

Jane Goodall's Seventy-Year Career

CAREER SUMMARY

Jane Goodall's career began very early in life. Her first field research study, according to her mother Vanne, was when she was about five years old.

"One day, curious Jane wondered where eggs came from. So she and Jubilee snuck into Grandma Nutt's chicken coop... hid behind some straw, stayed very still... and observed the miracle.¹"

During her childhood years, Jane demonstrated the competencies necessary for her future career: curiosity, compassion, patience, focus, and a love for animals. Other useful qualities included not being bothered by smells or other discomfort, and a lack of concern about what others think of her interests. Jane's desire to visit Africa surfaced and solidified in mid-childhood, during which time she also formed the "Alligator Society", enlisting her sister and two close friends in the study of animals mundane and exotic.

As Jane made her way through high school and graduation, she faced the practicalities of entering adulthood. Assuming Africa was out of reach, her late teens and early 20s were a time of investigating and investing in generalist skills and experience. She attended secretarial school and worked in an administrative role at a film production agency.

When presented with an invitation at age 22 to visit Africa, Jane's focus shifted to working jobs that would earn her as much money as possible while spending as little as possible – living at home for a few months while working as a waitress and substitute mail carrier. Customer service skills and the ability to juggle a lot at once were useful skills gained during this short period.

Landing in Africa for the first time on her 23rd birthday, it wasn't long before Jane seized the opportunity to "cold call" the famed paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey. He was quickly impressed with her and saw her as someone who could take on a project he had been hoping to launch. For Leakey, Jane's lack of experience was not a flaw but a feature. Her innate talents and her evident skills were perfect for the chimpanzee study he had in mind.

Jane was 26 when she arrived for the first time at what was then known as Gombe Stream Game Reserve. In two five-month periods, Jane spent long days in the forest observing chimpanzees, taking detailed field notes.

After those first two stints as a field researcher, Jane enrolled in a Ph.D. program at the University of Cambridge, having obtained a waiver for her lack of an undergraduate degree. With enormous amounts of data from her field research, she was able to dive right in to academic production, finishing her first scientific paper when she was 27 and making her first scientific conference appearance when she was 28.

The doctoral defense took a bit longer, which she completed at age 31. During these four years she was very busy with a wide variety of work alongside writing her dissertation: continuing her field research in

¹ Patrick McDonnell, *Me... Jane* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2011)

Gombe, giving scientific and popular speeches, creating content for *National Geographic*, writing a chapter for a science textbook, and seeking grants to continue the work in Gombe.

This eventful period also included personal milestones: when she was 28, Jane met Hugo van Lawick, the photographer sent to Gombe by the National Geographic Society to collaborate with her for the magazine. They were married shortly before Jane's 30th birthday.

Jane's career activities burgeoned throughout her 30s. Magazine articles and television specials had catapulted Jane into celebrity status, leading to book deals and lecture tours. Meanwhile, she continued her scientific work observing chimpanzees in Gombe and also dealt with the administrative problems of institutionalizing the work of a growing research station: hiring staff, operationalizing processes, diversifying funding. During this time Jane took about a week off for maternity leave. For the next several years, her son – known as Grub – would typically join her or Hugo during their field work in various parts of Africa.

At age 37, Jane formed a partnership with Stanford University, and became a professor for the first time. She gave lectures at the university on human biology, and also welcomed students for short field research studies at Gombe. The relationship with Stanford, while fruitful, was to last only about four years. Jane later formed a similar relationship with the university at Dar es Salaam. A years-long project also came to fruition during this time: the publication of Jane's book, *In the Shadow of Man*.

Her late 30s through mid-40s were characterized by significant transitions in her personal life. Jane divorced Hugo van Lawick; then, at age 41, married the Hon. Derek Bryceson, member of the Tanzanian Parliament. Derek passed away from cancer five years later.

In her early 40s, in conversation with key partner-donors, Jane established the Jane Goodall Institute for Research, Conservation, and Education (JGI) as a vessel for fundraising as well as managing the growing portfolio of programs Jane had begun to participate in. Day-to-day leadership of the research station was slowly transitioned to an administrator other than Jane. She continued her writing and her lectures, which often served as fundraisers for JGI. At age 52, she published a book synthesizing twenty-five years of data in *The Chimpanzees of Gombe: Patterns of Behavior*.

