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Interview with Jane Goodall, primatologist



"My dog Rusty showed me how animals have personalities"

She fought against all that prevented her from making her dreams in Africa come true, she fought against the establishment at Cambridge and now she is fighting against hopelessness in the world. Primatologist Jane Goodall visited Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona for an international meeting of the Jane Goodall Institutes. Taking advantage of her visit the university had the chance to interview her.

Dame Valerie Jane Goodall, born in England in 1934, is a primatologist and anthropologist known worldwide for his studies on chimpanzees. Goodall began her studies in 1960 in Gombe, Tanzania. She later received her doctorate from Cambridge University and also initiated programmes to protect wildlife related to cooperation with people in Natural Parks. In 1977 she set up the Jane Goodall Institute for Wildlife Research, Education and Conservation, which organised this year's world meeting at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Goodall is also Dame

of the British Empire, United Nations Messenger of Peace and has received the Príncipe de Asturias Award for Technical and Scientific Research, among other honours.

Your mother was always supportive of your intentions of studying animals. Which role did she played in getting you to study chimpanzees in Africa?

Without my mother I would never have been able to go to Africa. First, she always encouraged me to follow my childhood dreams about going to Africa and writing about animals, and she gave me the right advices when the moment arrived for me to accept my friend's invitation to go to Kenya. Then, she accompanied me during my first four months in Gombe, as the Tanzanian government wouldn't allow me to go alone. She went through all kinds of discomfort to make my dream job possible.

Another important character in this story is the famous paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey. What kind of person was Leakey? How was your relationship with him?

Louis Leakey was a brilliant, one of his kind scientist. I started working with him as his assistant but he thought I would be make a good field researcher, so he encouraged me to study of those wild chimpanzees inhabiting a remote area in Tanzania, and learn more about our own origin. He was always very supportive and without him I wouldn't be here.

You began chimpanzee research with no university education in biology, let alone in ethology. Later, you went to college. Was it a shock for you, going from the forests of Tanzania to classes at Cambridge? How was your relationship with the university professors?

Yes it was a shock for me. Those professors were extremely critical with me having given names to chimpanzees and talking about 'their personalities'. They said I should have given them numbers and they didn't think they had any sort of personality. But I knew I was right, because another professor, my dog Rusty, had shown me how animals can have personalities and anyone who has a dog or a cat knows it.

Later, the Jane Goodall Institute was founded. What are the purposes of this institution?

Research, conservation and education. Our CCC (Community Centered Conservation) methodology also takes into account the needs of local populations, the only ones who can protect their environment in the long term.

After all these years, is there hope for wildlife?

Of course there is. But we need a critical mass of people all around the world to make it happen. That is why I encourage everyone to join efforts with us in the program Roots&Shoots (roots@janegoodall.es) and start a project on environment, animals or people in your town, neighborhood or village, and join a network of more than 15.000 groups in 130 countries in the world of young people from kindergarten to university working for a better world.

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