



Photograph by Spring Waugh

ENVIRONMENT

## The Gardening Connection

Two years ago, in a graduate anthropology course at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Holly Hughes was moved to action by guest speaker Jackie Chege, who was there to speak about the Watoto Village in Kenya and the impoverished children fostered by her village foundation. Hughes met with Chege after the class, planting the seeds of a friendship as well as the foundation for a master's thesis project that would affect both women's lives.

Back at her job at the St. Louis Science Center, Hughes realized one of the institu-

tion's outreach programs—Youth Exploring Science—was built on the same foundation as Chege's Watoto Village. Hughes' idea: Link the two, inviting underserved kids in St. Louis and Kenya to conduct the same plant-life experiments, share data and journal entries and learn lessons about persistence, flexibility and self-reliance.

With the support of UMSL and the Science Center, project Globe Garden gained momentum. "It was just kind of a force," Hughes says. "It couldn't be stopped."

Chege began growing a garden in her Kenyan village, and Hughes and two student friends did the same here. For nine months, the St. Louis crew planned and saved for its first trip to Kenya. A week before the group was to depart in June, the U.S. Embassy in Kenya closed, citing terrorism concerns. The three—Hughes, Spring Waugh and Todd Combs—continued with their mission.

After 16 hours in the air, the three touched down in Nairobi and set off to meet with Chege and the village children. Eleven children met their guests with smiles, questions and an authentic welcome of dancing, drumming and singing. For four weeks, the Kenyan youth were either in school, performing experiments or learning about their St. Louis counterparts.

"As the days went on, the relationships became more personal," Hughes says, recalling one afternoon in particular. She and Lucy, a 17-year-old from the Watoto Village, were working on a farm collecting vines for an experiment, when Lucy was suddenly moved by the long-forgotten memory of working in the fields at the age of 5 with her grandmother. "She was connecting her activity right then with something in her past," Hughes says. "That was a really cool moment for both of us."

Cool, indeed. Simple yet complex, a matchup of science and life and a testament to the fertile land of a global garden tended with care.

—Stephen Schenkenberg

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