

THE VARSITY

Jane Goodall to youth: “Break through and change the world”

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Jane Goodall spoke at U of T on Saturday and spent time with children on Sunday with her Roots and Shoots group. She led the children in games and spoke about the work the group has done worldwide. See ww.rootsandshoots.org for more information.

This past Saturday, world-renowned primatologist, environmentalist and UN Messenger of Peace, Dr. Jane Goodall, swung into Convocation Hall to give a lecture that commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the Jane Goodall Institute. In conjunction with the U of T Centre for Environment, the discussion focused on a number of issues such as her revolutionary scientific research, the conservation of chimpanzee habitats, and the eradication of the bush meat trade, causes with which Goodall has long been associated. Her week long visit to Canada has shed light on another aspect of her work: encouraging the world, especially youth, to take action ensuring the world's environmental survival.

The JGI's youth environmental and humanitarian program, Roots and Shoots, strives to foster awareness and respect for all living things, promote understanding of all cultures and beliefs, and inspire young people to take action by working on one of the program's projects. Some of these tasks may include reforestation, shoreline cleanup, care for animals, communitycentered development or simply picking up trash on the streets of Toronto. To date, Roots and Shoots has over 8000 groups in 100 countries, with over 10,500 youth participating in Canada alone.

Goodall said that she does not find it surprising that young people can feel desperate, hopeless and helpless. This is exactly why the program is so vital, she adds, because youth need to be told they can make a difference. They must figure out what they are passionate about, and then strive to make change in a positive way. “Young people, when informed and empowered, can break

through and change the world.” Why is it that Goodall has such faith in young citizens? Looking over her life and work, it becomes clear that as a scientist and a human being, she has come full circle with her efforts. Goodall was once not dissimilar from youth today who desire to understand and protect the world.

Animals were of noticeable interest to Goodall from a very young age. By the time she was four, she began to observe and inquire into the scientific perplexities around her. When puzzled by the seemingly impossible task of a hen laying an egg, Goodall spent hours in a hen house until her inquiry was answered. A self-proclaimed odd child, she credits her mother as her greatest sponsor and inspiration.

As she entered into early adulthood, Goodall was determined to travel to Africa and pursue her childhood dream of working with animals, but like so many other young adults chasing a dream, the path was not clear and she needed others to help her along the way. After attending secretarial school, Goodall got a job with a London-based documentary film company. It seemed her dreams were being placed firmly on the back burner. But at the age of twenty-three, after only a short stint in the secretarial business, her years of preparation met opportunity when a friend invited her to go to Kenya.

This trip proved to be significant, for it was in Kenya that Goodall met the person that would become her mentor, Dr. Louis Leakey. Upon meeting Goodall, the already-established paleontologist and anthropologist was immediately impressed by her knowledge, and soon asked her to accompany him and his wife on a fossil-hunting expedition in Olduvai Gorge.

Although Goodall was aware of the importance of her work with Dr. Leakey, she still had a strong yearning to work with wild animals. She turned down an offer to continue her work with fossils at the Nairobi Museum because, as she put it, working at the museum or becoming a palaeontologist “had to do with dead animals. And I still wanted to work with living animals. My childhood dream was as strong as ever: somehow I must find a way to watch free, wild animals living their own, undisturbed lives.”

Dr. Leakey could not ignore his protégé’s intense desire, and he decided she was ready to take on her own research project with the chimpanzees at Gombe National Park on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, Tanzania. However, Goodall faced a demoralizing roadblock when British authorities were reluctant to allow a young person, especially a woman, to go into the depths of Africa alone. Refusing to let her daughter’s dreams be quashed, Goodall’s mother offered to accompany her, and the authorities soon acquiesced.

Although it took several months for the great apes to become accustomed to her, Goodall did not let her eagerness compromise her research. Through patience, she was able to assimilate herself into the animal community. What she found altered the way anthropologists perceive our species’ closest relative. She discovered that these primates make tools, eat meat, have distinct personalities, and engage in warfare. It soon became clear how alike humans and chimpanzees are. “I think I understand people better from working with chimps, and they drive you into concern for people,” she says.

With the founding of the Jane Goodall Institute in 1977, Goodall began to make waves beyond the scientific world, into the humanitarian one. Soon, her lifelong love of nature had developed into a world-wide endeavour.

Perhaps Goodall trusts the world's youth because she knows first-hand that one person can overcome life's barricades and change the minds and actions of others. She sees her young self in the children, adolescents and young adults that she continuously inspires to contribute.

In a climate that seems to be plagued with ignorance, fear and thus stagnation, Goodall remains positive about the resolve of humanity. "We have at last begun to understand and face up to the problems that threaten us and the survival of life on Earth as we know it. Surely, then, we can use our problem-solving abilities, our brains, and, joining hands around the world, find ways to live that are in harmony with nature."

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