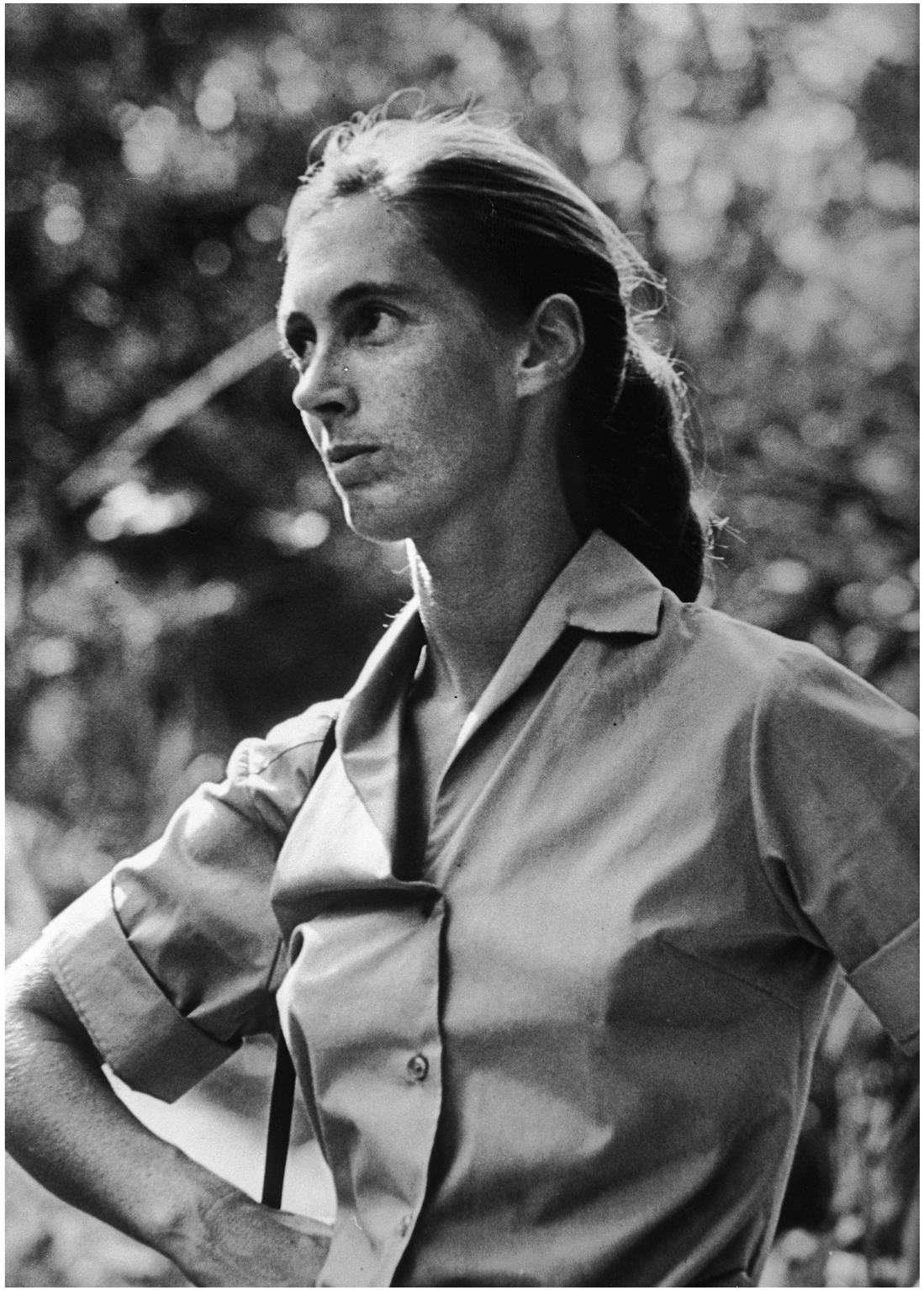
JANE

From her perch in the tiny Tanzanian nature reserve of Gombe, primatologist *Jane Goodall* changed how we understand the nature of chimpanzees—and ourselves. Words by *Katie Calautti*



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"People go, 'You need to slow down.' But I have to go quicker."

Jane Goodall knew she loved apes long before she penned her first field notes in the Tanzanian wilds of Gombe. When the pioneering primatologist was one year old, her father gifted her a stuffed chimpanzee named Jubilee. The now-hairless love-worn toy remains one of her prized possessions. As a child, Goodall managed a coterie of creatures at her family home in Bournemouth, England—starting with handfuls of earthworms and sea snails that she snuck into bed and progressing to her first field research project, a stakeout in a henhouse, at the age of five.

