

# Temple Grandin returns to her N.H. school with a message for neurodivergent youth: ‘Sky’s the limit’

Grandin considers the early years she spent in N.H. as one of the most formative experiences of her life

By [Amanda Gokee](#) Globe Staff, Updated April 21, 2026, 5:55 a.m.

[Temple Grandin](#) was living at a small boarding school for neurodiverse students in Rindge, N.H., when she first worked with horses and found the subject she would go on to pursue for the rest of her life.

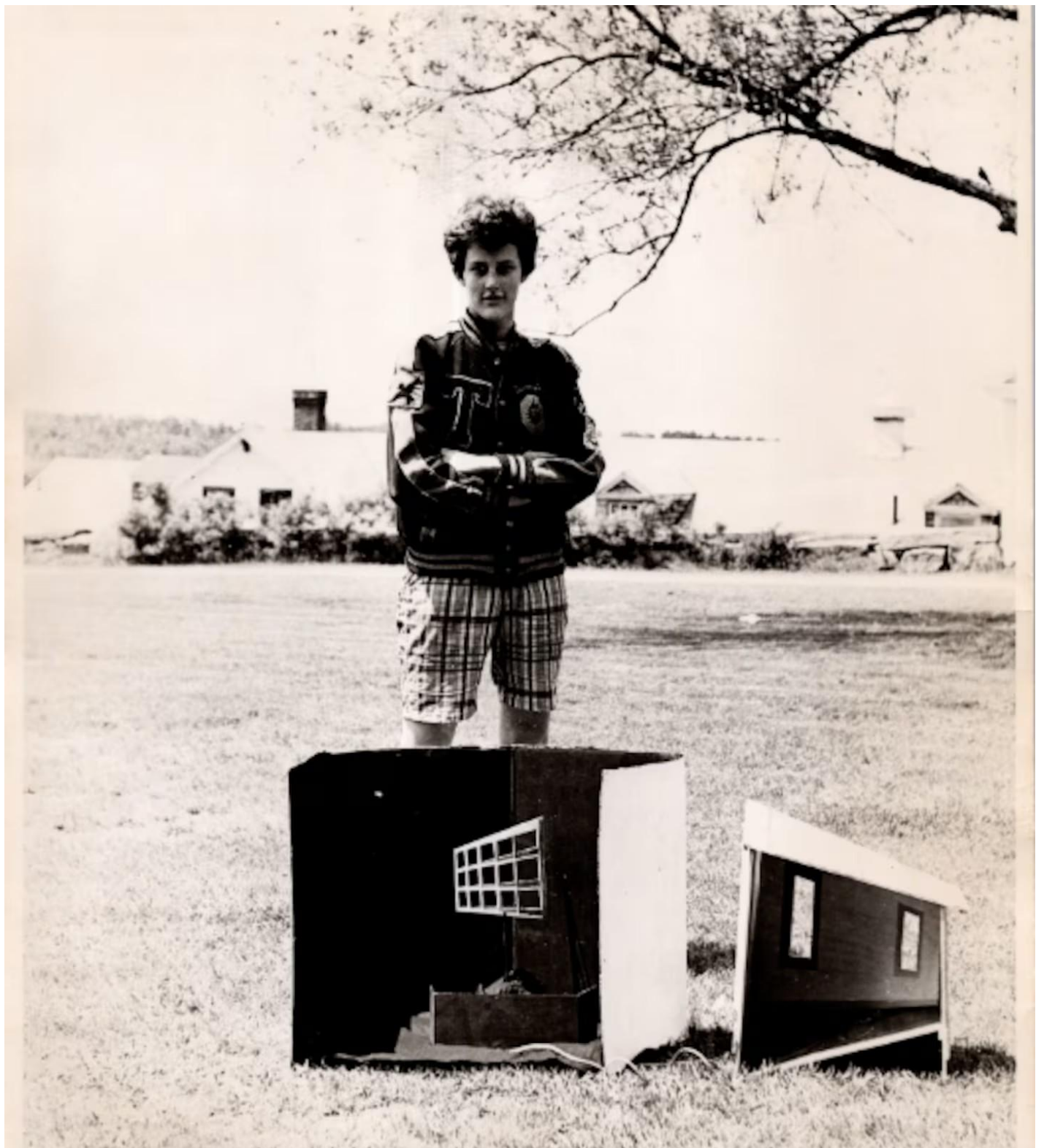
In the years since, Grandin has become renowned for her work on [humane livestock handling](#) in addition to her advocacy around [autism](#).

Now, six decades since she was a student at [Hampshire Country School](#), she’s returning on April 22 with a message for the next generation of [neurodivergent](#) youth: The world desperately needs people like you who think differently.

“You need both kinds of minds,” said Grandin, who considers herself a visual thinker, processing information through pictures, as opposed to a verbal thinker who processes information through language.

But Grandin, who is autistic, is concerned that neither the education system nor the broader society is uplifting those who think differently.

“I’m very concerned we’re screening out our visual thinkers,” she said in an interview with the Globe.



