



Origin Stories Episode 3: Jane Goodall
July 1, 2015

Meredith Johnson

0:00:06

This is Origin Stories, The Leakey Foundation podcast. I'm Meredith Johnson.

Today, we're going to hear the story of one of the most famous woman in science, Jane Goodall. But we pick things up with Louis Leakey, the paleoanthropologist, recorded here in 1970.

Male Speaker 1

Okay, rolling? Okay. Leakey Special, roll one, one, take one. (Snapping sound)

Male Speaker 2

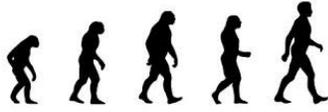
Dr. Leakey, could you explain to us the importance of the study of primate behavior to contemporary man?

Louis Leakey

Yes, it's very easy really, and especially the higher primates. You see, today, there are, living, three of the higher primates: chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans. And they are our closest living cousins. And, consequently, as our nearest cousins, they must be in a position to throw some light on my problem. I am concerned with the study of early man and proto-man. And it's because of that that I looked around to find somebody, first of all, to study the chimpanzees. And so I invited Jane, who's here with me today, to study the chimpanzees, in depth, down in a place in Tanzania, and warned her, very carefully, indeed, that it was going to be a very long job.

Meredith Johnson

A very long job. July 14, 2015, marks the 55th anniversary of the day that Jane Goodall first arrived at the Gombe Stream Game Reserve in Tanzania to start her life's work. Today, Jane Goodall is a hero in science classrooms everywhere; the woman who showed us the amazing world of chimpanzees and changed the way we define ourselves as humans.



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Origin Stories Episode 3 Jane Goodall

In our episode today, we're going back in time to the late 1950s, when we knew practically nothing about the lives of wild chimps. We didn't even know how closely related we are to them. In 1957, Jane Goodall was 23 years old. A close friend had invited her to Kenya. She had spent the previous summer working long hours as a waitress to fund the trip. Goodall had always dreamed of going to Africa. In 2004, she told her story to author and Leakey family biographer, Virginia Morell, as part of an oral history project. This interview has never been heard before.

Virginia Morell

This is an interview with Dr. Jane Goodall for the Leakey oral history project for the Leakey Foundation and the UC Berkeley Bancroft Library. What I've done with everyone is to start at the beginning, which is how they first heard about the Leakeys and, in your case, how you came to meet Dr. Louis Leakey.

Jane Goodall

Well, I first heard about Louis when I had a job in Nairobi, and I was 23 years old. And somebody said, "If you're interested in animals, you should meet Louis Leakey." So I called the Natural History Museum, the Coryndon Museum. And a voice answered and said, "Hello." And I said, "I would like to meet Dr. Leakey." And he said, "I'm Leakey, what do you want?" So that led to an appointment. And I distinctly remember him taking me around and asking me many, many, many questions. And, because I'd been reading a lot and going to the Natural History Museum in London, I could answer many of those questions.

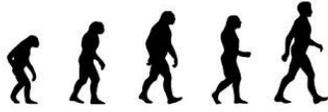
Virginia Morell

He was asking you questions...?

Jane Goodall

About the animals. Did I know what this was, and then he took me down, and I knew things like ichthyology, and I think that impressed him. So I ended up being offered a job as his assistant, it was his secretary, really. Well, he was being very genial. He was being very charming. And so I thought he was wonderful. I was always on the lookout for ways of going and being out in the field and looking at animals. So when he offered me the job, I remember saying, right that first meeting, "If I'm going to take a regular job, it's really important for me to go out and see a bit of Africa first." Because I had to, you know? I had to go outside Nairobi. He said, "Well, I do have an expedition in the summer for three months. But that will depend if—whether my wife likes you."

Meredith Johnson



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Origin Stories Episode 3 Jane Goodall

His wife was renowned paleoanthropologist, Mary Leakey. And the expedition Louis Leakey was talking about was to Olduvai Gorge, one of the richest and most famous fossil sites in the world.

