



DINING for WOMEN

Making Connections

November 2006

KENYA

God created the primordial parents, Gikuyu and Mumbi, and from Mount Kenya showed them the land on which they were to settle: west from Mount Kenya to the Aberdares [mountain range], on to Ngong Hills and Kilimambogo, then north to Garbatula. Together, Gikuyu and Mumbi had ten daughters—Wanjiru, Wambui, Wangari, Wanjiku, Wangui, Wangeci, Wanjeri, Nyambura, Wairimu, and Wamuyu—but they had no sons. The legend goes that, when the time came for the daughters to marry, Gikuyu prayed to God under a holy fig tree, mugumo, as was his tradition, to send him sons-in-law. God told him to instruct nine of his daughters—the tenth was too young to be married—to go into the forest and to each cut a stick as long as she was tall. When the daughters returned, Gikuyu took the sticks and with them built an altar under the mugumo tree, on which he sacrificed a lamb. As the fire was consuming the lamb's body, nine men appeared and walked out of the flames.

Gikuyu took them home and each daughter married the man who was the same height as she was, and together they gave rise to the ten clans to which all Kikuyus belong. (Even though the youngest daughter, Wamuyu, did not get married, she did have children.) Each clan is known for a particular trade or quality, such as prophecy, craftsmanship, and medicine. My clan, Anjiru, is associated with leadership. The daughters made the clans matrilineal, but many privileges, such as inheritance and ownership of land, livestock, and perennial crops, were gradually transferred to men. It is not explained how women lost their rights and privileges.

--from the Kikuyu creation story, as told by Wangari Maathai

Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai is a devout Christian; but the ancient stories and traditions of her Kikuyu ancestors have helped informed her commitment to the environment and to women as well. As the myth taught her, women and trees have been connected for a long time. Last March, *MC* focused on Kenya. In that edition, we mentioned Maathai and her Green Belt Movement of women foresters leading a revival of Kenya's natural resources. This month, we're back in Kenya and supporting the work of Maathai through the African Millennium Foundation. Since many of our chapters are new since March and some of the older ones may not have been used to reading *MC* then (that was only the second edition), we encourage you to go back to that edition (still available on the funding schedule webpage). There you'll find information about some of the challenges that Kenyan women face and how they are meeting them. You'll find book and dining recommendations, as usual. In this edition, we'll discuss connections between the empowering women and environmentalism, add to our March dining suggestions and book recommendations, and offer some suggestions for really good holiday gifts. As usual, we'll "hear" from Kenyan women and particularly from Wangari Maathai herself.

FOCUS: Women and Environmentalism

In our review issue of *MC* in June, among the dozen ideas that seem to apply to the situations of women in the countries we've studied was this one: "What's good for the environment is often what's good for women." The Green Belt Movement and others like it, embody this idea. Sadly, it is only one side of Kenyan women's experience. Far too many Kenyan women are experiencing the connection between devastation of the environment and destruction of their lives.

MC March highlighted the challenges of Kenyan women as they reevaluate customs and traditions deeply engrained in their culture. We examined links between lack of property rights, the plight of women farmers, the customs of "wife inheritance" and FGM, and the alarming spread of AIDS among women. We can add to that linkage environmental decay.

Wangari Maathai first noticed the link between women's hardships and environmental problems when women began to tell her that they had to walk further and further away from their homes to find firewood, as the forests were disappearing. A recent report by National Public Radio tells of another tragic example. In the Suba district of western Kenyan, along the banks of Lake Victoria, nearly half of all women are infected with HIV. So many women are dying of AIDS that the number of orphans with no one to care for them is overwhelming. The very sad irony is that many of these women contracted AIDS because they were desperately trying to take care of their children.

Fishing the lifeline for people in this area. People there tend small gardens of greens and other vegetables, but they depend on the fish from the Lake for their main sustenance in this remote area. Men, often very young men, dominate fishing. Women who are widowed or unmarried must buy fish, but it is often unaffordable for poor women and getting even more so because the Lake is in decline.