"When I was a little girl, I used to dream as a man, because I wanted to do things that women didn't do back then such as traveling to Africa, living with wild animals," Goodall wrote in a 2018 *Time* article. "I didn't have any female explorers or scientists to look up to but I was inspired by Dr. Dolittle, Tarzan, and Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*."

In 1957, while visiting a friend in Kenya, Goodall met famed paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey. Leakey hired her as his secretary and later brought her on an archeological dig at Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania, where he noticed Goodall's patience, independence and keen observation skills. He'd long wanted to conduct a field study of chimpanzees, who share 98.6% of the same DNA as humans. At the time, next to nothing was known about chimps in the wild.

Leakey procured funding, and offered Goodall the job, even though she didn't have a college degree.[1] "Louis didn't care about academic credentials," Goodall recounted in her book *Reason for Hope*. "He told me he preferred that his chosen researcher should go into the field with a mind unbiased by scientific theory."

On July 14, 1960, 26-year-old Goodall arrived at the Gombe Stream National Park on the eastern shores of Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania. Her only companions were her mother, Vanne, and a local cook named Dominic. They lived on a shoestring budget, working out of an old Army tent and bathing in streams.

"I knew perfectly well that if results didn't come through, Louis wouldn't be able to raise further money," Goodall wrote in *Reason for Hope*. "I was terrified of letting him down." After two frustrating months, she was accepted into the fold by a chimp she named David Greybeard, and soon she was assigning names and personalities to every primate community member.

Goodall's discovery in 1960 that chimpanzees make and use tools is considered one of the greatest achievements of 20th-century animal scholarship, and her field research at Gombe, in which she immersed herself in their habitat, redefined the relationship between humans and animals.

Goodall's history-making observation came when she caught David poking blades of grass into a termite mound to scoop out and eat the bugs, and later saw chimpanzees stripping leaves off of twigs to fish for termites. The chimps weren't just employing tools, they were also demonstrating modification—behaviors thought to be unique to humans. Leakey famously proclaimed of her discovery, "Now we must redefine 'tool,' redefine 'man,' or accept chimpanzees as humans."

The iconic field images of Goodall clad in khaki shorts and T-shirt, bag slung over her shoulder, binoculars in hand, blonde hair in a signature low ponytail, scaling steep slopes and trees alike—sometimes barefoot—with a determined, watchful expression fixed on her face are as much a part of the public consciousness today as they were 60 years ago.

Goodall herself has remained nonplussed by the attention. "There's this glamorous young girl out in the jungle with potentially dangerous animals," Goodall told *National Geographic* in 2017. "People like romanticizing and people were looking at me as though I was that myth that they had created in their mind. Articles at the time touted Goodall's "fragile" and "uncommonly pretty" appearance, branding her "a comely miss." In a 1963 wire story, Goodall's comment, "I'm becoming more arboreal" segued to, "Miss Goodall appears more ethereal than arboreal. The slender blonde English girl looks as if she should be serving tea to the village vicar, not tracking chimpanzees in Africa."

"The media produced some rather sensational articles, emphasizing my blonde hair and referring to my legs," Goodall wrote in the 2018 *Time* article. "Some scientists discredited my observations because of this—but that did not bother me so long as I got the funding to return to Gombe and continue my work... If my legs helped me get publicity for the chimps, that was useful."

In 1962 Goodall became one of the few people in the University of Cambridge's history to be admitted to work for a Ph.D. without a B.A. "I was quickly told that I had done my study all wrong," Goodall told *Time*. "I should have numbered the chimps rather than given them names, and I could not talk about their personalities, minds, or emotions, as those features were unique to humans."

Goodall stood her ground with professors and rejected what she perceived as coldness in their approach. "You can make observations that are absolutely scientifically accurate even while having empathy for the being you are studying," she wrote. This approach is part of what's made Goodall the world's foremost expert on chimpanzees. "It was clear they had emotions like happiness, sadness, fear," she told *The New York Times* in 2019. "That they had a dark and brutal side, but also love, compassion, altruism."

Goodall's initial stay at Gombe was extended through a grant from *National Geographic*, and she was joined by Dutch wildlife photographer Hugo van Lawick. Their collaboration on the 1965 National Geographic Society film *Miss Goodall and the Wild Chimpanzees*, which was viewed by an estimated 25 million North Americans (a massive amount, even by today's standards), made Goodall a star. The two married in 1964 and had a son, Hugo Eric Louis—known affectionately as Grub—in 1967. They divorced 10 years later after Goodall's work kept her in Gombe and van Lawick's

Goodall's research has shed light on chimpanzees, humankind's closest living relatives, for more than 60 years. Her work has redefined species conservation to include the needs of local people and the environment—a subject which she now travels the world to lecture on.

