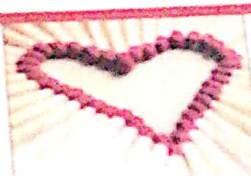
FEBRUARY 7, 201

NEW STRAITS TIMES
LIFE & TIMES
Live it up on Saturday

GIFTING GAFFES
LIVING PAGE 3

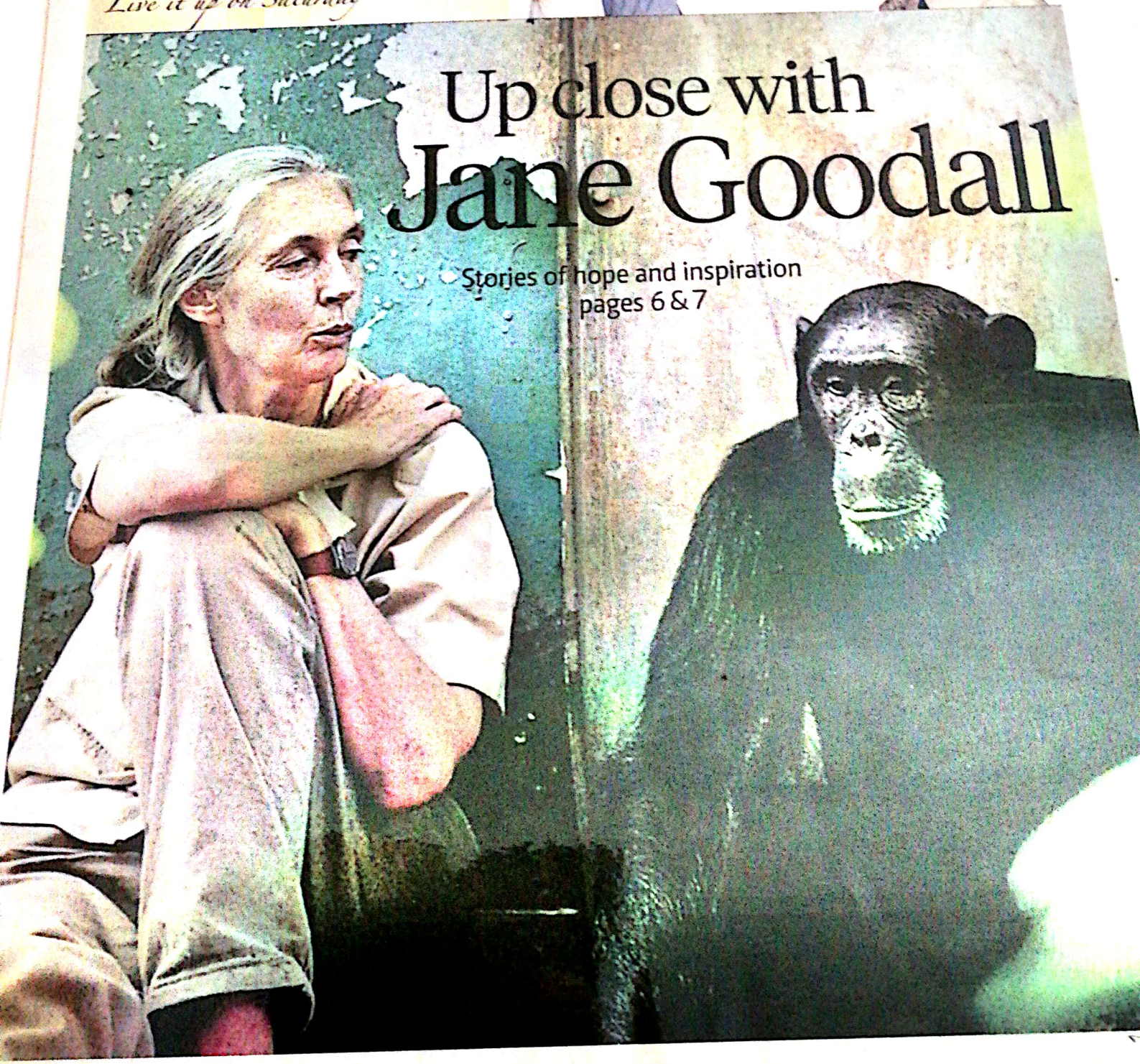


SPACE FOR SEDUCTION
LIVING PAGES 4 & 5

DEBORAH VOIGT OPENS UP
SHOWBIZ PAGE 33

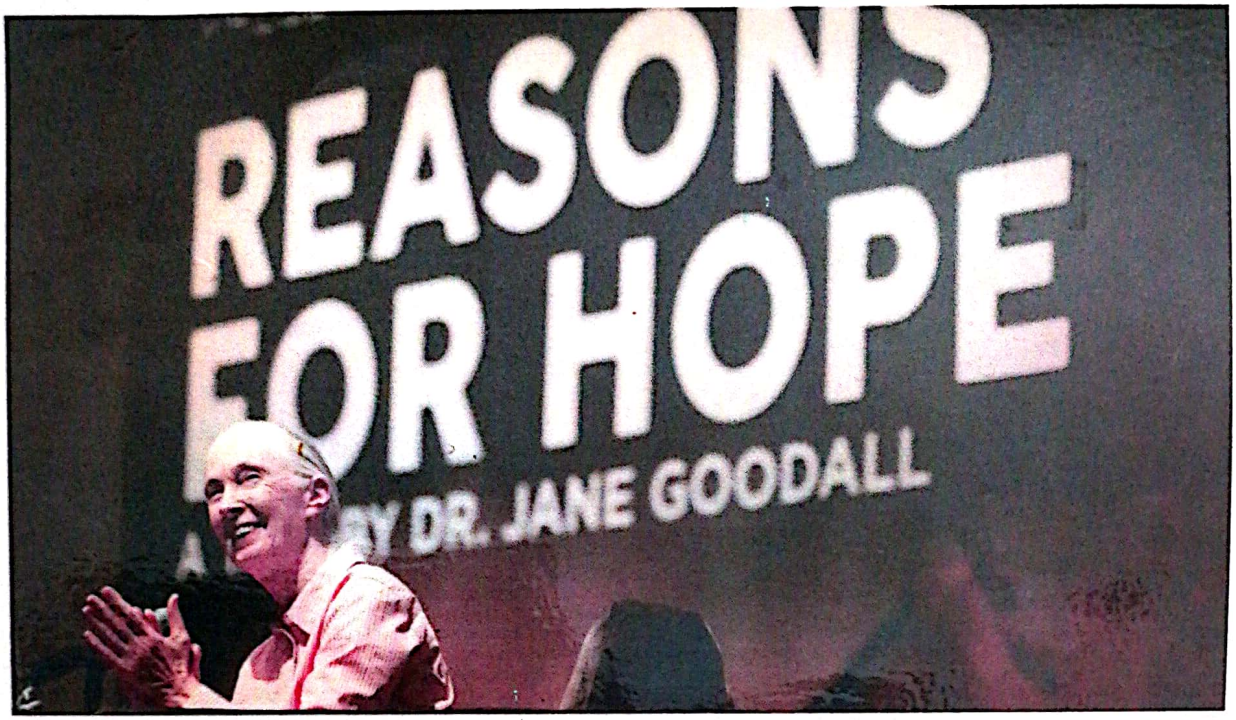
Up close with Jane Goodall

Stories of hope and inspiration
pages 6 & 7



A network of caring youth

World-acclaimed primatologist and environmental advocate Dr Jane Goodall shares her reasons for hope, writes **Kirana Aster**



Goodall, at 80, continues to be a symbol of inspiration. PICTURES COURTESY OF THE PHOTOZ

ELECTRIC. That was the atmosphere in the packed hall of a 2,000-strong crowd at the Berjaya Times Square Hotel in KL recently. From young school children to adults from all walks of life, they held their breath as their icon entered the room to a standing ovation.

But the overwhelming welcome wasn't reserved for a pop star. Still, it was nothing short of a rock star moment as the famed Dr Jane Goodall DBE delivered her talk "Reasons For Hope" that morning in her maiden trip to Malaysia.