Many years ago, Nile perch and Nile tilapia were introduced into Lake Victoria. Along with overfishing and pollution, these non-native species have wreaked havoc in the Lake ecology, depopulating native fish species and depleting important aquatic plants. The fish industry is in trouble and even supplies of Nile perch are down. Of course, when supply is down, price goes up.

Women just trying to feed their children are left with no choice but to follow the old custom in the area: trade sex for food. Too often, they wind up paying a far higher price in contracting HIV. In a related NPR report, Dr. Helen Gayle, President of CARE underlines the importance of "holistic" approaches to AIDS prevention and of taking cultural factors into account, such as the fact that women don't often have a choice about whether they have sex, much less about protection when they do. She notes, with Wangari Maathai, the importance of empowering women to be self-sufficient as well as changing attitudes about old customs and women's roles. She emphasizes beginning with women but also the necessity of changing men as well. In Suba district, aid workers have found women very eager to know their HIV status to learn prevention methods while men have been resistant to awareness efforts.

Ecologists predict that unless dramatic change is made, the great Lake Victoria will die. One wonders if it will outlast the people who inhabit its shores, given the AIDS epidemic there. The bottom line is that people cannot live without the Lake and the Lake—at this point—without people to care for it. Men may still profit from fishing right

now, but the parallel plight of women and the Lake point to a bleak future for nature and human beings unless something is done.

The connection between the well being (and suffering) of women and nature is the focus of a relatively new social movement called “ecofeminism.” First named by a French feminist in 1974, the movement was generated out of concern that environmentalism was overlooking gender as an important consideration. The movement has grown to become multi-dimensional over the decades, according to scholars, Cathleen and Colleen McGuire, taking an “interdisciplinary” approach that combines interests in spirituality, politics, and science among other subjects.

Whatever their focus, all ecofeminists attribute the “twin oppressions” of women and environment to that way of thinking we call “patriarchy.” Particularly, patriarchy’s dualistic worldview—understanding reality in terms of hierarchies that oppose spirit, maleness, and culture to body/matter, femaleness, and nature—makes women and the natural world subordinate to men (or, those in power who think this way) and “higher” concerns. Thus women and nature all too often are objects used in higher male pursuits rather than being valued in themselves. In patriarchy, their well-being is secondary and only important as it relates to male power and productivity.

As the McGuires state, “Ecofeminists are proud of women's unique physiology, and feel that equality with men should not come at the expense of disavowing or understating our physical differences.” They stop short of assuming that women are necessarily more in-tune with nature than men. What they do hold is that women, nature, and all life could be more in harmony when liberated from the hierarchies of patriarchy and the idea that dominance rather than cooperation is the right relationship between human beings and human beings and the nature of which they are part.

Ecofeminism is making its way into development programs. For example, a number of programs now focus on women farmers when only a decade ago gender was never consider a factor in agricultural development (even though the vast majority of farmers are women!). Two of most cited models of ecofeminism in action are India’s Dr. Vandana Shiva and Dr. Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement. The connections her programs make between reforestation and women’s rights, between AIDS awareness, education, empowerment, and environmental care exemplify ecofeminism’s ideals.

And ecofeminism at the grass roots level—women understanding that resurrecting the environment means improving their lives and the lives of their children—is bringing hope for Kenya and Kenyans in some fishing communities not far from Lake Victoria. Journalist Wanzala Bahati Justus recently reported on the Witeko Wetlands Self-Help Organization for *Islam On-Line*. You’ll read a bit more about its catfish-farming project in the *Dining with Women* section. Of the cooperative’s forty members, thirty are women. Like the women of the Green Belt Movement, they are combining AIDS prevention, education, and gender awareness with reviving the environment, building a sustainable livelihood from it, and making it possible for their communities to thrive in it. Women and trees, women and fish, women and life—all are connected.

Book Recommendations

Please see *MC March* for the feature on women’s literature from Kenya. We still highly recommend Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye’s novel, *The Present Moment*. In an appendix at the end of this edition we include some quotations from another book

mentioned in March, Helena Halperin's *I Laugh So I Won't Cry: Kenya's Women Tell the Story of Their Lives*. Halperin spent several years interviewing and re-interviewing Kenyan women from many walks and stages of life. Her book reproduces those interviews and gives us a rare opportunity to hear directly from them.