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Left Photograph: CBS via Getty Images. Previous Spread: National Geographic Studios / AF archive / Alamy Stock Photo

NOTE

1. Along with Goodall, Leakey also encouraged occupational therapist Dian Fossey to study mountain gorillas in Rwanda and student Birutė Galdikas to study orangutans in Borneo. The three women became known as the Trimates and went on to become prominent scientists and important scholars in the field of primatology. Today, Galdikas continues her field research into orangutans—among the lengthiest continuous studies of a mammal ever conducted—and campaigns on behalf of primate conservation and the preservation of rainforest environments. Fossey published *Gorillas in the Mist*, a seminal account of her studies at Karisoke Research Center, two years before she was murdered in her cabin at a remote camp in Rwanda in December 1985. It has been theorized that her murder was linked to her conservation efforts. Serious threats to the survival of mountain gorillas persist, from irresponsible development to climate change—and now COVID-19. Mountain gorillas share about 98% of human DNA and can catch respiratory diseases from people. Scientists warned in April 2020 that COVID-19 poses an "existential threat" to primates and that, for mountain gorillas, the introduction of a new, highly infectious disease could be a "potential extinction-level event."

Goodall, pictured with her former husband, the late filmmaker Hugo van Lawick, has been the subject of more than 40 films.

"What's the point of any of this if we're not raising new generations to be better stewards than we've been?"

anchored him in the Serengeti. In 1977, Goodall established the Jane Goodall Institute to sustain research at the site in Gombe. It remains the longest continuous study of any animal in their natural habitat in history. "My first impression of Jane…was how fearless, competent, and articulate she was," says Dr. John Crocker, Goodall's former student at Stanford, who joined her at Gombe from June 1973 to February 1974 and wrote a book about his research, *Following Fifi*. "I thought of the amazing combination of grace, stamina, intelligence, and magnetic presence. Her soothing voice alone could quiet a room in seconds." Goodall shifted from researcher to activist at a 1986 Chicago Academy of Sciences conference where she learned of the steep decrease in chimpanzee populations and witnessed the deplorable conditions of chimps in zoos and research facilities. Archival footage of Goodall at the conference shows her calmly telling the audience, "I'm not the sort of person who likes taking the limelight, I really like sitting in the forest at Gombe… but it's become apparent that I have to use this power, if you like, of bending the ear of very many people to help the creatures who have put me in a position to do just that."

"Gradually, it grew," she told NPR in 2010, referring to both the Jane Goodall Institute and her global youth program Roots & Shoots, founded in 1991 and now represented in 120 countries. "From chimpanzees, you must save the forest. To save the forest, you have to work with the people living around the forest and improve their way of life. To do that, you have to get help and a different attitude from some of the big donor agencies overseas, and then meeting all these young people and realizing what's the point of any of this if we're not raising new generations to be better stewards than we've been."

The "Where in the World Is Jane?" section of the Jane Goodall Institute website isn't just a gimmick, it's a necessity—she travels 300 days a year and hasn't been in one place for more than a few weeks since 1986. "I grew up as a very shy child, and if anybody had told me then that the career that I wanted to do would lead me to become a kind of strange icon, which I never planned or meant or strived for, I think I might not have gone along that path," she says in the opening moments of the 2020 documentary *Jane Goodall: The Hope*. "Jane is just uniquely herself and that is her approach," says Dr. Dale Peterson, author of *Jane Goodall: The Woman Who Redefined Man*. "I think the icon that was created, and the image, and the reality that she had this revolutionary impact on primatology, is really what's behind it."

Audience members routinely leave her speaking engagements moved to tears, yet Goodall told *National Geographic* in 1995, "I feel totally incapable of giving a lecture. I always do—until the moment I go out." Perhaps that's why she's always accompanied by a stuffed chimpanzee, hugged to her chest on flights and perched at the podium with her on stage—an echo of the comfort and inspiration Jubilee gave her when the dream of Africa was just a glimmer in her eyes. Now 86 years old and having celebrated the 60th anniversary of the moment she first set foot in Gombe earlier this year, she told PBS: "People go, 'You need to slow down.' But I have to go quicker." As Goodall knows, the seeds of hope for our future won't spread themselves.

Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images.