Jane Goodall

I remember meeting Mary Leakey. And she wanted me to ride her pony back from a pony club hunt. And, fortunately, I had this feeling and I—the pony walked backwards. They didn't tell me the pony always walked backwards with a stranger on his back. Sherry, he was called. And something made me get off and remove the saddle. And there were these two huge saddle sores. So, of course, I could do no wrong. That was it. I made it in Mary Leakey's eyes.

Virginia Morell

The sensitivity to animals?

Jane Goodall

Yes, and her beloved pony. So I went back to have lunch at the house and got on fine with everybody. There were little animals running around. There was a dyke or a dik-diksdik-dik or something like that, the odd hyrax. So for me, it was just magic, complete magic.

Meredith Johnson

So Jane Goodall joined the Leakeys' expedition to Olduvai. Another assistant from the Coryndon Museum came along, too. Her name was Gillian Trace. It was a 300-mile journey from Nairobi to Olduvai. Louis and Mary Leakey had worked at the site for decades searching for early hominin fossils. Leakey had what was, at that time, a blasphemous idea; that humans came from Africa. And he needed the bones to prove it.

Jane Goodall

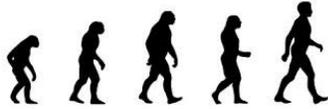
It was a very overloaded car. And there was, also, a big truck, which had all—you know, had the Kenyans and the equipment, such as it was. Gillian and I had to take turns to be squished in the back with the two Dalmatians. You know, every time we saw something interesting we stopped and looked at it. Once we got sort of, you know—off the beaten track, which most of it was at that time.

Meredith Johnson

As they made their way across the Serengeti Plains of Tanzania towards Olduvai Gorge, Jane Goodall saw the Africa she had imagined as a small girl back in England.

Jane Goodall

I've been in some forests and seen leopard tracks, and that was exciting.



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Interviewer

Oh yeah.

Jane Goodall

There was no track in those days. It was nothing. Nothing, not a mark, not a mark of a tire. And all we saw for three months was the Masai, that's it. Nothing. It was magic, yeah. Setting up tents at night.

Meredith Johnson

Olduvai Gorge is a steep-sided ravine in the Rift Valley of Eastern Africa. Not quite big enough to be called a canyon. Erosion has carved its way through, exposing layers of rock dating back to two million years ago. It's very dry and very hot. There aren't many trees, but there are lots of fossils. During the day, Jane worked on the dig. They woke at dawn and worked until it got too hot. They'd take a break and start up again when it cooled down.

Jane Goodall

We were given our little patch, and we were given very different tools to what they use today. We had a hunting knife that we took off the heavy stuff. The Kenyans did—worked with picks to remove the scree if it was a new bed.

Meredith Johnson

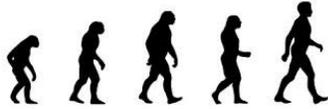
Scree is what they call the chunks of broken rock covering a slope. It had to be cleared by hands to get to the interesting stuff.

Jane Goodall

And the last bit, when you're getting down to the bone layer, Mary didn't like them to do it because she thought if they broke a bone, it's better she did it than the Kenyans did. So she would wield a pick, and she was very happy because I could wield a pick, too. And Gillian wasn't so strong, so I was the favored one. And, anyway, if we found a bone, we used a smaller knife or a dental pick and got them out. And marked the ones we dug out with a date and the place we found them. And then we went back and did some more digging. And Bottom Biter, the dog with Toots, would warn everybody of lions. Mary had to have her dogs. I didn't really care about the fossils that much. I cared about the animals. So I was really lucky. I went at exactly the right time.

Meredith Johnson

We all know Jane Goodall's destiny wasn't to dig for fossils. But at Olduvai Gorge, she got her first experiences with the wild animals of Africa. There were gazelles and zebras, and the



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Origin Stories Episode 3 Jane Goodall

miniature antelopes called dik-diks. The Leakeys let Jane and Gillian go for walks away from the dig site as long as they brought Mary Leakey's dogs with them.