But how could our "book of the month" be anything other than *Unbowed*, Wangari Maathai's recently released autobiography (Alfred Knopf, 2006)? From the Green Belt Movement website: "In *Unbowed*, Wangari Maathai offers an inspiring message of hope and prosperity through self-sufficiency. We see her studying with Catholic missionaries, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in the United States, and becoming the first woman both to earn a Ph.D. in East and Central Africa and to head a university department in Kenya. We witness her numerous run-ins with the brutal Moi government and she makes clear the political and personal reasons that compelled her, in 1977, to establish the Green Belt Movement."

Socially Responsible Shopping

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It's that time of year, so here's a review of some great gifts ideas we've learned about this year and sources for them. Give a really GOOD gift—and pass on the news about DFW and the women we're supporting as you do. And don't forget your own wish list!

**Organic Cotton Clothing*

<http://www.maggiesorganics.com/index.asp>. Beautiful tops and camisoles for women made by the women of COMAMNUVI in Nicaragua. (We love the criss-cross top especially). Also cotton tights, socks for everybody, darling baby things, and more!

**Fair Trade Coffees*

www.landofathousandhillscoffee.com and www.thousandhillscoffee.com: Rwandan Coffee

<http://www.transfairusa.org/content/shop/coffee.php>: lists sources for coffees from other places we've studied (including Kenya)

**Rwandan Peace Baskets*

<http://www1.macys.com/campaign/rwanda/index.jsp> (see also [gxonline](#) below and coffee sources above)

**Guatemalan Mayan Dolls, Woven Items, Etc.*

<http://www.mayatraditions.com/products.html> offers many Mayan-made items, including many types of weaving. Check out their Maya Doll Project as well.

<http://terraexperience.com/index.html> sells costumes made by Guatemalan women that fit the American Girl and other dolls as well as other Guatemalan crafts and books on Guatemala.

<http://etnyca.com/donation.php> sells Mayan Utzil dolls and contributes to Friendship Bridge's work in Guatemala.

**Everything from Vietnam, Tibet, Uganda...*

<http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/catalog/search.php> our favorite one-stop spot for gift buying. If you want something from a particular locale, just type the country name in the search box.

Two other good sources for artisan-made, fair trade items:

<http://www.gxonlinestore.org/all-vietnam-2.html>

www.oneworldprojects.com

**Books*

Please look back through past editions of MC for great gifts for readers from among our books recommendations for adults and children. (And don't forget the cookbooks mentioned in our Dining with Women sections for those cooks on your gift list.)

**Trees*

Just this week at the UN Conference on Climate Change, Wangari Maathai called on people around the world to plant one billion trees in 2007. Trees absorb trapped greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, which are contributing to global warming. (They can also help prevent erosion and, if placed strategically in your yard, reduce your energy usage and utility bills.) So give a tree or plant a tree this holiday season. You can find more information and register your tree as part of the UN "Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign" at <http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign/>. Countries like Kenya stand to suffer the most from global warming, which is already causing severe drought conditions and starvation there. The United States is the biggest producer of greenhouse gases. Our government has been slow to respond, so let's do our part. As Wangari Maathai says, "This is something anyone can do."

**Homemade Gifts from DFW*

Consider making one of our Dining with Women recipes as a hostess gift or for a party this holiday season. It's a great way to spread the news about DFW and to remember the women we study during the holiday season. Some recipes especially suitable for gifts: Vietnamese Peanut Sauce from *MC* May, Tanzanian Chutney from *MC* June, Mountain Jam—perhaps with a package of Lijit papad—and Nut Barfi from *MC* September, and this month's "Almond Biscuits." The chutney and jam should keep at least a month or so if tightly sealed and refrigerated. You could "process" them if you're into that. The Peanut Sauce should keep a week at least. Barfi, tightly sealed, keeps several weeks. The almond biscuits—couldn't tell you because they always disappear in a couple of days!) All our recipes are designed as "take alongs" suitable for potlucks, parties, etc.

