



**A Kid-Friendly Guide
to Earth-Friendly Living**

by Jenn Savedge



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Interview with Green Parent Timberly Whitfield

If anyone knows what it's like to grow up green, it's Timberly Whitfield. At the age of six, Timberly moved with her family from a cushy life in the United States to a less-than-cushy life in Africa as United Methodist missionaries. For the next twelve years, Timberly lived in both Tanzania and Nigeria, growing up as an average African kid, with few of the luxuries (like water and electricity) that we often take for granted. She is currently the host of the daily television series "New Morning" on the Hallmark Channel and a noted public speaker on media and the environment. I caught up with Green Parent Timberly Whitfield at the Green Festival in Washington, D.C., where she shared her thoughts with me on growing up green and being a role model to the next generation.

Q: *What was your childhood like in Africa?*

A: I really grew up like a "Green Kid," although we didn't use that term. We didn't know we were green. It was just the natural way that we lived. We were environmentally conscious because of our lifestyle and the country's limited resources. All of the food that we ate came directly from the Earth, no chemicals or pesticides. We had to conserve water. I can remember as a kid having to bathe with two pitchers of water because that was all we had. We collected rainwater that came off of our roof

and pumped it to drink. We had to conserve electricity, so we could only use it for three hours a night. We even had to take turns going out and hand-cranking the generator (a scary task for a little girl). When it came to washing clothes we were pretty high-tech. We had an old, old Maytag wringer type washing machine and we would fill it with one basin of water. Then we'd start with the whites, then the colors, pastels, and darks. We washed all of the clothes in the same water. At then end, we took the water (which was basically just dirt by then) and we would throw that on the garden. Everything was recycled and reused. Nothing got thrown away. These ideas are all fashionable now, but that was just the way we lived. It was difficult for me at first, because I was an American kid, but I got used to it and got the hang of it.

Q: *How would you compare your childhood with the life your daughter has now?*

A: Night and day! I hope and I plan for her to visit Africa with me one day and see how I grew up. She's heard some of the stories but she's only five so she's still a little young to understand it all. Right now she's just a typical American kid. She has a room full of toys, most of which she doesn't play with, and she still wants more. But I try to instill in her some of the things that I learned growing up. One thing that I like is that my mom has started a little project with my daughter where they go into her room and go through all of the toys, games and dolls that she is no longer playing with. She has a little bit of a hard time with it. I'm not saying it's easy. But my daughter has to try to figure out what

she can part with. And then she and my mom put a box together and they go to the post office and send it to Africa.

It was really wonderful one day when we got a letter back from a mom in Africa who sent a picture of her twin girls wearing some of my daughter's clothes and holding some of her dolls. It was a touching moment because my daughter really got the connection that the girls in the picture needed something that she no longer wanted and instead of throwing it away we were able to give it to someone who was really happy to have it.

Q: *You're speaking tomorrow (at the Green Festival) about the role of the environment in minority communities. Why do you think this is a particular concern?*

A: The environment is not really a priority in minority neighborhoods because people are concerned about so many other things like unemployment and education. But I think it is important that minority leaders in the church and in the community add the environment to their platform because it does affect all people and I think if folks knew just how it does affect them and their children, then they would become a lot more involved.

Q: *What advice do you have for parents who are trying to raise their children to be environmentally conscious?*

A: Parents are role models. Period. You can talk and talk and talk, but it goes in one ear and out the other. But your kids are always watching you, so you have to set the tone. If you're recycling and conserving, I think it will get passed on and you won't have to lecture or preach. It will just come naturally.