Temple Grandin is pictured during her days at Hampshire Country School in the 1960s. HAMPSHIRE COUNTRY SCHOOL

Before enrolling in Hampshire Country School at the age of 14, Grandin said things went poorly at the regular school she attended in Massachusetts, where she was bullied and teased for being the “weird kid.”

Finally, she said, she got kicked out after hurling a book at another girl who called her a derogatory name. She said her mother found three alternative schools and let her choose where she wanted to go.

Hampshire Country School appealed in part, she said, because of [the animals](#) that live on the property. Even so, Grandin said, she was not eager to go to the boarding school. But after she started, she said, two factors fundamentally changed her relationship to education — a science teacher who mentored her and the opportunity to work with the school's horses.

She had big responsibilities at the horse barn — feeding the horses, cleaning their stalls, and letting them in and out, hard work that gave her the opportunity to ride. Working with the horses helped her develop her character and a strong work ethic, and riding horses was one of the few places where she made friends, Grandin said.

She considers her time at the school one of the most formative experiences of her life, where she transformed from a poor student into a motivated one.

She went on to graduate from Franklin Pierce University in Rindge in 1970 and later earned a PhD in animal science from the University of Illinois. She's become known for her work with cattle and her efforts to design humane slaughtering facilities. She is now a distinguished professor of animal science at Colorado State University and travels frequently for speaking engagements around the country.

One of her concerns is that children aren't getting the same kind of broad exposure they need to discover their talents in the way she did, as [technological escapes](#) like video games and phones have proliferated.

"We've got to get kids back doing more real things," she said.

Hampshire Country School has changed since the days when Grandin was a student there. There are fewer students, and the school only accepts boys. On a return trip about

a decade ago, Grandin was upset to learn that the horse barn had burned down.

But it's still a place that is tailored to students with learning differences who often struggled in conventional schools. And the private school, which serves students from third through 12th grade, still has a functioning small-scale farm with cattle, pigs, and a garden where students can learn about sustainable agriculture.



A working farm at Hampshire Country School provides outdoor learning possibilities and the opportunity for students to co-regulate with livestock. HAMPSHIRE COUNTRY SCHOOL

Lucy Pritzker said her son's intense interest in insects was restricted in public school, where he only had permission to talk about it twice per day — any more than that and there would be consequences. But at Hampshire Country School, Pritzker said, her son's expertise was valued: A teacher instructed another student to use her son as a primary source for a report on the very insects he was most knowledgeable about.

The school charges tuition of \$86,500 per year and offers extremely small classes that typically only have three to six students. Overall, there are fewer than 20 students

enrolled in the school. Pritzker said the staff is versed in working with neurodivergent students like her son by creating a predictable environment and recognizing students' sensory sensitivities.

“I feel like the Hampshire Country School saved his life, but it also saved my life,” said Pritzker, who is now a school board member.

Her son has since graduated, earned a master's degree, and recently married the love of his life, Pritzker said. She credits the school for instilling in him the expectation that he will thrive, rather than seeing himself as a problem.

Pritzker hopes Grandin's visit will help reaffirm for others that neurodiversity can be a positive attribute.

“Temple really speaks about that and really embodies that,” she said.

While the school long sought to maintain a low profile, a new generation of leadership is now taking a different, more public approach, according to Matt Schmitz, board chair of the Hampshire Country School. That new approach includes inviting speakers like Grandin and starting a broader conversation with the surrounding community.

“This is a school that wants to be known and wants you to know us and we want to know you,” he said.

Schmitz hopes Grandin's visit can show young people who are neurodivergent that “the sky's the limit for them in terms of what they can do.”

“I'd like the kids to first walk away with a sense of optimism about who they are and what they can do,” he said. And he hopes the faculty will leave feeling invigorated about the impact they can have on young people.

Nationally, the conversation around autism and neurodivergence has evolved significantly since Grandin's days in New Hampshire.

There's increased awareness about autism, and more people are being diagnosed with it than before.

But the [increase in diagnoses](#) doesn't mean that more people have the traits of autism in the population, according to Caroline Robertson, associate professor of psychological and brain sciences at Dartmouth College who directs the Dartmouth Autism Research Initiative. In fact, she said, the prevalence of neurodiverse traits has remained relatively stable over time.

Robertson said the term neurodiversity was first used as a social concept to recognize that variation in cognitive styles is part of the normal range of human difference. Her research is focused on using science to show how neurodiversity shows up as biological differences in people's brains.

When it comes to education, she said, classrooms need to recognize that children have a variety of learning styles and work to meet children where they are.

"The key concept is that not every child learns the same way," she said.

In practice that means embracing multiple ways of learning in any classroom setting, according to Robertson.

Robertson said Grandin has been an icon for neurodiversity even before the term was commonly used.

"Today, it's just caught fire," she said. "Any college classroom that I teach in today, many students identify as neurodiverse in some way."

*Robertson and Grandin will both appear at a symposium about young neurodivergent learners on April 22 at The Park Theatre in Jaffrey. [More information is available online.](#)*