

“*Rescuing Ladybugs* is an exceptional book — a clarion call to awaken our empathy, ignite compassionate action, and help recover our humanity in these dystopian times. It should be required reading.”

— DR. MICHAEL W. FOX, author of *The Boundless Circle*

RESCUING LADYBUGS

A green stem with a ladybug on the left and a four-leaf clover on the right, positioned between the words 'RESCUING' and 'LADYBUGS'.

Inspirational Encounters
with Animals
That Changed
the World



JENNIFER SKIFF

Author of *The Divinity of Dogs* and *God Stories*

Jenny Desmond

CHIMPANZEE

In March 2015, the New York Blood Center (NYBC) abandoned sixty-six chimpanzees, some of whom they'd been experimenting on for more than thirty years. They left them on uninhabited islands in Liberia, Africa, without food or fresh water. The chimpanzees — who had been forced to endure invasive, painful experiments and had been injected with HIV, hepatitis, and West Nile viruses — were left to die. An American researcher who was in Liberia to address the Ebola virus crisis saw what was happening to the chimpanzees and called on friends in the United States for help. A coalition of more than thirty-five animal welfare and conservation organizations joined forces. Together with animal rights activists, they launched a global campaign demanding that NYBC honor its commitment to provide for the individuals it had discarded. When NYBC refused, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) stepped in with a fundraising campaign and hired Jenny and Jim Desmond to oversee the chimpanzees' care.

I first learned about Jenny while reading about the Liberian chimpanzees in an article written by Karen Lange in *All Animals* magazine. Wanting to know more, I reached out to Jenny, and over lengthy emails, we bonded.

Jenny's connection with chimpanzees began when she was seven years old and her mother gave her Jane Goodall's first book, *My Friends the Wild Chimpanzees*. Her mother inscribed it: "To my very own little Jane Goodall." Shortly after that, Jenny announced to her uncle that when she grew up she planned to live in the jungle with monkeys.

Jenny spent her childhood in Manhattan Beach, California, where she ran around the house on all fours wanting to be an animal. Her parents, though not animal lovers the way she was, still nurtured her love for and connection with animals. However, when the number of rescue animals living in the house reached an all-time high of twenty-two, Jenny and her animals moved into a cabana behind the house.

Jenny's dream of working with animals came true unexpectedly. She met a man in Boston, and they went on an around-the-world backpacking adventure. Then, in Africa, they were asked to parent an orphaned chimpanzee they named Matooke, and they both found their calling.



Entebbe, Uganda

I wanted a career where I could be around animals. There were plenty of options, but none of them worked for me. I didn't want to work in a zoo because I couldn't stand seeing caged animals. The obvious choice of veterinarian was off the table because I'd passed out three times at the vet clinic when my animals were being treated. I am definitely not a math and science person, but I still decided to study wildlife biology in college. When I realized it was all science and that job opportunities included positions like game park ranger (deciding on numbers of hunting licenses to issue each year), researcher (I am not a patient observer), or working in a lab (yuck!), that option flew out the window. I guess I gave up on an animal-related career at that point.

I ended up changing my major to social work, moving to Boston after school, and working in sales and marketing. That's when I met Jimmy Desmond at a brewery. Jimmy was a chemist. We connected over a mutual love for beer, parties, and socializing with friends. It was pretty much love at first sight. It wasn't until we got married and took

an around-the-world backpacking trip that our journey with wildlife began.

It had always been a dream of mine to see great apes in the wild. So, on that trip, we visited orangutans at the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre on the island of Borneo, Malaysia. The experience was so exciting, we ended up volunteering there and working with veterinarian Annelisa Kilbourn. Jimmy became so enthralled with her work rescuing great apes and studying disease transmission between humans and other apes that he realized he wanted to become a veterinarian. At the same time, I was introduced to the world of wildlife rescue, rehabilitation, and conservation of wild populations and found my path. I suddenly saw there was a way for me to put my passion for animals to use. It was a true sign of fate. We had no intention of doing what we do today, and yet we met, fell in love, got married, and embarked on a journey around the world together. It is only on that trip that we found our way at the same time as one.

To get some experience as wildlife rehabilitators, I wrote to Jane Goodall for advice, and to my surprise, she wrote back! She connected us with our now dear friend Debby Cox, and we ended up in Uganda, Africa, managing a rhino reintroduction and sanctuary program at Uganda Wildlife Education Centre [UWEC] in Entebbe. And that's where we met Matooke.

UWEC works with the Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary and has chimps on-site, as well as rhinoceros. They take in wildlife confiscated by authorities and rehabilitate and release the animals when it's possible.