Dining with Women

Two recipes were included in *MC* March that represent the breadth of Kenyan food. Because so many peoples have come there and brought their foods with them, Kenya is a veritable buffet of cuisines—Indian, Portuguese, Middle Eastern, English, and indigenous tribal foods (although they too are heavily indebted to vegetables brought from elsewhere, especially Latin America). Some Kenyans might eat bread and tea for breakfast, a curry kebab at lunch, and *ugali* with stew for dinner. But many Kenyans struggle to find enough of the staple foods that their ancestors survived on; a report in *The Telegraph* in February this year estimated that by year's end, some 12 million East Africans would need food aid due to drought. Worst hit is northern Kenya, with 3.5 million people in need of food.

Most Kenyan women still cook with wood or coal in pots that sit over three-stone hearths. Of course, this has a profound environmental and health impact and the Green Belt Movement and others are attempting to find viable alternatives. Women do most of the cooking as well as the fuel and water gathering, farming, and marketing. In some tribes, men may roast food outdoors; but only women can cook the starches and only in their indoor kitchen space.

Menu: A Buffet of Kenyan Specialties

Kofta Kebabs (See *MC March*. You might serve these with the mountain jam from *MC September*)

Mtuza wa Samaki with Wali wa Nazi (Baked Curry Fish with Coconut Rice)

Kunde (Black-Eyed Pea Stew. See *MC March*)

Ugali and Sukamawiki “Southern Style” (Grits and Greens. You could serve the greens on their own as well.)

Almond-Fig Biscuits with Fruit Salad of bananas, citrus, and mango

Recipes

Mtuza wa Samaki (East African Baked Fish in Curry Sauce)

Adapted from <http://www.blissites.com/kenya/culture/recipes/samaki.html>

Including a catfish main dish in this menu is especially appropriate since we’re supporting the Green Belt Movement this month. Overfishing, the introduction of alien fish species, and other practices detrimental to Kenya’s lakes and rivers have threatened its native fish populations and brought many of its important waterways to near ruin. The introduction of non-native Tilapia, for example, has caused severe environmental problems in Lake Victoria (and in other countries). Some catfish farming projects, such as the Witeko Project in western Kenya, are aiming to provide sustainable (environmentally-friendly) work for communities in wetland areas that have been on the brink of destruction. Catfish is considered a delicacy in western Kenya and here it receives a treatment that comes from Kenya’s coastal region.

BTW: It’s important to know where the fish you purchase comes from—for your own health and the health and welfare of the fishing communities and environs. You can print out an easy pocket-size guide on “good fish” to purchase in your region from

http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/download.asp

Ingredients:

2 lbs. catfish fillets (you could use another mild, white fish)

2 large yellow onions, sliced very thinly

2 T vegetable oil

2 jalapeno peppers, thinly sliced, or 1/2 red pepper flakes (or to taste)

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 large can (28 oz) crushed tomatoes (with the liquid)

3/4 t each: ground cardamom, ground cumin, cinnamon

1 t salt

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease the bottom of a large casserole dish and arrange the fish in it in a single layer.

Heat 2 T oil and add the onion, garlic, and peppers. Cook until softened. Add the other ingredients and heat to a simmer. Pour over fish, cover the casserole dish with foil, and bake until the fish is cooked through, around 30 minutes.

Note: You can substitute chicken or shrimp for the fish, adjusting the cooking time up or down accordingly. Serve with coconut rice. Serves 6-8.

Wali wa Nazi (East African Coconut Rice)

Adapted fr. Fran Osseo-Asare, *Food Culture in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Greenwood Press, 2005)

2 c long grain rice (basmati preferred)

1/2 c diced onion

1T butter

1 can coconut milk (unsweetened—not “cream of coconut”) plus enough water to make 4 cups of liquid

1 t salt

In a large pot (with a lid) saute the onion in the butter until almost soft over med-high heat. Add the rice and stir to coat the grains with the butter. Continuing stirring for about a minute. Add the liquid and salt. Bring to a boil, cover, and turn heat to low. Cook undisturbed for 20 minutes. Turn off the heat and allow to sit, still covered, 5 minutes. Uncover and fluff with a fork.

