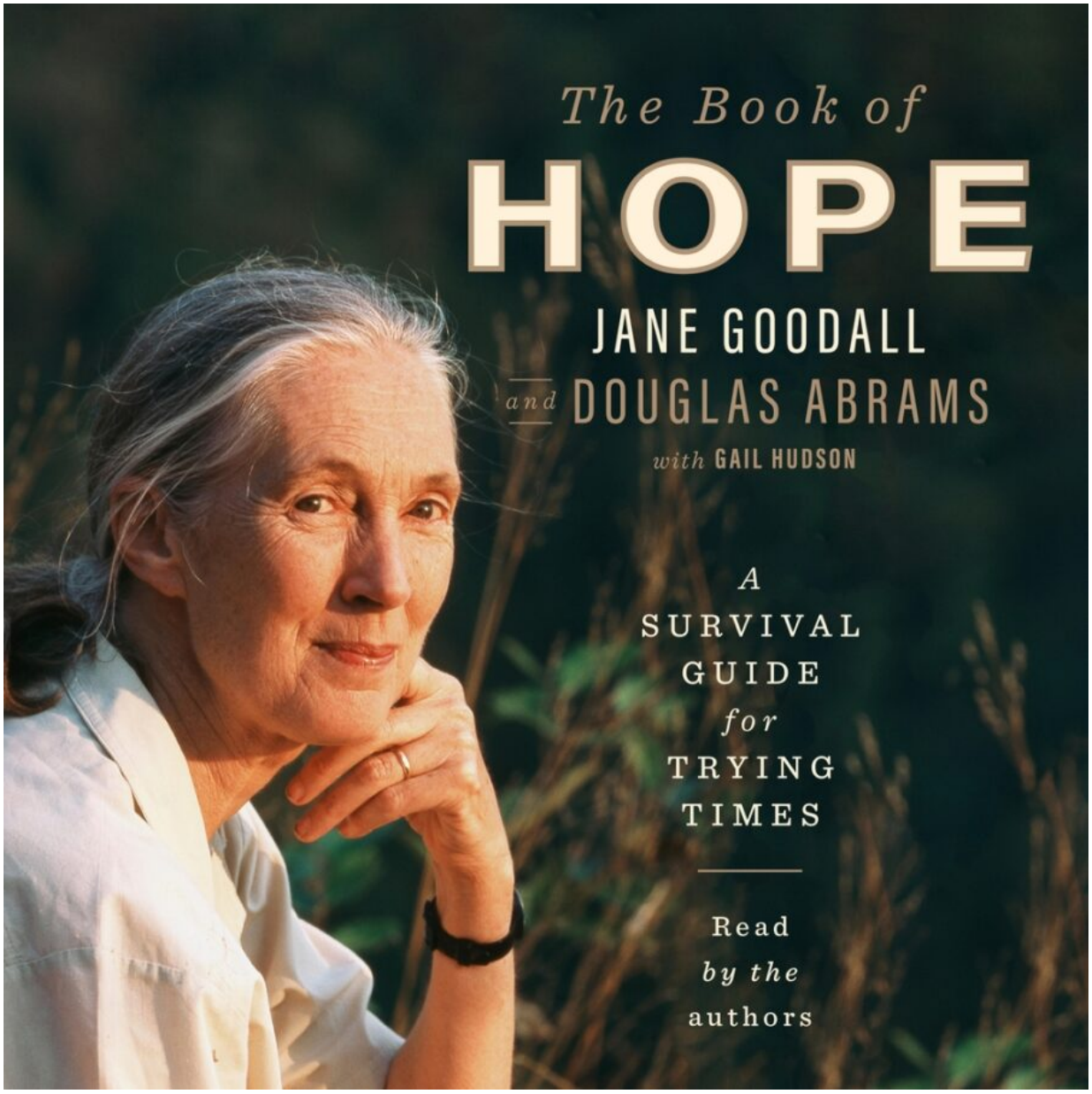
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jane Goodall

Elisa Leonelli · Tuesday, March 1st, 2022

I had missed the press preview of "Becoming Jane: The Evolution of Dr. Jane Goodall" at the Natural History Museum, which opened November 7, 2021 and runs until April 17, 2022. Work, Omicron and family caused me to put off visiting this amazing exhibition, until I learnt that I would have a chance to witness a Zoom interview with Jane herself, hosted by the Los Angeles Times Book Club on February 25, to discuss *The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times*.



