

Never give up on your dreams - Dr Jane Goodall

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Jane founded the Jane Goodall Institute in 1977 to focus on inspiring individual actions to improve the understanding, welfare and conservation of great apes. - Gustavo Caballero/Getty Images/AFP

KUALA LUMPUR: Started off as a very shy little girl with a dream, Dr Jane Goodall never knew she would be speaking to millions of people around the world, sharing about her passion on welfare and conservation of great apes.

Jane, 82, now a world-renowned ethologist, conservationist and United Nations Messenger of Peace, had one person to thank for, her mother.

Describing her mother as extraordinary, Jane, born an animal lover, recalled how her mother would encourage her to embrace her passion and explore new things at a very young age.

"When I was one and a half years old, she came to my room to say good night and she found that I took a whole handfull of worms to bed with me."

"Most mothers will be crossed because there was a lot of earth on the bed as well but she said quietly to me, 'Jane, they need to go back into the garden or they will die', and I carried them back," she said during her speech at the 12th Khazanah Global

Lectures, here, yesterday.



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Another moment, she recalled, was while spending the holidays in the countryside at the age of four.

Staying in the farm, she had the task of collecting eggs from the hen house.

Curious to know where eggs come from, she remembered hiding behind the straw stack in the hen house where the hens slept at night to lay their eggs.

"I waited and waited and waited. Nobody had any idea where I was. It was getting dark and they were searching for me and they even called the police!

"But when my mother met me, instead of telling me off, which would then killed all the excitement, she saw my shining eyes and sat down to hear about the wonderful story about how a hen laid its egg.

"Isn't that a making of a little scientist? The curiosity, asking questions, not getting the right answers, deciding to find out myself, making a mistake, not giving up and learning patience," she said.

As a child, Jane loves reading books about animals, her favourite book was "Dr Doolittle", where she pretended she too, could understand animals.

However, her dream of working with apes in Africa really materialised when she found a book "Tarzan" and fell passionately in love with the character.

"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.

"How would you go to Africa? It's a very far away continent also known as the 'dark continent' back then. We didn't have any money, and girls don't do that sort of things."

"They would tell me to dream about something that I could achieve and forget about Africa," she said.

The only person who stood by Jane and supported her dreams was her mother, when she said to her, "Jane, if you really want this, you have to work really hard, you will have to take advantage of opportunities and never give up."

And she did.

She worked for five months in a hotel and eventually saved up enough money and took a boat to Africa at the age of 23.

In Africa, her friend encouraged her to contact the famous paleontologist, Louis Leakey, who was then the curator of the National Museum in Nairobi.

"He asked me many questions about the different animals in the museum and of course, since I have read so many book about animals and Africa as a child, I could answer most of his questions," she said.

He then hired her as a secretary and later sent her out to learn about chimpanzees in the wild.

In July 1960, Jane began setting up her camp at Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania and bravely entered the little-known world of chimpanzees.

Equipped with nothing more than a notebook and a pair of binoculars, with her unyielding patience and optimism, she won the trust of those initially shy creatures and she managed to open a window into their sometimes strange and often familiar-seeming lives.

Her breakthrough observation was when she noticed a chimp modified twigs to "fish" for termites, which was a redefining moment in science back then, as humans were thought to be the only creatures capable of using tools.

From her chimp observation in Gombe, it is now the world's longest running wildlife project of social and interactions of wild chimpanzees in Tanzania.

She then founded the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) in 1977, to focus on inspiring individual actions to improve the understanding, welfare and conservation of great apes and to safeguard the planet.

She has received many honours for her environmental and humanitarian work. She was named Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in a ceremony held in Buckingham Palace in 2004.

In April 2002, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan named her as a United Nations Messenger of Peace.

On safeguarding the planet, she believes it takes everyone to make a difference.

"Every single person makes a difference every single day. This takes people out of this helpless feeling of 'there is nothing I can do because the problems are too big.'

"With the magnification power of social media, television and film, the individual's action is then multiplied by a billion times and this is going to lead to a better world," Jane said.