Grits and Greens

Adapted from www.ansonmills.com

In East Africa, one hasn't eaten if she hasn't had the staple starch of the region. In fact, in most tribal languages the word for the staple starch is also the word for food. Kenyans rely on *ugali* (a thick porridge, usually made from corn) as their staple starch. They also rely on *sukamawiki*, or greens (usually collards or kale) that they cultivate or find growing wild. *Sukamawiki* is also the name given to an everyday dish of greens, onions, tomatoes, and whatever other vegetables and bits of meat they might have on hand. It means “push the week” and often does just that: extend small amounts of ingredients on a limited food budget. Kenyan's would scoop up a portion of *ugali* between the thumb and first two fingers of their right hands and then use it to scoop up some of the *Sukamawiki* or other saucy dishes. Here, I've given a variation on the same combination from the American South: grits and greens. It is critical that you use very good grits (the standard quick grits will disappoint and instant grits are a blasphemy). Try Anson Mills (fabulous! www.ansonmills.com), Carolina Plantation (excellent:

www.carolinaplantationrice.com) or Bob's Red Mill (very good: generally available). If you live in the South, you may find locally milled grits so by all means, use them here.

Your grits won't be as stiff as *ugali*. If you want to eat with your hands, I suggest making polenta (“Italian grits”) and allowing it to stiffen up (pour hot polenta into a baking dish or onto a tray and allow to cool slightly and set). It's also important to use young greens here—older collards especially will be too tough. Southerners should know this, but unless your collards have been exposed to a hard freeze already, they won't quite as good as they should be. Kale may be the best bet.

Ingredients:

1 pound young collards, chard, or kale

(You can also use 2 lbs of spinach)

4 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced

1 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

salt and pepper to taste

1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper

Good quality cider or wine vinegar

Hot, freshly prepared grits, made according to package directions (either white or yellow is fine)

Alternate ingredient: You can use 3-4 slices of good quality thick-sliced bacon, diced. In step 3, cook it first (on medium heat with a little water in the pan to get it started), until cooked through but not crisp, drain off some or all of the grease, and proceed with cooking the garlic. You won't need all of the butter and olive oil if you use some of the

bacon grease.

1. Make your grits. Good quality “quick” grits from Anson Mills or other producers should take around 20 minutes to cook. The long-cooking variety can take up to an hour. It’s worth the time if you have it.

2. Wash the greens well and drain them well. Trim off and discard the tough part of the stems if using collards or chard, then strip the leaves from the remaining stems. Keep the leaves whole; dice and reserve the stems. If using kale, strip the leaves and discard the stems; keep the leaves whole. Set aside.

3. Just before the grits are done, heat the oil and butter in a Dutch oven over low heat until the butter melts. Add the garlic and cook slowly, stirring constantly, until golden brown. With a slotted spoon, transfer the garlic to small dish and set it aside. Increase the heat, add the reserved stems of collards, beet greens or chard, cover the pot and cook slowly until tender, tossing once or twice, about 2 minutes. Add the leaves and cook until wilted, tossing frequently with tongs. (For kale, add the leaves to the pot and cook until wilted.) Stir in salt, pepper and pepper flakes. Return garlic slices to pot and toss well. Sprinkle with vinegar and serve with hot grits as side dish.

Serves 4 to 6.

Almond (and Fig) Biscuits

Kenyans were not traditionally big sweet eaters. Even fruit is considered “children’s food.” But colonial influence and globalization are changing that. This “biscuit” (cookie) recipe (somewhat adapted here) comes to us via novelist Rosa Shand, who wrote about life in neighboring Uganda in her novel, *The Gravity of Sunlight*. It is originally from *The Kenya Settlers’ Cookery Book*.

