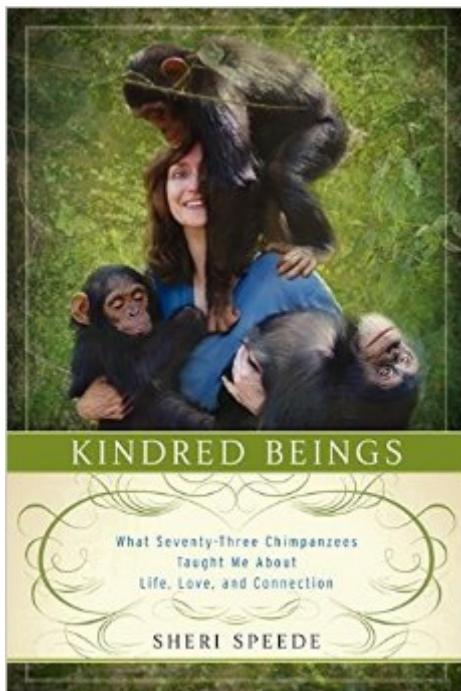


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Kindred Beings: What Seventy-Three Chimpanzees Taught Me About Life, Love, And Connection



Synopsis

Enter a world of tender friendships, staunch loyalties, violent jealousiesâ "and enduring love. As a child, Sheri Speede knew that she wanted to advocate for animals in any way she could. But it was not until many years after veterinary school, when she was transporting a chimpanzee named Pierre away from a biomedical facility as part of her job as a conservation advocate in Cameroon, that Dr. Speede discovered her true calling. She began to search for land for a forest sanctuary for captive chimpanzees that were held on chains and in small cages at local hotels. Dr. Speede eventually founded the Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue Center, a forested home for orphans of the illegal ape meat trade. One chimpanzee, Dorothy, was rescued by Dr. Speede and her colleagues from a bleak existence imprisoned on a chain and forged a deep friendship with her. Dr. Speede explains how chimpanzees, like humans, are capable of a broad spectrum of emotional behaviorsâ "both hateful and loving. Dr. Speede also candidly reveals her own struggles as a stranger in a foreign culture trying to adjust to rural African village life. And she admits that unlike Dorothy, she was not always kind, gentle, and forgiving. Dorothy died of old age at the sanctuary, and a photograph of Dorothy's funeral, in which Dr. Speede cradled Dorothy's head while her family of chimpanzees mournfully viewed her body, went viral after being published in National Geographic. The world was surprised at the depth of the chimps' grief at the loss of their friend, but Dr. Speede was not. Through the chimps, she had come to understand the meaning of love, loyalty, and true connection. While this is a compelling story about the emotional complexity of the chimpanzees she rescued and befriended, it is also Dr. Speede's story. Major events in her personal life, including love affairs, dangerous run-ins with criminals, and the birth of her daughter, unfold as the development of her primate rescue center runs parallel to her own development. Ultimately, Kindred Beings is a story of profound resilience, of both the apes and the woman who loved them.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: HarperOne; Reprint edition (September 2, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062132490

ISBN-13: 978-0062132499

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (53 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #400,037 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Zoology > Primatology #59 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Apes & Monkeys #281 in Books > Travel > Africa > General

Customer Reviews

I would suggest that this book be re-titled "Mission Impossible"! Having worked at a small sanctuary for chimpanzees in Central Africa for just a few months, I can attest to the enormity of the task undertaken by the author in a part of the world where accomplishing a simple task is a difficult challenge. Creating a sanctuary "from scratch" in a desperately under-developed country while battling poverty-driven corruption, crime, disease and ignorance at every turn, is surely a project of great magnitude. Using every ounce of her energy and wits, Dr. Speede somehow managed to surmount the many obstacles in her path..including a lack of building materials, adequate roads, skilled labor..not to mention the inevitable culture clashes that often made her unpopular with the locals, to say the least! Armed with few resources other than her strong will and sheer determination to rescue five captive chimps cruelly kept as 'tourist attractions', the author had to dig deep into her soul to find the strength and means to succeed. Over the course of those first bumpy years, she managed to build trusting relationships with local leaders which provided an essential support team for the sanctuary benefiting both the chimps and the villagers as well. Clearly, Sheri Speede is one of Margaret Mead's "thoughtful, committed citizens (who) can change the world". Read this book now and be filled with inspiration!

Sheri Speede founded the Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue Center in Cameroon as a home for orphans of the illegal ape meat trade. This is the story of how one little girl who loved animals found her true calling in a forest sanctuary in Africa as a committed animal activist and rescuer. It's an adventure story, because after all she was a stranger in a foreign culture trying to adjust to African village life--and it's a love story, because through the chimps she helped rescue she came to understand the meaning of love, loyalty, and true connection. As a child who knew that she always wanted to grow up and advocate for animals in some way, she took the traditional path at first by choosing a veterinary career. But soon after beginning her veterinary career she was moved by the plight of three adult captive chimpanzees on display in three small cages located on the back side of the Atlantic Beach Hotel. Captured as infants by poachers they had been in captivity most of their lives. Her sadness at the smallness of their lives haunted her and she was determined to see them

released from their torment. Though it took her some time to actually fulfill the promise she made to them to free them, she was eventually successful and established her sanctuary in the Mbargue forest. In this book, we see the development of Dr. Speede's personal story alongside the emotionally complex stories of the chimps she befriended. We come to know and love these "kindred beings" just as she does. When one of the rescued chimps (Dorothy) dies from old age at the sanctuary, we mourn too. The photograph of Dorothy's funeral (in which Dr. Speede cradled Dorothy's head while her family of chimpanzees mournfully viewed her body) went viral after being published in National Geographic. The world seemed to be surprised at the depth of the chimps' grief at the loss of their friend. Dr. Speede wasn't, and we weren't either after reading this powerful story of these personalities that are so similar to humans. Dr. Speede has spent her life battling ignorance and apathy and evil trying to end animal abuse and the suffering they endure at our hands. This compelling story of her bravery and determination to safeguard their well being is uplifting and inspiring. How fortunate our planet is to have people like Dr. Speede who are determined to live their convictions out in their daily lives sometimes against overwhelming odds. Dr. Speede is founder and Director of In Defense of Animals-Africa, an organization that is well worth your support. Read this book. Make a donation. It is important that this extraordinary work continue.

I loved this book. I loved the incredible tale of enviable determination I was shown in Sheri Speede. Once she came to know the true pain and suffering of her fellow beings, these chimps who are apes like us only different, that cannot speak or tell their pain, rage and frustration, she felt it, and unlike any who had encountered the first of the chimps, for whom Sanaga-Yong was founded, she was the first to feel it enough to do something about it, because she loved them. And that is a powerful part of this story, the unfolding of Sanaga-Yong Sanctuary is a lesson in how the power of love can and does change the universe, one small part at a time. Things happened I thought at times, because Sheri Speede would simply not let the universe unfold any other way! I don't know if anybody but Sheri and the chimps knew how important that was. More than once the book made me feel "this was meant to be"; so much that went before in her life prepared her, made her better able to do the job, and then, others of like caliber joined in, the energy grew and sustained itself, as more chimps so desperately needed a safe haven. Yes, this is a unique book, it has its own quality and timbre, it gives us so much, the experience of Africa, the people who help the sanctuary, and the unforgettable chimps, those amazing beings.

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