



Kid Warrior

Boulder's 15-year-old Xuihtezcatl Roske-Martinez just may be one of the most influential environmental activists in the world. BY LORI DEBOER

When asked about when he first became interested in saving the planet, 15-year-old Xuihtezcatl Roske-Martinez shrugs. It's been on his mind for as long as he can remember.

"Living in Boulder and being outside all the time, being on the mountains and being in the forest inspired me," he says. "So, learning about the destruction of the planet prompted me to take action and do something about it."

He first spoke out at a rally in Boulder when he six years old and the video is still floating around the Internet. Looking somber and cute in his long hair, Xuihtezcatl speaks clearly into a microphone, only occasionally referring to his notes, and gets applause from the crowd.

After that initial speaking opportunity, he became involved in local environmental campaigns, including banning bee-killing pesticides, discouraging the use of plastic bags by adding a fee, and standing up against fracking. He lent his energies in the fight to end Boulder's contract with Xcel Energy to pursue renewable energy possibilities.

He naturally became involved Earth Guardians, an organization his mother Tamara Roske formed in Hawaii before he was born, which started as a school but now takes on a number of environmental projects. There are now more than 600 Earth Guardian chapters all over the world, he says.

"That's how we first got started—local action with my friends," he says. "Now it's grown to hundreds of thousands around the world."

Today he's the youth director of Earth Guardians and it would not be an exaggeration to say he's one of most influential environmental activists in the world. His calm and impassioned presence makes him a favorite speaker at climate change rallies and conferences.

His work often brings him in contact with celebrities. He met Robert Redford while speaking for the third time at the United Nations and there's a charming photo of the two interacting with each other, while his mother snaps a photo in the background. He was featured in *Rolling Stone* and has earned the moniker of Kid Warrior, a nod to the Aztec heritage passed down from his father, Siri Martinez. His honors include being named to the Campaign for Presidential Youth Council as one of 24 Under 24 youth leaders, a United States Community Service Award from President Obama and a \$25,000 fellowship from Peace First. He also attended the COP21 talks on climate change in Paris.

Roske-Martinez isn't one to sit around, so it's no surprise he's thrown in with 21 other young people in a landmark lawsuit against the United States government, filed with the assistance of the Oregon-based non-profit Our Children's Trust. The suit claims that their generation has been deprived of their constitutional rights to life, liberty and property because the government has caused climate change and failed to protect essential resources in the public trust.

He enjoys the connection he has with other activists and is non-plussed by speaking in front of international movers and shakers.

"I think high school is probably more intimidating than the United Nations," he says, with a laugh. "I don't get shy, I don't prepare speeches anymore, I just speak from the heart."

A student at the Watershed School, Roske-Martinez has clearly sacrificed some of his childhood to maintain a mad schedule of appearances, interviews and activist responsibilities. He believes in balance. He loves eating waffles, skating and hanging out with his friends.

"I'm definitely making time to be a kid," he says. "The world is depressing, and keeping your head up and doing stuff that makes you happy is important."

A classical pianist by training, he's most recently gotten into writing and performing socially conscious hip-hop.

He performs with his brother, Itzcuahtli, also a climate activist, who made the news for going on a 45-day silence strike, and his sister, Isa, as well as "whatever artists are floating through town." He has a small studio in the basement of his North Boulder home, where he produces all his own songs. He's recorded two singles with Far and Away Studios in Boulder, "Tick Tock" and "I Am."

"I've been involved in writing music the last year and using that as a tool to talk about the work we are doing," he says. "We've played shows all over the world with incredible artists. There's suddenly a lot of support with our music."

He believes that youth voices are vital to saving the planet. "We have a generation of creative entrepreneurs," Roske-Martinez says. "All these things that make us strong as a generation, offer us an opportunity to make the greatest difference of all time." **B**