The internationally-renowned primatologist, ethologist, anthropologist and United Nations Messenger of Peace is a stoic symbol to many but for different reasons. To her legion of fans, she's a symbol of inspiration and conviction for never giving up on your dreams.

To the scientific community, she's a symbol of a female pioneer in a field visibly dominated by men. To conservationists, she has been an important voice in the crusade against environmental destruction and apathy. And at 80, the world's leading expert in chimpanzees still packs a punch.

GIRL POWER

Long before her heyday as *National Geographic*'s cover girl for her work with chimpanzees, the young Jane Goodall grew up in a middle-class family in London. Born on April 3, 1934, she recalls being surrounded by strong women.

Her passion for animals manifested in the form of a stuffed toy, a chimp called Jubilee — the toddler's best friend and partner in crime. "I had a good start in life and had a mother who was very supportive. We didn't have much money but we had enough and we didn't need more."

She cultivated her curiosity and skills of observation from as young as 5 when she snuck into her grandmother's chicken coop in the countryside to observe how chicken lay eggs. She reappeared five hours later — her family was frantically looking for her by that time. Rather than scold her, Goodall's mother listened as the little girl excitedly detailed the miracle of life she had observed.

When she turned 10, she read the *Tarzan* stories religiously and decided then that she was going to work with animals in Africa. It was this early nurturing coupled with her mother's patience that sowed the seeds of a life-long dream.

The youth, believes Goodall, is reason for hope, as evident in the ***Roots and Shoots*** *programme.*

"Parents need to satisfy their children's curiosity as children develop better with the natural world around them. My awe and wonder as a child would have been simply crushed and I might not be where I am today if not for my mother's full support."

Growing up in an era when females were discouraged from choosing more adventurous pursuits, Goodall remained steadfast in her dreams. The phrase, "you're just a girl" was constantly thrown at Goodall but it only served to fuel her ambitions.

"If you believe it's a good idea, you must never give up on it," she emphasised.

She obtained excellent results at school but Goodall's family didn't have the means to send her to college. Instead, she went to secretarial school and the opportunity to realise her dreams arrived when she was invited to visit a friend in Kenya. She saved up working as a waitress and bought a one-way boat ticket to the "dark continent". She was 23. Her journey was just beginning.

INVIGORATING SCIENCE

Once in Nairobi, another door of opportunity opened for Goodall. She was introduced to the paleoanthropologist and archaeologist, Louis Leakey, who was studying the origins of human evolution in Africa. He had been searching for the right person for 10 years to research wild chimpanzees and found the perfect candidate in Goodall.

Their initial meet resulted in a job offer for Goodall who joined two other young women — Dian Fossey and Birute Galdikas, known as Leakey's "Trimates" — all were chosen by him to study chimpanzees, gorillas and the orang utan respectively. So in 1960, Goodall packed up again but this time brought along her mother to begin her research in Tanganyika (later called Tanzania) at the Gombe Stream Game Reserve, now known as Gombe National Park.

Her life, or fate, as some would argue, came full circle in Gombe. It was a homecoming of sorts for the 26-year-old Goodall whose solitary observations in the rainforest eventually led to breakthrough discoveries on chimpanzees. Her scientific findings catapulted her to international fame when she shed light on the animals' use of tools (a behaviour previously thought as unique to humans) and behavioural characteristics such as aggression and violence as well as altruism and affection.

Recognising the potential in Goodall's landmark work, in 1962, Leaky arranged for her to enrol in a PhD programme in ethology at Cambridge University. Without any college degree or scientific background, Goodall's early foray into her doctorate years was met with criticism from her colleagues.

Her bold personification and unconventional methodology of research on the Kasakela chimpanzee community in Gombe, with entry upon entry in her journal documenting the distinctive traits of David Greybeard, Flo and the likes were deemed as unscientific; chimps shouldn't have names they say, they should be given numbers.

"It was intimidating at first to be told that my studies were wrong and that I can't use names for animals because they don't have personalities or emotions. Science at the time was arrogant, reductionist and had no tools to study emotions in animals. Scientists didn't dare to give them attributes."

