



## ME, JANE

Her life story may be tough to condense in two pages, but Jane Goodall wants her message of conservation to be what she's best known for. BY ZARA ZHUANG

HOW SHOULD ONE write a profile of the primatologist and conservationist Dame Jane Goodall?

You could start where she often does in her presentations, introducing herself in fluent chimpanzee pant-hoots and then retelling her now legendary tale of how, at age four-and-half, she hid in a hen house in the English countryside for hours waiting to

observe how eggs emerged from the fowls, forcing her mother to call in the police to locate the missing child ("Isn't that the making of a little scientist?" she asks the audience. "Curiosity, asking questions, not getting the right answer, and deciding to find out for yourself.") Or how, at 10, she discovered the book *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, "fell passionately in love with the glorious lord of the jungle, and was horribly jealous because he married the wrong Jane."

What about her 21-day journey by ship from the dankness of England to equatorial eastern Africa in 1957, at just 23 years old, and later becoming a protégé of Kenyan paleoanthropologist and archaeologist Louis Leakey? Or the 26 years she spent observing chimpanzees in Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania, where she made the breakthrough discovery — on noticing David Greybeard, the first chimpanzee that trusted "this peculiar white ape," breaking off twigs, stripping them of leaves and using the bare sticks to fish termites from underground nests — that the ability to create and use tools

PHOTOS: JANE GOODALL INSTITUTE



JANE GOODALL WITH FIELD STAFF AT GOMBE STREAM NATIONAL PARK, TANZANIA

wasn't *Homo sapiens'* exclusive domain?

In the words of another great Dame, Shirley Bassey: Where do I begin?

The United Nations Messenger of Peace since 2002 was in Singapore for the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Jane Goodall Institute (Singapore), during which she addressed the packed MES Theatre on the urgency of environmental conservation, and met students and volunteers from the local chapter of her namesake conservation organisation. She's also the subject of the recent National Geographic documentary film, *Jane*, directed by Brett Morgen, and based largely on archival footage shot by the society's photographer-filmmaker and Goodall's first husband, Baron Hugo van Lawick. The 90-min feature saw its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in October.

Goodall may be 83 years old, but she still looks the same as she did at 23 — sporting the exact ponytail from her youth and the olive button-ups in which she's trekked

through Tanzanian jungles. Her speech is steady and her countenance calm, but she's as passionate about her subject matter as a Southern Baptist preacher his. She's earned innumerable accolades and awards — the French Legion of Honour in 2006, the British Academy President's Medal in 2014, honorary degrees from at least 40 international institutions, among others — but continues to devote some 300 days a year to zipping around the world giving lectures, meeting youths in her global community action programme Roots & Shoots, and overseeing research at international Jane Goodall Institute chapters. She never stays more than three weeks at each location.

This is the life Goodall has known since 1986, when she attended the "Understanding Chimpanzees" symposium, organised by the Chicago Academy of Sciences, where chimpanzee researchers discussed forests in Africa being cleared for human settlement and the contagion that followed, the beginning of the bushmeat trade, and the horrid living conditions of primates in research facilities.

"I had nightmares for weeks after seeing secretly filmed videos of our closest relatives in medical research labs housed in cages measuring 5 ft by 5 ft," Goodall recounts. "I went to that conference as a scientist, and I left an activist."

Beyond advocating for the conservation of Man's primate cousins, Goodall shares on the

message of environmental protection and responsibility with no less earnest conviction than when she first embarked on the journey. "You hear this expression, 'We haven't inherited this planet from our parents — we've borrowed it from our children,'" Goodall opines. "But we haven't been borrowing our children's future in recent years; we've been stealing it. How is it possible that the most intellectual creature is destroying its only home? Is there perhaps some disconnect between this clever brain and the human heart?"

No matter how little time there seems to be left on the countdown to an environmental catastrophe and apocalypse, Goodall remains hopeful of humanity's ability to collectively organise and apply the brakes before irreparable damage is done.

"I'm a very obstinate person," she says of her faith. "Yes, you meet setbacks and get frustrated and disappointed, and you can feel helpless at times, but I guess growing up during the war made it different — bombs were falling all around but I got up and [went about my life]."

Reflecting on the decades she's spent lecturing and advocating, Goodall denies having ever considered how long she'd remain in this fight.

"I just jumped into it. You don't think of your life in 30 years, and there was so much to do. It was obvious from the beginning that it was a huge task. But if I had really seriously sat down and thought, 'What on earth do you think you can do?' I probably would have done nothing." ■