



Africa in My Blood: An Autobiography in Letters: The Early Years

By Jane Goodall

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AFRICA IN MY BLOOD is an extraordinary self-portrait, in letters and commentary, of Jane Goodall's early years, from childhood to the landmark publication of IN THE SHADOW OF MAN. It reveals this remarkable woman more vividly and clearly than anything that has been published before, by her or about her. We see Goodall grow from a schoolgirl into the promising young candidate whom the legendary Louis Leakey sent to a wildlife preserve on the shores of Lake Tanganyika to undertake a revolutionary study of chimpanzees. At Gombe we see her immerse herself in the lives of wild animals as no one had done before. AFRICA IN MY BLOOD is a dramatic, moving, funny, and important book that tells the story of how an English girl who loved animals became one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century.

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Africa in My Blood: An Autobiography in Letters: The Early Years

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Africa may not always have been in Jane Goodall's blood, but animals were there right from the start: the list of recipients in what one hopes is only the first volume of her letters includes Dido the dog and Pickles the cat. And this is no flight of editorial fantasy. Goodall always accorded these members of her "darlingest family" their proper place alongside such correspondents as her mother, her father, her best friend, and her mentor, Louis Leakey (a.k.a. FFF, Foster Fairy Father). *Africa in My Blood* opens with 7-year-old Valerie Jane's encounters with various canines (real and porcelain) as well as signs of incipient naturalism--she has found "a dead rook he died of cold" and is caretaking a "caterpillar." In the same communiqué, she also notes that her toy chimp has a new dress. Goodall would later prefer her primates *au naturel* but would continue to balance her urge for living taxonomy with love and empathy.

Culled from more than 16,000 letters, this collection will inspire Goodall adepts and those coming upon her for the first time. Her "autobiography in letters" restores this icon to full, even frivolous, humanity. It also recalls a lost era of inspired amateurism. When she went off to Nairobi at 23 in the spring of 1957, Goodall had no formal scientific training. Yet within weeks she had met Leakey and was soon working with him, not to mention rebuffing his advances, though she assures her mother that "he's much too fond of me for any monkey business."

Meanwhile, they had already discussed monkey business of a higher sort. "There is the vaguest possible chance that little me," Goodall wrote, "may have the chance to go right out into the wilds of the Northern Frontier for two or 3 months to study a strange tribe of chimpanzees who may be a new species, or sub-species. That is too heavenly to even think about." By the summer of 1960, Goodall was installed at the Gombe Stream Chimpanzee Reserve (which she soon termed Chimpland). And over the next year, she made four key discoveries, if not more, and was proving herself the zoological equal of such masters as George Schaller, having documented her subjects eating meat as well as using tools with ease.

Africa in My Blood reminds us that Goodall was once a controversial rather than hallowed figure, her methodology viewed with suspicion and condescension. And as many of us happily vegetate in front of televised slices of animal life, her awareness of her privileged position puts things in perspective. In early 1961, Goodall recounts a complex ritual and then asks her family: "Can you begin to imagine how I felt? The only human ever to have witnessed such a display, in all its primitive, fantastic wonder?"

Because Goodall has written so elegantly and incisively on chimpanzee behavior in, for instance, *In the Shadow of Man* and *Through a Window*, some readers might initially be tempted to gloss over her descriptions of such animals as the venerable David Greybeard and expert towel thief William and concentrate on her own persona--teasing, hyper-enthusiastic, and absolutely determined. When her project is threatened in 1963, she implores FFF: "You would fall head over heels in love with all my darlings--never, never think that I will let anything happen to them through what I am doing. I KNOW it is right. I KNOW that I can work the Reserve the way it must. I KNOW that I shall come back here time and time again until the problems that remain are hardly worth mentioning." *Africa in My Blood* makes it clear that, as Jane Goodall has long stressed, human and ape cannot be separated. --Kerry Fried

From Publishers Weekly

No one, perhaps, has done more for great apes than Goodall, whose decades of work with Kenyan

chimpanzees showed the rest of the world how chimps live--how they use tools, eat, sleep, have sex, raise their young, fight, make peace--demonstrating that they deserve further study as well as human protection. Here, in a follow-up to last year's spiritual autobiography *Reason for Hope*, are displayed the roots of that work, in a thick, fun, enlightening, somewhat diffuse compilation of letters that Goodall wrote to relatives, friends and colleagues over the first 32 years of her life, now amplified by Peterson's introduction and annotations. The earliest letters show the preteen Valerie Jane Morris-Goodall at school in England, chattily inviting her best friend to see her collection of "quite a lot of caterpillars." Later batches describe life in "Chimpland," where Goodall and her co-workers have set up their ongoing project. We see a mother chimp and her neighbors react to a baby; we also see Goodall, then-husband Hugo van Lawick and a cast of dozens handle the practical problems of running a jungle encampment, from parasites to postage and publicity. Goodall describes her work with her mentor, paleontologist Louis Leakey; shows her continued affection for her family; keeps up with U.S. and European animal-behavior researchers such as Konrad Lorenz; and narrates "the proudest [day] of my whole life to date": the chimpanzee "David G--yes--he has TAKEN BANANAS FROM MY HAND." This volume covers only the "early years" (1934-1966); readers who care about animal behavior--or who enjoy the collected letters of a fascinating, friendly and dedicated woman--will hope for a sequel. 16 pages of b&w photos not seen by PW. Author tour. (Apr.)

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From Library Journal

The ambitions and struggles of chimpanzee ethologist Goodall are detailed in this collection of letters written by Goodall from her childhood in 1942 through the onset of her fame in 1966 and edited by Dale Peterson, coauthor of Goodall's *Visions of Caliban*. The letters about her early experiences in Africa are the most interesting. Goodall maintains a never-say-die attitude when complications delay her entry into the Gombe Stream Reserve and as she struggles to learn the proper way to photograph the chimpanzees for National Geographic. Later letters to her "darling family" in England describe the comings and goings of her new "family," the chimpanzees of Gombe. Goodall's advocacy of the retirement of chimpanzees from biomedical research is foreshadowed as early as 1963, as she comments on the chimps' "pathetic relations which are forced to live in captivity." This book presents an interesting parallel to Goodall's autobiography *My Life with the Chimpanzees* (1988). Anyone who thinks of studying chimpanzees in the wild as idyllic is certain to be surprised.

---Raymond Hamel, Wisconsin Regional Primate Research Ctr. Lib., Madison

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Users Review

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