the wheel, with everyone else asleep below, as a violent gale built behind us. I was unsure whether to keep the lighted buoy ahead to port or starboard. I guessed wrong and we ended up aground on a sandbar, pounded by ferocious waves. We were towed to safety, spent a month repairing the cracked cement hull, nervously relaunched and sailed on. The cracks did not re-form. But I was slowly realising that I needed to get home to build a career. Decades later, those powerful memories and lessons from life at sea still shape my life and how I view the path ahead. Greta Thunberg's journey so far has had a rocket-like trajectory. Her voice and those of other young climate activists deserve amplification. They represent generations who will inherit the climate we're shaping today.

But the task of building a sustainable relationship with the climate requires all of us to push off from comfortable shores, respect (if not embrace) the diversity of views of fellow passengers, share our vessel's finite resources and — most important — avoid panic and get down to work.

—NYT



INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Shah's new role

Amit Shah's responsibilities are increasing. Apart from being home minister, he is also a member of all eight cabinet committees. In addition, he spends around two-and-a-half hours a day handling party affairs. Although party working president J P Nadda is to eventually replace Shah, until now Shah continues to call the shots. Recently, Shah has taken on yet another onerous duty, a fact which has escaped the attention of most. As home minister, he is now in charge of the police force in Jammu and Kashmir. The state has been divided into two union territories and hence law and order comes under the purview of the home ministry in Delhi, as in the case of other UTs such as Delhi and Puducherry.

Egalitarian funeral

At Arun Jaitley's funeral at Delhi's Nigambodh Ghat, the VVIPs, whether chief ministers or central ministers, did not try to pull rank but mingled freely with other mourners. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman stood throughout the ceremony refusing to take the seat offered to her, as did Smriti Irani. Chief ministers such as Devendra Fadnis, Manohar Lal Khattar, Nitish Kumar and Vijay Rupani came without any escorts and were left to fend for themselves.

A thunderstorm broke out towards the end of the ceremony after the funeral pyre was lit. Amit Shah set an example by refusing to budge from his seat even though he was completely drenched. Rajnath Singh sitting next to him followed suit. Even when the chief ministers and central ministers were leaving the venue there were few umbrellas to hand around. Khattar could be seen manfully holding up his pajamas and trying to wade through the water, while Sushil Modi sat patiently in a spot with overhead cover waiting for the rains to subside. The egalitarianism of Modi's ministers was commendable, although at the same time one could not help wondering whether the lack of any real security was advisable in such sensitive times. Many read the rain shower, which was curiously confined only to the funeral ground and did not douse the flames of the covered pyre, as a good omen.

Grace under fire

Behind every great man there is usually an inspiring wife. Sangeeta Jaitley, known universally as Dolly, was Arun Jaitley's anchor who conducted herself with amazing dignity and grace during his long bout with illness. Despite the trials and tribulations she faced, she

kept a composed front and was even the caring hostess to the stream of visitors who came calling at her house enquiring about her husband's health. Once asked how she coped, she replied simply, "What choice do I have?" In fact, Dolly was trained to take over the responsibilities of running a politician's household early in life. At a young age she served as political hostess for her father Girdhari Lal Dogra, a freedom fighter and an eminent Congress leader who was finance minister of J&K for 26 years.

Missing in action

Though BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya is in charge of the BJP's parliamentary office, it was noticeable that he was missing through much of Parliament's budget session, even though he has his own room next to the BJP's parliamentary office. The buzz in the BJP is that Vijayvargiya has retreated into a shell ever since the Prime Minister, at a parliamentary party meeting in which Vijayvargiya was present, lashed out at the behaviour of his son Akash, who had hit a civic official in Indore with a cricket bat. Modi said pointedly that anyone indulging in such antics should be taken to task no matter whose son he was.

New position?

Expenditure secretary G C Murmu, a Gujarat-cadre IAS officer, is due to retire this November. A favourite of both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah, Murmu is expected to be appointed to the Central Vigilance Commission, the powerful statutory apex body which monitors central government corruption.

Nipped in bud

The nascent rebellion in the BJP's Karnataka unit was nipped in the bud by Amit Shah and the party general secretary (organisation), B L Santosh. Shah made it clear to the five ministers who publicly displayed their unhappiness for not being adequately rewarded with a deputy chief minister's position, that they could be thrown out of the party. Santosh warned that the party was prepared for fresh elections. Anger in the Karnataka BJP is intense over the appointment of Laxman Savadi as a deputy CM. Savadi is not even an MLA and gained notoriety after once being photographed watching porn in the assembly. Since Savadi is a Lingayat, the party seems to feel he can be groomed for an important role when CM B S Yediyurappa retires. Also Savadi is from Belgaum where the BJP wants to cut to size two powerful political families.

