



Following Fifi: My Adventures Among Wild Chimpanzees: Lessons from our Closest Relatives

John Crocker , Jane Goodall (Foreword)

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As a young student, John Crocker embarked on the adventure of a lifetime, spending eight months in the Gombe forest working with Jane Goodall. He followed families of wild chimpanzees from sunrise to sunset and learned the fundamental behavioral traits of these chimps as they raised their offspring.

One chimpanzee captivated him. Her name was Fifi, and she displayed extraordinary patience and reassurance toward her infant, Freud. Upon returning home and becoming a doctor, Crocker found himself incorporating the lessons he learned from Fifi into his work as a father and physician. When he witnessed his young patients rocketing around his exam room, he would picture Fifi's patience and tacit approval of Freud's uninhibited and joyful exploration.

Crocker shares how his time spent with our closest animal cousins has helped him better understand his patients with ADD, anxiety, and depression, and how primate traits hardwired into our own natural behavior help chimpanzees protect their community, raise their young, and survive. Finally, chronicling his return to Gombe thirty-six years later with his own son, he reflects on how his experience with the chimps has come full circle.

An illuminating book that will raise thought-provoking questions about the evolution of human behavior and the importance of patience and strong family bonds, *Following Fifi* provides a greater understanding of what it means to be human.

Following Fifi: My Adventures Among Wild Chimpanzees: Lessons from our Closest Relatives Details

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From Reader Review Following Fifi: My Adventures Among Wild Chimpanzees: Lessons from our Closest Relatives for online ebook

Kristine says

Following Fifi by John Crocker is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in early December.

A significant amount of real, heartfelt, considerate qualitative observations where I thought there would be only quantifiable. Crocker's journey into the Gombe at 22 from 1972-1974, then his experiences in working as a family physician before his return to the Gombe with his son, Tommy, in tow in 2009 all revolve around calm, serene storytelling of observations and interactions among chimpanzees and people, including Fifi, Frodo, Freud, Jane, Hamisi, Venne, Grub, and his many patients in Seattle for whom which so much of his experiences can wrap around to.

Edward says

I would never have read this book had it not been for a chance conversation I had with my doctor after a routine exam. He said he was going to retire soon and hoped to complete a book about his experiences with Jane Goodall and the chimpanzees of East Africa. He had gone there many years ago as a graduate student at Stanford and said the year spent there had a profound experience on his later life, both personally and professionally.

As the title indicates, he learned much from the behavior of the chimpanzees. He was there for roughly a year as a young man and returned nearly 40 years later with his adult son. The book spans and includes both visits. As an observer Crocker traveled through the forests and observed chimpanzee behavior, observing but not interacting with them in their natural habitat. Fifi, from his observation, turned out to be exceptional chimpanzee mother, nurturing and caring for her chimpanzee infants. The process of studying chimpanzee behavior required close attention and patience, qualities that Crocker tried to incorporate into his later medical practice. Too often, he comments, physicians are rushed and rely too heavily on medical tests and procedures. Not that they're unimportant, but so are the patient's feelings, and a good doctor should take the time to listen to and respect these feelings.

Crocker learned, too, that as a part of a larger landscape, he could not direct or control the world around him. In researching and taking notes on chimpanzee behavior, he realized he was a privileged guest, a lesson he later used in his practice as a physician, as well as in his actions as a husband and parent. Guidance is needed, but not control.

In his last visit to Gombe, the chimpanzee sanctuary, he found the habitat for chimps had been much reduced, due to human habitat destruction. Goodall had managed to halt some of this, but the implications are ominous. Humans in trying to shortsightedly "control" nature, contribute to its destruction.

These are all larger concerns, but Crocker describes as well the day-to-day existence of Fifi and one of her children, Freud (groups of chimps were designated by letters so that all of one family group had names beginning with the same letter). Much of a chimp's time is spent in foraging for food. Children play, just as humans do, but the mothers are always close by and alert to their children. The chimps spend a lot of time grooming (combing their hands through the hair of another) each other for relaxation and bonding. On the surface the mothering seemed calm and effortless, but it required a high level of competence. Affection and protection were simultaneously provided.

Chimpanzees and humans share 99 per cent of the same DNA. Obviously, human development moved away from chimpanzees, but as Crocker's book reminds us in many respects. they can teach us what some of our commonalities mean for behavior. It's an engaging book, combing his ideas with personal experience.

Clare O'Beara says

This highly enjoyable and thoughtful memoir focuses on an American doctor who, while a student, spent nine months with Jane Goodall and her team studying chimpanzees in Tanzania. He made good friends among the local support people and visited the village home of one young man, five hours' walk away. The chimps of course are the stars of any such naturalist memoir, but Jane Goodall is clearly a person of great character and gentleness, who made a decided impression on the young students, as did her family.

When Goodall observed chimps making and using tools, this literally changed the dictionary definition of humans. I did know that, but it never hurts to be reminded.

While working as a family doctor, the author often put his observations to good use, mentally likening a highly active boy to a young male chimp who needed room to run, climb and throw things, rather than dismissing him with an instant diagnosis of ADHD. He would not say so, in case the parents did not appreciate the comparison.

Later in life the author was able to make a return trip to the nature study centre, with his own grown son. The book contains his mature reflections and philosophies - the times when he needed a break from long hours and stressful work, but could only imagine himself in a forest - as well as remarks on polio and bilharzia and the work done by the Goodall Institute to keep Lake Tanganyika free of pollution, sewage and consequent disease. He noted that Mount Kilimanjaro was almost denuded of snow over thirty years of climate change.

Anyone who would like to read such a memoir can do very well to pick up this one and read about the earnest observer following Fifi and the other large, strong, wild chimps about the forest. As the author was able to draw on his letters home, the notes are crystal clear and the environment so well observed that I felt as though I was hearing the soundtrack.

Foreword by Jane Goodall.

I downloaded an ARC from Net Galley. This is an unbiased review.

Maureen Caupp says

I loved this book! I have always been fascinated by wild animals and nature. I loved it when my parents would take me hiking and camping in the wilderness in the U.S., but I have always hated mosquitoes and would be nervous like Tommy around poisonous snakes.

John's description of the chimps and the Tanzanian forest were beautiful. He did such a good job capturing how the experience with the chimps and researchers changed his life. His medical practice, his view of chimps and humans and the similarities we share, his relationship with his family and patients, and overall view of life was profoundly touched by the chimps and his experience as a student researcher. Here are two quotes I enjoyed.

"I am content to be alive now with modern conveniences, such as a hot water and a bathtub to relax me at the

end of a hard day, but I often find myself wanting more of a connection to nature, more time to build stronger connections with friends and family, and to feel just physically tired instead of emotionally exhausted at the end of the day."

"And we dream that our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will enjoy the profound pleasures of encountering a primate cousin -- a distant family member who still has so much to teach us about being human."

This book made me think of another book I recently enjoyed *Wolf Nation* by Brenda Peterson. Both books taught me more about chimps and wolves respectively, but both focused more on the relationships we have with and impact(complicated in many cases) these magnificent creatures have on humans. Ultimately the survival of both species depends largely on human actions.
