

# ‘Dr Jane’: A personal tribute to Jane Goodall

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Despite a little rain recently, the ground beneath the topsoil was like concrete; I had to hammer in my crowbar to loosen the clay. By late afternoon, however, I’d completed my task. On 6 October, within a week of Dr Jane’s death, I had planted the last three trees for a grove I began creating on 3 April 2024 – to celebrate her 90th birthday. I had chosen mainly Birches, accompanied by Wild Cherry, Wild Pear, Crab-apple, Bullace, Willow, all to sustain pollinators in the spring and feed the birds in autumn. Originally I had just wanted to plant ‘The Birches’ after Dr Jane’s England home, but, as I was digging, an involuntary thought made me laugh out loud. My saplings were all



The author intends to position a plaque or inscribe on his woodland map: ‘The Birches’ in *gratam et amantissimam memoriam Jane Goodall, Ph.D., DBE.*

'pioneers'! Where I have positioned them, adjacent to a managed Hornbeam hedge, they will never be overshadowed.

Why 'Dr Jane'? Upon our one meeting, on 7 September 2015, she frowned when I addressed her as 'Dame Jane'. Her last words to me, on my birthday in January after I had updated her on my 'The Birches' project, ended with 'Love from Dr Jane'. So, to me, 'Dr Jane' she will remain.

What's remarkable about this reminiscence is not the relationship I felt I had, but that thousands of people across the globe have similar vignettes to share. Jane had an extraordinary capacity for both leading a global strategy while simultaneously giving of herself to individuals who were not famous or powerful. This special quality, fostering deep connections at so many levels, must lie behind why she was so beloved and her loss felt so acutely and widely.

Jane's story becomes ever more compelling as more details emerge with each retelling. Of being asked by Louis Leakey in 1960 to study chimpanzees in Gombe, Tanzania, fulfilling her dream of travelling to Africa, even though by then Tarzan had married 'the wrong Jane'. Requiring a chaperone, she chose her ever-supportive mother. Her first major scientific insight, arising from observing David Greybeard using a tool to 'fish' for termites (as Leakey famously responded, "Now we must redefine tool, redefine man"). A Cambridge PhD followed in which she insisted on naming her subjects. In 1977 the founding of the Jane Goodall Institute and the beginning of a worldwide outreach mission entailing never staying longer than three weeks in any one place. Her indefatigable drive enduring until the night she died, on Wednesday, 1 October, in Los Angeles. Her courage, resolution, guiding spirituality, sense of adventure, even towards death. And her journey towards ethical veganism: what we all do makes a difference, most profoundly what we put on our plates. Deciding what kind of difference we want to make irresistibly drew Jane to basing her diet on plants not animals, as it should for all of us.

I knew the icon. Marc Bekoff and Koen Margodt's edited collection *Jane Goodall at 90* provides readers with an introduction to the real Dr Jane. She had a tremendous capacity for friendship, evidenced by the outpouring of tributes and grief on social media. Marc and Jane knew each other for 27 years, widely collaborated, and Marc's revised edition (with a foreword by Jane) of *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (2024) honoured her 90th.

Jane was a good friend to animals, but they were also friends with her. She oft spoke of Rusty, her childhood dog. "Owing much" to David Greybeard she included him in the dedication of her monograph *In the Shadow of Man* (1971). To do so again in her *Book of Hope* (2021), written half a century later, speaks of a deep and abiding affection. David must have felt for Jane too. The moment in the *Shadow* that moved me most was when he fleetingly held and squeezed her hand, dissolving the "barrier of untold centuries [...] a reward far beyond my greatest hopes" (van Lawick-Goodall, 1971: 268).

On that September 2015 evening when I met Dr Jane I believed myself to be in the presence of a living saint. That may sound hyperbolic, but others will attest to the same feeling of meeting someone whose serenity radiated something never witnessed before or since. However foolish expressing this may make me



Marc Bekoff with Jane sharing a fine single malt whisky, which Dr Jane referred to as her ‘cough medicine’ (photo by Thomas D Mangelsen/Images of Nature).

seem, I believe that something was peace and goodness. The experience was simply wonderful and will stay with me for ever.

Unyielding in the gloom of desperate times, Dr Jane was a light shining brilliantly in the darkness. From afar, that light did not so much splutter or dim, but was suddenly gone; in an instant that darkness became darker still. But Dr Jane would not approve of such a lachrymose lament. In November 2021 she sent me a handwritten letter, which, having framed, I read every time I sit down to work. She wrote of our 2015 meeting “and the change that made in your life”. It cannot end thus, she would gently chide: never give up; never lose hope.

## Acknowledgements

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