The special one

With regards to Ben Stokes, the two rivals—Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt—are on the same page

RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty



BEN STOKES IS the glue that binds Britain at the time of Brexit.

Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt are Tory colleagues, who became leadership rivals over how Britain should leave the European Union. Johnson sticks to the October 31 deadline, "deal or no deal". Hunt called it a "fake deadline". Johnson went on to become the Prime Minister, probably much to Hunt's chagrin, after Theresa May stepped down as the leader of the Conservative Party. With regards to Stokes, however, the two rivals are on the same page. Both want the Christchurch-born England allrounder to be Knighted.

Stokes became England's national hero after he anchored his team and helped them win an epic World Cup final on boundary count-back. It was his redemption. Three years ago, in the World T20 final against West Indies at Eden Gardens, he couldn't defend 19 runs in

the final over, as Carlos Brathwaite gazumped England's party with four sixes on the spin. Stokes sat on his haunches and looked distraught.

The affray charge following a fight near a Bristol nightclub in September 2017 was the lowest point of his career. He went through an 11-month ordeal, missed an Ashes series, before being found not guilty. Stokes had a duty to make up for lost time. The Headingley Test during the ongoing Ashes series saw his entry into cricketing folklore.

The *Guardian* called it 'the miracle at Headingley'. His 135 not out in the second innings was indeed once-in-a-lifetime innings. Chasing 259 for victory, England slumped to 286 for nine. Then, the magic began. Stokes added 76 runs for the last wicket with Jack Leach to make the improbable happen. England stayed alive in the series. He enjoyed the rub of the green. Fortune favoured the brave.

Thirty-eight years ago, Headingley had witnessed the batting sorcery of Ian Botham. In 1981 also, England were about to go two down in the Ashes. And staring at an innings defeat, with his team reeling on 135 for seven, the great man scored a magical 149 off 148 balls,



hitting 27 fours. Botham's innings, however, didn't win the game for England, for Australia still needed only 130 runs in the fourth innings to wrap up the Test. Bob Willis's eight for 43 knocked them over.

Little wonder then that Botham's captain in that game, Mike Brearley, gave Stokes's performance a higher rating. "It is hard to believe Stokes' could ever have been, or even ever will be, surpassed," Brearley wrote on *The Times*. The former England captain painted a picture. "Vivid though the images from the distant past are, mental pictures of rampaging bowling and batting by all three iconic all-rounders, it is difficult now to remove from the front of my mind the shock, the exhilaration, of the recent: the sheer improbability of Stokes's performance at Headingley last week."

Stokes evoked the memories of Botham. He, in fact, surpassed it. "It changed my life overnight. I think Ben's life will be the same. He will have no private life. He has to get used to that and so do the family. He is public property but it is a great place to be in for the long term. It will set him up for life. He will reap the rewards which he richly deserves and he is now a world, box-office attraction," the great allrounder told *Telegraph Sport*.

Even Geoffrey Boycott called it "the best I've seen in over 50 years". Bottom line is that English sport got a true special one, not a self-styled moniker. But it would be more logical to savour Stokes's

effort rather than going into comparisons. VVS Laxman's 281 against Australia at Eden Gardens and Brian Lara's 153 not out in West Indies' one wicket win over Australia in 1999 at Kensington Oval, too, will have many backers.

"The next Botham" tag weighed heavy on far too many England all-rounders. The Headingley heroic did a great favour to Stokes. He has now completely emerged from Botham's shadow. Also, his innings came on the heels of the World Cup final and hopefully it has done enough to take cricket back to the English living rooms.

Stokes, meanwhile, has set his sights on regaining the Ashes. "I will only take real satisfaction from the innings if we win back the Ashes. It was an amazing week in Headingley and something that will be very hard to forget, but we still have a long way to go. Momentum is huge in sport and I'm 100% sure when Stuart Broad got out, Australia would have thought they would have the Ashes by the end of the day, so we go into the next match with a lot of confidence," he told *Sky Sports News*.

After three matches, the series is tied at 1-1. The momentum is now with the hosts and if they go on and win the Ashes, Prime Minister Johnson, Hunt and the Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn will all approve an open top bus parade in unison. On a lighter note, the Queen might defer the prorogation of the parliament to allow the MPs hail the triumph.