Jane Goodall

Gillian and I were just having our walk and—and I remember a tiny mouse ran across the trail. And the two dogs chased it down to one of these low acacias.. And you know how you feel something behind you? I looked around, there was this young lion, about two years old. And he was just looking at us, lashing his tail, I suppose the distance of this room. And then Gillian and I had an argument because she wanted to dive into thick stuff and I said, “Well, that’s silly because he’ll know exactly where we are and we won’t know where he is.” So we have to walk up in the open onto the hill, which is what we did. And she didn’t dare look back. So I had to keep looking back and saying, “Well, he isn’t any closer.” He followed us. And then, finally, he stopped following. We made it to the top. And Gillian had Toots. Toots was the champion of all breeds of Kenya, I remember this so well. And Gillian let Toots go. Toots, who had no idea about the lion, because the wind was right, went diving back for the mouse. We called and called, and I can remember starting back down, because I thought, “Well, it’s the end of everything if a lion eats Toots.” Anyway, we got Toots back.

Meredith Johnson

Louis Leakey and Jane Goodall spent a lot of time together at Olduvai.

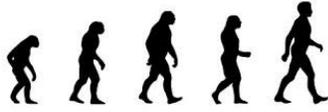
Jane Goodall

We talked about animals all the time. And he knew I was really interested. And he knew I cared. And he realized that I was tough. He realized that I didn’t care about—you now, parties and clothes and things like that. I think it was after we met the lion, at least after we met a young lion, then I remember Louis talking about a group of chimps on a remote lakeshore and how he hoped, one day, to find somebody to study them. Well, I knew that couldn’t be me because I didn’t have a degree or anything. He kept talking about this group. And, in the end, I remember saying, “Louis, I wish you wouldn’t keep talking about this because that’s just the kind of thing I want to do.” And he said, “Well, why do you think I’m talking about it?” I mean, I really couldn’t believe it, but that’s how it went.

I was amazed. I mean, I was thrilled. Would I be prepared? Yes, it was still a year before we could get there. Money had to be found, and the permission had to be sought.

Meredith Johnson

This would be the first study of its kind, the first to study chimps in the wild. And Louis Leakey thought Jane Goodall, with no degree or anything, was the right person for the job.



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Jane Goodall

Well, he always said women make better observers, that they were more patient and more sensitive, which isn't necessarily correct but I think that they are female characteristics. And females tend to be quieter and less wanting to dominate and be the-better-of. So I think he sensed all those characteristics.

Virginia Morell

Did you have any second thoughts?

Jane Goodall

No, no, I was just longing to get there. I didn't know how I'd do it. There was nobody to tell me. I remember just feeling almost like something's sure to go wrong. It can't really be happening. Not wanting to get too excited in case it went wrong again. So just quietly getting on and getting everything ready and not thinking too much.

Meredith Johnson

What Jane Goodall was trying to do was unheard of in the late 1950s. Young women did not go off into remote jungles alone to study wild animals. At the time, Tanzania was a United Nations trust territory under British control. The colonial officers gave their approval for her trip to the Gombe Stream Reserve only after this grown woman agreed to take a parent with her.

Jane Goodall

It was the administration in [Kigoma](#) who was so horrified at the thought of a young woman alone. So in the end, they said, "Well, as long as she has a companion." So it was my amazing mother who came and volunteered for the first four out of those six months. And we collected up all the stuff for the expedition. Louis helped us. Louis told us what to get. And as far as I remember, Louis must've actually bought all the stuff because we didn't have a car or anything. And then he persuaded one of the museum—the botanist drove us. Didn't think he'd ever see us again, thought it was crazy.

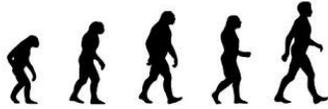
Virginia Morell

The botanist?

Jane Goodall

Yes, everyone. They all thought Louis was amoral. They all thought that sending off two lone, unarmed women into the bush was the most ridiculous, stupid thing.

Meredith Johnson



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Goodall arrived in Kigoma on the shores of Lake Tanganyika with her mother, Vanne, ready to begin her dream job. She and her mother, along with their cook, Dominic, and their game warden escort loaded up the boat and set off across the lake.

Jane Goodall

Yeah, Louis had got a little boat, it was a simple little aluminum boat—very good one, actually. And finally got permission to go and the warden, who was there to see us established, he was actually quite irritable about everything. He thought it was stupid. He didn't think that—I'd—that we'd stay more than two weeks. That's what he told everyone. No, he thought it was mad. But we got on fine with him once we'd met him, he melted. And so he put us and our boat on the little government launch, Cabisi, which is still there. And took us along and landed us where his two game scouts were. And helped us put up the tent.

