

TAKING ROOT: The Vision of Wangari Maathai

A Film by Lisa Merton & Alan Dater

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Lisa Merton, Co-Director/Producer

We first met Wangari Maathai in the spring of 2002 at Yale University where she was a guest professor. We had been asked to do an interview with her for a possible short film; the idea of a short film was immediately abandoned. Wangari's was a big life, an exemplary life that the world needed to hear about.

I have never been so moved, captivated and inspired by anyone's story as I was by Wangari Maathai's. It was not only what she had done but the way she had done it; it was also her presence and her skill as a storyteller. She was of it, completely part of the story she was telling - a filmmaker's dream! She was spellbinding, funny, delighted, expressive and full of life. I had never met a person of such courage, one who had risked her life for the truth. Her story was organic; her rural roots connected her deeply to the earth, and despite her education and years in academia, she had never lost that connectedness.

In Wangari's story, we could see an evolutionary path that linked seemingly disparate realms. As her story unfolded, it became clear that each step she had taken could not have been taken without the ones before. Her path was a blueprint of her developing understanding, and hence, our understanding, of the nature of holistic change and the deep relationships between sustainable development, democracy and peace.

When she left 15 years in academia, she reconnected with the rural women with whom she had grown up. In looking at their problems stemming from a degraded environment, Wangari was starting at the grassroots. These women were the caretakers of their families, and it was because their lives had become so difficult that she took notice. It made her problems in academia seem trivial by comparison.

Taking Root tells of the journey she took, with the work of many others, following the links from poverty to development, to environmental protection and good governance. At the time, Kenya was still under the dictatorship of Daniel arap Moi, a man who had attacked her personally, put her in grave danger, and was in the process of destroying their country. Yet Wangari held no bitterness toward this man, no hatred was expressed. Despite her amazing courage, she was humble.

We were both inspired and compelled to tell her story. Her message was utterly timely and needed to be heard by millions of people who would resonate with her story or, perhaps, make the connections for the first time. It is our hope that ***Taking Root*** presents her journey as a model for humanity to follow.