Around age 50, Jane's focus shifted from basic scientific research into advocacy with the launch of the first of such projects, known as ChimpanZoo, which aimed to “attempt to improve zoo conditions for chimps by introducing something called ‘environmental enrichment’.”² Jane traveled to and gave lectures in an ever-expanding number of countries, while also working to write and publish both popular and scientific books and papers about her work.

This decade saw Jane get more involved in organizing on behalf of chimpanzees – starting with her peers in the scientific and research community, then expanding to public policy figures in the United States Congress and in consecutive presidential administrations. She advocated at every level for improved best practices in labs and zoos, and stricter laws and policies to protect chimps in the United States and around the world.

In her mid-50s, while on a visit with a group of young people in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Jane conceived of a new organization to mobilize youth. Under a chapter model, Roots & Shoots provides curriculum for

² Dale Peterson, *Jane Goodall: The Woman Who Redefined Man* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006) 590

young children through teens to learn how to develop and implement environmental, conservation, and humanitarian programs within their own communities.

The year she turned 60, working through the JGI, Jane established a program to promote sustainable agroforestry in the villages around Gombe. The Tanganyika Catchment Reforestation and Education program, known as TACARE, would spread to 32 villages over ten years, and continues to grow.

By her mid-60s, Jane began to be seen by many as a spiritual leader and global peace-builder, particularly with the publication of her book *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey*. When she was 67, she received the Gandhi/King Award for Nonviolence, the only person from the Global North to have received the award. The following year, she was appointed by the U.N. Secretary General as only the tenth “United Nations messenger of peace”. Jane’s lectures and projects since this time have heavily incorporated these messages of hope and peace, and she publicly celebrates the National Day of Peace each year on September 21.

Into her mid-80s, Jane traveled over 300 days per year, attending to these various endeavors and participating in conferences and interviews. Although the COVID-19 pandemic halted her travel, Jane’s appearance schedule increased as technology enabled her to be many places while remaining in her home in Bournemouth, England. Until her death at age 91 while on a speaking tour in California, Jane continued to collaborate on books, podcasts, and other content, and to persist as a tireless advocate for all non-human animals, for the planet as an ecosystem, and for humanity itself.

LESSONS FOR A SEVENTY-YEAR CAREER

What can we learn from Jane’s expansive career path?

Education & Training

Jane gained her foundational skills, and uncovered her bedrock talents, during her childhood – not in a classroom, but in the farmyards and forests of her native England. She learned all about animals not through teacher-assigned projects, but through self-generated activities such as the Alligator Society and hours spent reading up in a tree. Through her childhood and into her late teens, including her course at Queen’s Secretarial College, she attended school out of obligation to society’s expectations – though she was a good student when she determined to become so.

Going to college is often presented as the necessary first step to entering our career. Jane faced numerous barriers to academic study in her area of interest. Like many, her family couldn’t afford to pay college tuition. More importantly, because of her gender and her academic record, in the 1950s it’s not likely she would have been admitted to a degree program that matched her ambitions.

Jane’s path instead was to shine by first demonstrating, in her mid-20s, that she could perform well in her dream job. Then she could be admitted to a graduate program tailored specifically to her expertise.

Early Career Jobs

Early career, and in times of career transition, low-wage and supposedly low-skill jobs are often the way to pay the bills. Jane’s first jobs included secretarial work, waitressing, and delivering mail! During the six months before Jane left England for the first time to travel to Africa, her work was solely focused on saving money for the trip. Many successful professionals have worked minimum wage jobs to put themselves through college or to save money to start their own business.

Relationships

With Jane's passion and focus on her vocation, it's no surprise that her two marriages were directly related to her work. Having a life partner who is also a business partner can have strong pros and cons, and Jane certainly experienced both with Hugo van Lawick, her photographer and collaborator on print and video projects, as well as with Derek Bryceson, whose political position allowed him to advocate for the conservation work necessary for Jane and her team to do their research.

Jane's career certainly would not have been possible without the support and mentorship of numerous individuals, but most notably her mother Vanne, and her mentor Louis Leakey.

