

# Wangari Maathai and Terry Tempest Williams: The connection between peace and environment through women's eyes

By Elaine Caldwell Emmi

*“Throughout Africa, women are the primary caretakers, holding significant responsibility for tilling the land and feeding their families. As a result, they are often the first to become aware of environmental damage as resources become scarce and incapable of sustaining their families.*

*“I came to understand that when the environment is destroyed, plundered or mismanaged, we undermine our quality of life and that of future generations.*

*“Although initially the Green Belt Movement’s tree planting activities did not address issues of democracy and peace, it soon became clear that responsible governance of the environment was impossible without democratic space.*

*“Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own – indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. This will happen if we see the need to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life, with which we have shared our evolutionary process.”*

(excerpts from Wangari Maathai’s Nobel acceptance speech, City Hall, Oslo, Norway, 10 December 2004)

**F**or too long, many advocacy groups have worked on unique issues without looking at the whole. They espouse a goal and work toward that, exclusive of others who might be advocating similar ideas. Through her years of work with the Green Belt Movement, Wangari Maathai had realised that she had to look at life in a holistic way – democracy with peace and sustainable living. She learned that wars are usually over national resources; and that these resources need to be managed more reasonably and equitably to

prevent war. With greater participation and democracy, harmony and balance can be achieved. Also, through participation people become empowered and gain self-confidence and identity.

Women have often had trouble with identity, self-confidence and empowerment. Wangari points out that this is especially a problem in more traditional developing and under-developed nations. In attempting to overcome a history of having little power, women have not only improved their country through tree planting but improved themselves. Through this process, women are able to participate more fully in the care and well-being of their country. They have done something for themselves and also for their future generations. This is a very sustainable act.

Terry Tempest Williams is also a planter; she is a planter of ideas. Many years ago I went to a lecture she gave for Thanksgiving. It was an earthshaking moment for me and my world was never the same after that. She came dressed in black, in mourning, for what the native peoples of America lost when the first settlers arrived. She mourned for their lost way of life and territory and their loss of hope. In all the years of celebrating Thanksgiving, I really hadn’t given a serious thought to the losses of the native peoples. A ‘tree’ (an idea) had been planted! I looked at history in a different light – whose history, whose success?

In her book entitled *The Open Space of Democracy* (Orion Society, 2004), Terry Tempest Williams plants more ideas (trees) such as “love can lead to social change (p. 49).” or “the power of nature is the power of a life in association. Nothing stands alone (p. 58).” “We are

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learning that a community engaged is a community empowered. If we listen to the land, we will know what to do (p. 75).” “Our future is guaranteed only by the degree of our personal involvement and commitment to an inclusive justice (p. 85).”

Terry Tempest Williams asks us, “Are we ready for the next evolutionary leap – to recognize the restoration of democracy as the restoration of liberty and justice for all species, not just our own (p. 88)?” I love this question as it gives me hope. The idea that democracy and sustainable living involves all of the entities living on this planet is a thought I have been nurturing for a long time. And with it, the sense that peace is not possible without justice ... and that means environmental as well as social justice.

I recently read an article entitled “We’re all Environmentalists Now” by Mark Schmitt. ([HTTP://WWW.PROSPECT.ORG/WEB/PAGE.WV?SECTION=ROOT&NAME=VIEWPRINT&ARTICLEID=10311](http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=viewprint&articleid=10311)).

He helps carry on the ideas of Terry and Wangari, that in order to go forward in advocacy we need to think holistically and work together. Peace cannot be a separate advocacy from the environment. It all works together and it only works when we are together.

Wangari Maathai and Terry Tempest Williams are two women who have stepped into a new world and are asking all of us to join them. They have listened to the land and they know what to do; do we? 🐾

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## Some words of help from Sunderland P. Gardner

By Kyle Jolliffe

**C**anadian Friends are familiar with the name Sunderland P. Gardner. The annual special lecture at Canadian Yearly Meeting is named after him in recognition of the tireless service of this beloved Friends’ minister who lived from 1801 to 1893. It is virtually forgotten that in 1895 Genesee Yearly Meeting, one of the three yearly meetings which reunited in 1955 to form Canadian Yearly Meeting, published the *Memoirs of the life and religious labors of Sunderland P. Gardner (Philadelphia: Friends Book Association, 1895)*. At 687 pages, it is certainly a lengthy book, composed of his autobiography, journal, letters, sermons and addresses.

*Of all the material in this book, what stands out for me as worth sharing today is a letter he wrote in 1882 to a man grieving the loss of his family. While some of the theological*

*language in this letter is dated and foreign to our age, it merits reading for the light it shines on a caring and deeply sympathetic Friend, and the deep grounding of his humble faith as he drew on his own experiences in life to comfort someone awash in grief. The following is the text of this letter, with the exception of several paragraphs in which he responded to the man’s question as to whether departed spirits can ever appear and be sensibly noticed by the living.*

My Dear Friend, J. S. C.:

Thy letter was duly received, but a great pressure of various cares and weariness from labor, kept me, in part, in a condition not favorable to a baptism of spirit suitable to sit with thee where thou sits: which is necessary, at least in a measure, in order that we may be brought into sympathy of heart. Although each heart knows best its own sorrows,

yet the gospel is designed to bring man so into sympathy with man, as to be willing to bear at least a share of each other’s burdens: one cannot do the work for another, yet Divine wisdom has so arranged our relations to each other, that we may mourn with those who mourn, and rejoice with those who rejoice. I can say to thee, my dear friend, that similar dispensations to those through which thou hast passed and art passing, have in a large measure been within the lines of my own experience. In earlier life I lost what was then an only child, and so deeply did it affect me that I desired to be taken also, but I now believe that to have been a wrong desire. It would have been better had I endeavoured to be resigned to circumstances which I could not change or control, and be thankful that the sorrow had not come sooner.

My path through life thus far