

Dear, Wangari Maathai

Born on April 1, 1940, in Nyeri, Kenya, environmental activist you grew up in a small village. Your father supported your family by working as a tenant farmer. At this time, Kenya was still a British colony. Your family decided to send you to school, which was uncommon for girls to be educated at this time. You started at a local primary school when you were 8 years old. You were an excellent student, you were able to continue your education at the Loreto Girls' High School. You won a scholarship in 1960 to go to college in the United States. You attended Mount St. Scholastica College in Atchison, Kansas, where you earned a bachelor's degree in biology in 1964. Two years later, you completed a master's degree in biological sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. You later drew an inspiration by the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements in the United States. Returning to Kenya, you studied veterinary anatomy at the University of Nairobi. You made history in 1971, becoming the first woman in East Africa to earn a doctorate degree. You joined the university's faculty and became the first woman to chair a university department in the region in 1976. You sought to end the devastation of Kenya's forests and lands caused by development and remedy the negative impact that this development had on the country's environment. In 1977, you launched the Green Belt Movement to reforest your beloved country while helping the nation's women. "Women needed income and they needed resources because theirs were being depleted," you explained to *People* magazine. "So we decided to solve both problems together." Proving to be very successful, the movement is responsible for the planting of more than 30 million trees in Kenya and providing roughly 30,000 women with new skills and opportunities. You also challenged the government on its development plans and its handling of the country's land. An outspoken critic of dictator Daniel arap Moi, you were beaten and arrested numerous times. One of your most famous actions was in 1989. You and your organization staged a protest in Nairobi's Uhuru Park to prevent the construction of a skyscraper. Your campaign drew international attention, and the project was eventually dropped. The place in the park where your demonstrated became known as "Freedom Corner." The following year, Maathai was beaten and badly injured at another protest in "Freedom Corner." You were calling for the release of

political prisoners. What had started out as an environmental movement quickly became a political effort as well. "Nobody would have bothered me if all I did was to encourage women to plant trees," you later said, according to *The Economist*. But I started seeing the linkages between the problems that we were dealing with and the root causes of environmental degradation. And one of those root causes was misgovernance." You remained a vocal opponent of the Kenyan government until Moi's political party lost control in 2002. After several failed attempts, you finally earned a seat in the country's parliament that same year. you soon was appointed assistant minister of environment, natural resources and wildlife. In 2004, You received a remarkable honor. You were given the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for " your contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace," according to the Nobel Foundation website. In your Nobel speech, you said that picking me for the renowned peace prize "challenged the world to broaden the understanding of peace: There can be no peace without equitable development; and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space." You also called for the release of fellow activist Aung San Suu Kyi in her talk. So as you can see that you got famous by fighting environmental issues.

To: Wangari Maathai
From: Alisi

