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# World-famous conservationist Jane Goodall tells her story

[Mikha Chan](#)

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Goodall visited Malaysia last weekend, holding a series of well-attended talks in which she told her life story and encouraged scientific curiosity among children.



PETALING JAYA: World-famous primatologist, ethologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall visited Malaysia last weekend to tell the story of her life in a series of talks organised by Roots and Shoots Malaysia.

Speaking at SJK (C) Yuk Chai, on “Coexistence For The Common Good”; at the Berjaya Times Square Hotel on “Finding Life’s Passion”; and at the 12th Khazanah Global Lectures, Goodall painted a vivid picture of her life as a scientist, who was shaped and encouraged by her mother, Margaret Myfanwe Joseph.

“What I do remember vividly is seeing a hen going into a henhouse. I thought: Ah, she’s going to lay an egg. Now I’ll find out,” Goodall said to the packed Manhattan Ballroom in the Berjaya Times Square Hotel last Saturday morning.

“I crawled in after her. Big mistake. (There were) squawks of...fear, possibly, and she flew out. I then went into an empty henhouse and hid in the corner and waited...and waited. My family had no idea where I was, it was beginning to get dark, my mother was out searching, and she sees this excited little girl rushing to the house, all covered in straw.

“So many mothers would have scolded me and said, ‘Don’t you know how worried we were? Don’t you dare do that again!’ which would have killed the excitement. But she saw my shining eyes and sat down to hear my wonderful story of how a hen lays an egg.

“The reason I’m telling that story...Isn’t that the making of a little scientist? The curiosity? Asking questions, not getting the right answers...deciding to find out for yourself?”

A different kind of mother, Goodall said, might have crushed that early scientific curiosity.

“My mother decided that I would learn to read much more quickly if she found books about animals. Of course, she was right,” Goodall said.

As such, Goodall developed a distinct love of animals from the books she read with Edgar Rice Burroughs’ “Tarzan”, sparking her deep lifelong interest in animals.

“That was when my dreams began. I would grow up, go to Africa, live with animals and write books about them. That was my dream and everybody at school laughed at me.”

She noted the many attempts to discourage her from her path, built largely around Africa’s reputation as the faraway “Dark Continent” and how “Girls don’t do that sort of thing”, as Goodall put it.

However, her mother Margaret remained supportive, advising her to work hard.

In 1956, at the tender age of 22, Goodall left for Kenya to work with paleontologist Louis Leakey at Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania.

She became a recognised primatologist, specialising in chimpanzees next to her peers Dian Fossey and Birute Galdikas, who were also trained by Leakey and focused on gorillas and orangutans respectively.

According to Goodall, Leakey, then the curator of the National Museum in Nairobi, had at their first meeting asked her many questions about the different animals in the museum.

“I had read so many books about animals and Africa as a child. I could answer most of his questions,” Goodall said.

It was during her time at Gombe Stream that she would make her mark as a primatologist, studying chimpanzees and eventually making science journal headlines with her observation that chimpanzees, not just humans, were capable of using tools.

Her turn for activism came however in 1986 after she attended the Understanding Chimpanzees conference by the Chicago Academy of Sciences on the decimation of forests and the surrounding wildlife and villages.

It was then that Goodall became a full-blown activist and conservationist, speaking and working until today to raise awareness on conservation.

In 2015, she was among 20 high-profile figures who signed a letter to UK’s Members of Parliament opposing Prime Minister David Cameron’s plan to amend the Hunting Act 2004, which would repeal the ban on fox-hunting with dogs.

Goodall has founded the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), a global wildlife and environmental conservation organisation headquartered in Vienna, Virginia, as well as Roots and Shoots, the JGI global youth-led community action programme that also organised her visit here to Malaysia.

Among the honours Goodall has received for her environmental and humanitarian work was being named the United Nations Messenger of Peace in 2002, the Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2004, and the Grand Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic in 2011.

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