She explains that 99 per cent of chimpanzee DNA is identical with humans and that they're more intelligent than what we give them credit for. "My research helped blur the line between humans and animals." After all, it was the opinion of her teacher that she cared the most about — her dog, Rusty.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Goodall has repeatedly mentioned that her happiest is being alone with the chimps in Gombe. It's there that she finds peace to lead a productive career as field biologist. She would have wished to remain in this sanctuary if not for a life-changing conference she attended in the United States in 1986.

In the conservation session, she was made aware of the threats being faced by these apes. Their forests were disappearing fast. Their numbers were also dwindling due to the proliferation of the bushmeat trade and the demand for chimps as pets. Furthermore, the cruel treatment of chimps in medical laboratories created an indelible mark in Goodall's consciousness and career path. "I went to this conference as a scientist and left as an activist. I saw the deforestation and environmental

degradation happening around me and knew that we'll reach a point of no return if don't reverse it."

Through the Jane Goodall Institute which she founded in 1977, she began to reach out to the communities on ground zero. Pressing problems such as poverty, lack of education and other humanitarian issues addressed would subsequently make or break conservation priorities of locals. After years of providing a holistic approach to these issues, the success of JGI's activities has resulted in more wilderness areas getting protected in five African countries.

Citing microcredit pioneer Muhammad Yunus as one of her heroes, Goodall strongly believes that the empowerment of locals will create a network of individuals who not only care for their community but also for all animals and for the environment.

In 1991, a group of 12 students in Tanzania responded to Goodall's call for action, establishing Roots & Shoots, a grassroots initiative involving the youth as environmental stewards.

The programme has since found a place in more than 130 countries, with more than 150,000 members who are all connected by the mission to make world a better place.

Malaysia is the latest addition to this growing initiative. "Whatever we believe in, we made a mess on this planet and we need to get out of this mess. We need to face up to what we've done to our home," she said.

LOCAL ACTION, GLOBAL IMPACT

Rallying others to make a positive impact isn't an easy feat. Travelling 300 days in a year, Goodall has encountered a common thread amongst the youth through her globe-trotting missions.

"I feel shame, anger and depression when I think about how we have damaged the environment."

These feelings, she adds, are multiplied in the younger generation who feel hopeless and apathetic about how they can make a difference. Many of them, she noted, are overwhelmed by the global problems that plague the environment. The key is to focus on local initiatives with solutions that would make an impact on our surroundings, and to unlock their own leadership abilities.

Goodall remains humble about her accolades and reminds the audience that her role was something that could easily be filled by any individual who wants to make a positive difference. Whether it be CEOs of large companies who change their business practices to be greener or the consumer who asks where the products come from, responsible action comes in many shapes and forms. More so is speaking up for Mother Earth and using "people power" to create the change you want to see.

"It's bizarre that humans who have an explosive development of intellect compared to other animals are destroying our home. There seems to be a peculiar disconnect of the brain and heart. Only when our clever brain and our human heart work together in harmony can we achieve our true potential."

Goodall reaching out to a young chimp in a 1964 photo. SOURCE: WEBOT.COM

STILL HOPEFUL

With conservation biology deemed one of the most depressing fields to work in, would Goodall still be as hopeful in the field studying chimps instead of her path of activism which led her to meet inspiring people and encounter affirming stories along her journey?

"Gombe is a story of hope and I would have remained hopeful. But the media today likes to portray negative stories. I will be launching a blog on my 81st birthday in April called Jane Goodall All Good News.

"I want to share stories of hope and projects that inject positivity. That's my antidote."

The youth, she attests, is also another reason for hope, as evident in the Roots & Shoots programme worldwide. What is also hopeful, is seeing the faces of Malaysians present in the hall who, in one way or another, strive to play their role. Activism doesn't seem like a far-fetched notion with Goodall. Instead, it's accessible and doable.

What is her advice to Malaysians who are keen to pursue a career in conservation?

"Quoting my mother: You have to really want it. You have to work hard. Take the opportunities that come your way. Never give up."

Perhaps another thing: Bring your favourite stuffed toy for the journey.

On the cover: Dr Jane Goodall with Gombe chimpanzee, Freud. Courtesy, of janegoodall.org
Photo by @Michael Neugebauer