After those two experiences and some research adding to what I already knew about Jane Goodall, inspired by her call to activism, I offer this article as my contribution, in celebration of Women's History Month.

It is because she was a woman that paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey chose a 26-year-old Jane to observe the daily habits of the chimpanzees living in the Gombe National Park in Tanzania in 1960. He said that women have "more patience" and "greater power of observation." I was reminded of what Sigourney Weaver said about playing Dian Fossey in *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988) by Michael Apted, another woman researcher recruited by Leakey to study primates in Africa.

Born in London on April 3, 1934, Jane was unable to attend college in post-war England, all her family could afford was a secretarial course; but when she did meet Leakey in 1957 at the Natural History Museum in Nairobi, Kenya, his secretary had just quit and he hired her. Jane would be admitted to Cambridge University in 1962, where she earned a Ph.D. in Ethology in 1965, despite her lack of an undergraduate degree.

Jane Goodall 1965 cover *National Geographic*

Speaking from her family home in Bournemouth, England, where she lives with her younger sister Judy, Jane said that she had loved animals since she was born. At age 18 months, her father gifted her a stuffed chimpanzee called Jubilee, named after the first baby chimp born in a London zoo in

1935, the 25th year of King George V on the throne. She reluctantly parted with this beloved toy, to allow it to be displayed in the National Geographic “Becoming Jane” traveling exhibit that opened in Washington, D.C. in November 2019 and will move to Chicago after Los Angeles. On display are also some of the books Jane loved as a child, *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* by Hugh Lofting, 1920, *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, 1912.

“Becoming Jane” photo by Elon Schoenholz © Natural History Museum

It was a woman, Jane’s mother Vanne, a novelist, who encouraged her daughter to work hard and not give up her childhood dream of traveling to Africa and study wild animals. In fact Vanne accompanied Jane in 1960 and lived with her in a tent on Lake Tanganyika, where both contracted malaria, but persevered in their mission, Jane spending her days observing chimpanzees with binoculars and a notebook, coming back at sunset to type up her notes and have dinner with her mother, prepared by their cook Dominic, while Vanne was hosting a clinic with basic medical supplies for the locals.

I could go on and on about Jane’s incredible accomplishments and the wisdom of her simple advice, but I encourage you to learn more on your own about the life of this extraordinary woman, who continues to inspire people at nearly 88 years of age, with the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), founded in 1977 and the youth program Roots & Shoots, developed in 1991.

Jane Goodall video portrait “Becoming Jane”

You should start by watching the 2017 documentary *Jane* by Brett Morgan, that tells the love story between Jane and Dutch photographer Hugo van Lawich, their marriage and the 1967 birth of their child, nicknamed Grub. You will see photos of a grown-up Grub with his three children at the exhibit. Then you could watch the 2020 documentary *Jane Goodall: The Hope* and sample this 2015 interview to see her speak directly at camera. You could also read some of her 30 books, including many for children.

Jane Goodall with baby chimpanzee

Jane remains an optimist despite what she calls “a very dark tunnel for some people in the Ukraine” and “what happened in Afghanistan”, as long as each one of us takes some action to fight climate change, poverty, corruption, the power of corporations, the pollution of the ocean, the loss of biodiversity, etc. She has hope because of the energy, commitment and passion of young people, and believes it’s not too late to stop the destruction of the Earth. Her motto: “Together we can and we will save the world.”

One last note, after visiting “Becoming Jane” be sure to take a walk in the Nature Gardens surrounding the Natural History Museum.

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