Virginia Morell

You camped right on the shores of the lake?

Jane Goodall

Just a tiny bit in, yeah. And the game ranger organized meetings telling everybody, locally, who we were and what we were doing. And they all thought we'd be spies, that the government wanted to get more land into the park. So we had to be watched to start with. Because we—it was—they thought that if I saw one chimp, I'd write down four. In other words, more chimps needed more land. That's what they were convinced. So it didn't last long.

Virginia Morell

How long did it take before you convinced them otherwise?

Jane Goodall

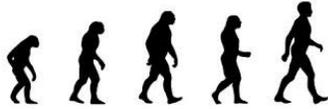
A month, two weeks.

Virginia Morell

What was your reaction when you saw where you were going to be?

Jane Goodall

Well, my reaction was, how am I going to find the chimps? Because I looked into those valleys and it somehow seemed much bigger then. Because, of course, the forest was all the way to Kigoma. So it seemed a much bigger wilderness area. It was totally unknown, and I knew that, in that place, somewhere there were chimps. But you know, how would I find them? It just seemed like a needle in a haystack. And then, to start with, I had to have these two people always with me. So we go clumping up a valley, and the chimps came to a tree, but they were



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Origin Stories Episode 3 Jane Goodall

too far away to see them. And it was all quite—It was exciting but, at the same time, I knew that I needed to see something exciting to get more money. So it was very worrying, too.

Meredith Johnson

The first months were tough. The land was very rugged. Dense forests covered the steep hills. The chimps ran away every time she got close. When the months-long rainy season started, everything was sopping wet morning till night. It felt like she was never dry. She trekked through the forest every day trying to find the chimps. She and her mother both got sick with fevers. She worried the funding would run out, and she'd fail to learn anything about chimpanzees.

Jane Goodall

Yeah, it was quite funny because I would write and say, "I can't do it." Because he put all that money and trust in me and I was getting more and more worried. And every time I wrote back and said I can't do it, he'd write back, and his writing got bigger and bigger, saying, "I know you can." And, of course, the more he said "I know you can." the more pressure I felt because I didn't know what else to do than what I was doing.

Meredith Johnson

Finally, after four months, Goodall had a breakthrough. It all started with one chimp.

Jane Goodall

Well, the breakthrough was David Greybeard, first of all, losing his fear. And secondly, demonstrating tool using.

Virginia Morell

And how did he lose his fear of you?

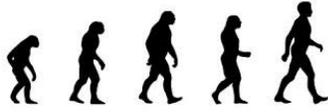
Jane Goodall

I don't know. He just was always—He often started feeding over where the little African camp was, where Dominic was, and the game scout. And David would be seen feeding there. And women would come and tell their husbands because they were getting firewood. And they were always seeing this one chimp with his gray beard. It was David.

Virginia Morell

And so he became tolerant of you?

Jane Goodall



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Origin Stories Episode 3 Jane Goodall

Yes. Why he lost his fear before the others, you know—who knows? It's just that they're all different.

Virginia Morell

And then, because of his lack of fear, the other chimps saw that, and they responded?

Jane Goodall

Yeah, so he helped me to habituate early, he really did. So, anyway, Mom left after four months. And it must've been early November, I saw the tool using, just after mom had gone back. So I had nobody to share the excitement with. So the tool using, as I had not been to university, I don't know that I even—well, I guess I knew it was fascinating. I don't think I realized how fascinating it was. But I do remember thinking, well, I know I've seen David. I know he picked grasses and put them in the nest. But I couldn't really see properly so I didn't have—believe it..

Virginia Morell

In the termite nest?

Jane Goodall

Yeah, I could only see his back view.

Meredith Johnson

What she saw was David Greybeard, the chimp, hunched over and poking a long stalk of grass into a termite mound, pulling it out and eating the termites that got stuck to the grass.

Jane Goodall

So I didn't dare tell Louis until I had seen it twice more. I wanted to be sure. I wanted to know it wasn't just an aberrant thing. So as it was the termite season by then, I saw it twice more and wrote this telegram. And his reply was, "Now, we must redefine man, redefine tool, or accept chimpanzees as humans."