1 1/2 c flour

1/2 t baking powder

1/8 t salt

1/4 lb (1 stick) butter, room temperature

1/2 c plus 2 T sugar

1 egg

1/2 t almond extract

preserved figs, cut in small pieces, for topping the cookies (or 1/4t fig jam per cookie)

Preheat the oven to 350. Mix the flour with the baking powder and set aside. Cream the butter and sugar with a mixer. Add the egg and extract and blend. Stir in by hand the flour mixture to make a dough—it may take a minute or so but it will come together. Chill the dough in the bowl for 30 minutes. Using a 1” melon baller (or your hands) make small balls and place them on an ungreased cookie sheet, about 1 1/2 apart. (Using a silpat liner or parchment paper on the sheet helps.) Make a slight indentation in each ball and fill with a tiny piece of preserved fig. Bake until lightly browned on the bottom and set, about 12 minutes. (The cookies will flatten somewhat in baking.) Cool completely on racks and store in an airtight container. Makes around two dozen. (You can easily double this, but allow more time for chilling the dough.)

NOTE: The original recipe called for candied cherries or almond pieces to top the cookies. I’ve used fig pieces here to help us remember the fig trees....

Resources:

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/plantingthefuture/>

http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/w/wangari_maathai.html

http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/wangari_maathai.htm

http://www.en.thinkexist.com/quotes/wangari_maathai/

<http://greenbeltmovement.org/w.php?id=10>

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5548537>

<http://www.islamonline.net/English/Science/Nature/Ecology/2006/07/03.shtml>

<http://www.ecofem.org/>

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20061108/ap_on_sc/climate_conference

Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire, "Ecofeminist Visions" at

http://eve.enviroweb.org/what_is/main.html

Helena Halperin, *I Laugh So I Won't Cry: Kenya's Women Tell the Stories of Their Lives* (African World Press, 2005)

Wangari Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement* (Lantern Books, 2003)

Fran Osseo-Asare, *Food Culture in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Greenwood Press, 2005)

APPENDIX OF QUOTATIONS***Kenyan women speak...***

Khadija: You should educate all your children the same, even if you can't send them all the way through. You know, two or three years ago, parents would say, "Never send your girls to school, because they will become prostitutes." But ideas are changing. Now parents are beginning to realize that girls are much more likely to help their parents than boys. It's more important to educate girls.

Lillian: I enjoy planting sukumawiki (kale) because it grows quickly and is easy to pluck. But I hate harvesting beans because it takes a long to harvest them, to carry them home, to beat them (so the pods open)...

Eileen: I am a good reader of novels, so I know how it is done in other places. What I like in American life is, when they are fed up, they just walk out. There is no fight about it. If it is the man who thinks that he is fed up with the wife, he is the one who walks out. He would even leave you the home. My husband bought the home for us. If I am the one who wants to go, he cannot part with his property. When I think that I have to start on my own, I am not going to go. That way we suffer much.

Tabitha: You sometimes can feel, when your husband doesn't help you, that he may have other wives outside whom he helps. And you find your friend advising you to leave him alone, continue with your own business. That really helps.

Agnetta: The future will be very difficult. The best thing we can do is to have few children and to educate them. Also, we should teach them respect.

Mlero: I can make decisions but my mother couldn't.

Maria: When I was young, we used to fetch water from the streams, passing through

thick forests. Food was there in abundance. Nowadays...most of the streams have dried up, the forests are no more, and the food that used to be abundant is not there.

Saadia: Sometimes the men don't want to end their clashes, so the women have to lead them.

Dekha: There are traditional women's parties in honor of Eve, who is the mother of all mothers. It is done every Thursday afternoon as the beginning of the Sabbath. Women collect sugar, coffee, and milk. They come to a central point, like the home of a respected lady, and they pray together and they discuss a topical issue like the outbreak of a disease, or it might be praying for someone. The older women drink coffee together and the young ones help the older ones to move. It's purely women, and it's something which helps to keep them together. It's a tradition which shouldn't disappear.

Quotations are from *I Laugh So I Won't Cry: Kenya's Women Tell the Stories of Their Lives* by Helena Halperin.

In the words of Wangari Maathai:

African women in general need to know that it's okay for them to be the way they are - to see the way they are as a strength, and to be liberated from fear and from silence.

We can work together for a better world with men and women of goodwill, those who radiate the intrinsic goodness of humankind. To do so effectively, the world needs a global ethic with values which give meaning to life experiences and, more than religious institutions and dogmas, sustain the non-material dimension of humanity. Mankind's universal values of love, compassion, solidarity, caring and tolerance should form the basis for this global ethic which should permeate culture, politics, trade, religion and philosophy. It should also permeate the extended family of the United Nations.