Vanne encouraged Jane's natural talents from her early days, enabled Jane's first field research project at Gombe by serving as her official chaperone, and maintained a home in the UK where Jane and Grub could always return from their travels.

Jane's relationship with Louis Leakey was perhaps more transactional but no less transformational. Leakey's vision for chimpanzee field research in Gombe was the catalyst for Jane's entire career. His fundraising activities in the Gombe project's early years allowed the research center to take root. Finally, Jane would not possibly have been admitted to a doctoral program at Cambridge without Leakey's involvement.

Linear Career Evolution

Jane Goodall's career is a good example of a career in which, while she hasn't performed the same activities for 70+ years, her work has evolved in a relatively linear way. Her late-career schedule of writing and public speaking is quite a bit different from crouching in a Tanzanian jungle for hours on end noting each movement of a chimpanzee!

But it is clear how Jane's career phases build on each other in a very natural way. Through her work as a field researcher, coupled with her degree program, she became a respected scientist. Her scientific expertise paired with her on-the-ground observations led naturally to conservation and advocacy work. The global relationships, respect, and skills she gained along the way have turned Jane into one of the world's most revered voices on hope, peace, and the future of humanity. All of these "jobs" remain rooted in her foundational calling, her first love, of animals and Africa.

Entrepreneurialism

Jane fits a certain type of entrepreneur profile, rarely leaving a job for a completely different one. She unwittingly founded the Gombe Stream Research Centre at age 26; more intentionally founded the Jane Goodall Institute when she was in her 40s; sprouted and then grew the idea of Roots & Shoots in her mid-50s; and established the TACARE program the year she turned 60. She remained involved in each of these initiatives to some extent until the end of her life.

As an entrepreneur, Jane has planted many seeds. Some never came to fruition, such as specific changes she advocated for in the U.S. Animal Welfare Act. Others, like the Gombe team, grew larger than she perhaps dreamed initially. Some took slow and persistent nurturing over many years, notably most of her published books.

As often happens with entrepreneurs, Jane has started many things, but it takes great effort for her to hand them off. While her field research at age 26 in Gombe has been described as a solitary endeavor, even at the beginning there was a small team supporting Jane's efforts. It wasn't long before personnel

management was a significant component of Jane's work. Through a succession of General Administrators who only lasted for a few years each, for at least two decades Jane was heavily involved in the administration and fundraising of what became the Gombe Stream Research Centre. It wasn't until the establishment of the Jane Goodall Institute as an umbrella entity that there was enough infrastructure for Jane to remove herself from hands-on management.

Money

Those who pursue a career based on passion and sense of vocation find themselves secondarily trying to figure out how to pay for basic living expenses and for the work itself. Jane, coming from a family in which cash was not abundant, had to "scrap" for many years – first to get herself to Africa, and then to further the work she was determined to do.

This type of work does not always lend itself to having a "salaried" job, with steady income from an organization's regular payroll budget. Personal income is sometimes generated in ways that are adjacent to the work itself. In Jane's case, this meant publishing popular books based on the less-reliably-paid research work.

Nonprofit leaders and startup founders are familiar with this problem of having to raise funds to operate an organization or grow a project, hopeful that the funds raised cover their own compensation as well as staff payroll and other organizational expenses.

Capstone Project

In a multi-phase career, it can be helpful to have a tangible project that marks the transition from one phase to another. Jane's dissertation defense at age 31 has been characterized as her entry into the scientific community, bookended when she was 52 by her publication of "the monograph", *The Chimpanzees of Gombe: Patterns of Behavior*. At that stage, Jane had already begun to pivot from a primary career identity as a scientist, and the completion of the book allowed her to fully step into her work as a conservationist and activist.

Technology

A seventy-year career requires the ability to adapt to new tools over time. Jane traveled on a ship when first went to Africa; before long, she was jetting around the world. When she started her fieldwork, she used notebooks and pencils, typing notes at night on a manual typewriter. By 2020, she was hosting a podcast!

Photography technology was so expensive and technical when Jane started her field work, National Geographic Society had quite a time trying to identify and provide the personnel and equipment to capture publishable images of Jane with the chimpanzees. Now, nearly anyone can easily take beautiful photos and videos using small electronic devices we carry around with us daily.