Virginia Morell

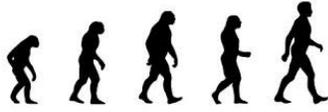
He must've been just pleased to see good news, I think.

Jane Goodall

Yeah, he used to go around talking about me. I heard that from lots of other people.

Virginia Morell

Do you remember what they said he was telling them?



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Jane Goodall

No, he was just very proud of me and what I'd done. And, "You see, I told you so. I wasn't so stupid after all."

Virginia Morell

Especially after people kept saying that it wasn't.

Jane Goodall

Yes, it was amoral.

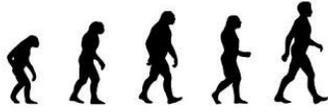
Meredith Johnson

Within the first year of her study at Gombe, she discovered things that forever changed the way we define humans. She learned that not only did chimpanzees use tools, they made them, too, stripping leaves off the grass to make the stalks work better. She learned that they hunted and ate meat, and shared it with each other. Before her study, people thought they were peaceful vegetarians. She learned about every detail of their lives, their relationships, their childhoods. She came to know them as individuals. She gave them names.

It's been 55 years since Jane Goodall first set foot in the Gombe Forest. And the study of the Gombe chimps is still going strong. It's the oldest ongoing, continuous study of any animal in the wild. It's grown from a single scientist in a tent with her mother to a research center with teams of scientists, students and trackers who work at Gombe on new studies of chimpanzee behavior.

Gombe is now a national park with rangers to protect chimps from poachers. Jane Goodall, herself now travels the world working to save chimpanzees from extinction. For all these years, everything the Gombe chimps do has been observed and recorded using a system Jane Goodall designed. And not just major events like births and deaths, every social interaction, meal, grooming session, squabble, display. That's a lot of information. What do you do with all that information? Find out in an upcoming episode of Origin Stories.

Thanks so much to the amazing Jane Goodall for sharing her story. You can learn more about her and her work on her website, www.JaneGoodall.org. And thanks to [ROHO, the Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library at the University of California Berkeley](#), for partnering with the Leakey Foundation for the Louis Leakey Centennial Oral History project, which Jane Goodall's interview was part of. We'll have links on our website, www.OriginStoriesPodcast.org, where you can find out more.



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Origin Stories Episode 3 Jane Goodall

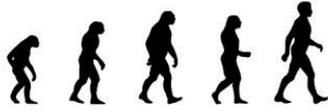
This episode of Origin Stories was produced by me, Meredith Johnson, and edited by Audrey Quinn. We had help from Schuyler Swenson. This episode was scored by Henry Nagel with original music and music by the [Blue Dot Sessions](#) and [Lee Rosevere](#).

This show is a project of the Leakey Foundation. [The Leakey Foundation](#) was named for Louis Leakey. Since 1968, we've been supporting exciting scientific research including studies of primates in the wild. The Leakey Foundation is a long-time supporter of Jane Goodall and other scientists who help us to understand primate behavior. The Leakey Foundation provides funding for long-term studies at Gombe and around the world. You can help support this important work and learn more at www.LeakeyFoundation.org. That's L-e-a-k-e-y, Foundation.org.

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Origin Stories Episode 3 Jane Goodall

Suggested tags

chimpanzee, 7, 8, 9, 10
chimpanzees, 1
Coryndon Museum, 2, 3
David Greybeard, 9, 10
fossils, 3, 4, 5
Gombe, 1, 6, 10, 11
gorillas, 1
Jane Goodall, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Kigoma, 6, 7, 8
Lake Tanganyika, 7
Louis Leakey, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 11
Mary Leakey, 3, 5
Natural History Museum, 2
Natural History Museum in London, 2
Olduvai Gorge, 3, 4, 5
orangs, 1
orangutans, 1
paleoanthropologist, 1, 3
primates, 1, 11
proto-man, 1
Rift Valley of Eastern Africa, 4
Serengeti Plains, 4
Tanzania, 1, 4, 6
The Leakey Foundation, 1, 11
United Nations, 6