Women are responsible for their children, they cannot sit back, waste time and see them starve.

You must not deal only with the symptoms. You have to get to the root causes by promoting environmental rehabilitation and empowering people to do things for themselves. What is done for the people without involving them cannot be sustained.

I would listen to women relating the realities of their lives: their need for water, wood (for fuel) and nutritious food. I came to understand that their problems were symptoms of a poorly managed environment leading to a lack of clean drinking water, an insufficient food supply and poor health. With these women, I hit on the idea of planting trees to provide food and fuel, slow soil erosion and desertification, offer shade and improve the aesthetic environment. Planting a tree is doable. Anyone can dig a hole, put in a seedling and nurture it. When one plants a tree, one feels a connection to the earth and has a stake in its survival.

Protecting local and global environments is therefore essential for achieving lasting peace. It is critical that people around the world take action to reverse environmental degradation and its negative impacts on our lives and on other species.

I have adopted a metaphor of the traditional African stool, which has usually three legs. I was using that because, especially if I'm trying to explain this to the heads of state in Africa, this might be a good way for them to understand what I'm talking about. So I said that the three legs represent those three pillars—peace, democracy, and good management of resources—and that each represents the environment, the milieu in which development can take place. That's where creativity can take place, that's where collectivity can take place, that's where donors can come, that's where partners can come. But if you work, and even if it goes very slowly, it is going to work

It's one thing to understand issues, but if you understand and you are not unsettled, then you don't get moved just watching. But if you understand and you are disgusted then you are moved to action. That's exactly what happened to me.

There's something very interesting about the Bible, the Book of Genesis, because every time God created He said, "It is good." Have you people read the Bible recently? He says, "It is good." But when he created man, he didn't say, "It is good." He didn't. I started wondering, "Why didn't God get excited about man when he created him?" And I thought, "Well, Adam was probably seated there unable to know what to do or what to do with himself and God looked at him and said, 'He's lonely.' " That's what the book says, "He's lonely. Let us create for him a helper." And so he put him back to sleep and he created Eve. If you read it carefully you will see that when Eve woke up she was not bored. She went for a walk. Remember? She went for a walk. She went exploring this beautiful planet; and one of the things she saw was the Tree of Life, right there in Eden. It had apples and all that jazz. And she took some apples, we are told, and took to Adam. Still seated in the same old place. Hadn't moved one little bit. Bored to death. But Eve was finding this garden very exciting.

When I was a young child, I used to collect the firewood for my mother, and I remember my mother telling me not to collect any firewood from this tree called a fig tree, the so-called strangular fig tree. And when I asked her why not, she told me, that is a tree of God. We don't cut it. We don't burn it. We don't use it. They live for as long as they can, and they fall on their own when they are too old. Now, I didn't think much about that until much, much later. Indeed, when I became environmentally conscious, I remembered that story. I also recognized that in the period of, maybe, between 1920s to 1960s, a lot of those fig trees had actually been cut, because having become Christians, the missionaries were very eager to get rid of all these trees that reminded the natives of a god that they did not relate to, because they needed to relate to another god, and this new god was a god who was worshipped in a house called church. But the god they were relating to prior to that was a god that they worshipped under these trees, such as that fig tree.

Trees are alive, so we react to them in very different ways. Quite often, we get attached to a tree, because it gives us food and fodder for our fires. It is such a friendly thing. When

you plant a tree and you see it grow, something happens to you. You want to protect it, and you value it. I have seen people really change and look at trees very differently from the way they would in the past. The other thing is that a lot of people do not see that there are no trees until they open their eyes, and realize that the land is naked. They begin to see that while rain can be a blessing, it can also be a curse, because when it comes and you have not protected your soil, it carries the soil away with it! And this is rich soil in which you should be growing your food. They see the immediate relationship between a person and the environment. It is wonderful to see that transformation, and that is what sustains the movement!

Quotations taken primarily from WM's speeches and writings as they appear on the Green Belt Movement website. Other sources are listed in the Resource section.