One day we were called to pick up a male eastern chimpanzee who, we were told, was in poor condition. We didn't know his history. We guessed his mother was killed, likely for bush meat, because a mother chimpanzee will never willingly give up her child. By his condition and age — estimated between two and three years old — we suspected he'd been taken as an infant and kept as a "pet" for one or two years in a village. We found him in awful condition. He was in a dog crate, sitting in his own feces and urine, with a lot of hair loss. He was extremely thin and very depressed. Usually chimps like this have come from villages where they haven't been nurtured, fed, or treated

well and end up physically sick and mentally unstable. He was in very bad shape, and his sadness was clear in his eyes.

When the young chimpanzee was reported to UWEC and the Ngamba Sanctuary, there was no one on-site available to care for him. He needed to be nurtured and quarantined for three months. We were asked if we would be willing to take him and give him around-the-clock care. We agreed, and our adventure with him began.

We took the little boy, still in the dog crate, to the inside of our hut at the back of the rescue center. He was no different than a traumatized human child who'd witnessed the murder of his family, been kidnapped, then been held captive and teased for years. In addition, this had been done to him by a different species, one he didn't know or understand. He was devastated and did not trust anyone, including me. Jimmy and I took on the role of father and mother for him, and as we saw it, our job was to bring him back to life.

He wouldn't come out of the crate, let me touch him, or take much food or water from me. The only type of food he would eat was a fruit similar to a banana called *matooke*, so that's what we named him. For nearly a week, he sat at the back of the crate, and I lay at the front with the door open. Hours and hours passed, and then days and days. It took four days before he let me touch him. It took another two days before he came out of the crate. The day he came out, he let me embrace him and that was that. We connected spiritually, emotionally, and telepathically. We bonded for life.

One day, *Matooke* accidentally rolled down a hill, and it made me laugh. I watched him register that I had laughed. Then he went right back up and did it again and again and again. He understood he was funny and that it was fun to make someone laugh. Before long, his sense of humor became apparent. He loved being tickled and playing games, and he loved to laugh.

Matooke also loved playing tricks on the dogs who lived on the property. He'd play chase with them and then run up a tree where they clearly couldn't follow — and then laugh his head off. At night, he often wanted to go to bed before I did. So he'd climb halfway up the ladder to our loft and make crying sounds until I caved and joined him.

After the three-month quarantine period, where he was only

allowed to be with us, we began introducing Matooke to other chimpanzees. His new family was comprised of a ragtag group of individuals from various backgrounds. They had been rescued from roadside zoos, poachers, being used as entertainment, and the pet trade. It took a month of bringing him to spend time with the group for the day, then bringing him home with us at night, before he made a choice. One night he decided to stay with his new chimp family instead of coming home with us. He definitely chose to leave us, and it was a great moment.

The fact that, in the end, he chose to be with his own kind was a beautiful and important thing to see and understand. He wanted to be with people who spoke his language, knew who he was and what he was about, and could truly meet his needs and wants. Just like any one of us, he wanted choice, freedom, love, understanding, and dignity.

Matooke is living happily in Uganda at UWEC with a large chimp family. Every time we visit him, he transforms from a big, tough, alpha male to a playful, silly, happy boy. He wants to laugh, be tickled, and play chase, just like before. He has grown up and become a confident, strong, and fulfilled individual.

Matooke changed my life and the life of my husband. He sealed the deal. We were clearly on a path to work with wildlife at the time, but he made it all crystal clear. After knowing him, whenever I saw pictures of little chimp faces in tiny metal boxes in research labs, I saw him. He made all the experiments on animals real. There was no question in either of our minds that we had to act on our love for him, to help others. It was a true epiphany, and there was no turning back once it happened.



Jenny and her husband, veterinarian Jim Desmond, are the founders of Liberia Chimpanzee Rescue and Protection (LCRP), the first and only chimpanzee sanctuary in Liberia, Africa. They rescue and rehabilitate chimpanzees who are victims of the bush meat and pet trades in that country.

In addition, Jenny and Jim, working with local and international partners, helped create Liberia's first law enforcement task force and public awareness campaign on wildlife trafficking. Their goals are far-reaching and include developing education awareness efforts to combat the trade of chimpanzees, which continues in Liberia. In their work, they seek to create partnerships with international organizations and country government agencies to develop and support the sanctuary's facilities and programs. Active locally, they have established successful vaccination and spay/neuter programs. When he's not napping with chimpanzees, Jim is a researcher in emerging disease.

As a footnote, in 2017, the HSUS reached a financial agreement with NYBC to help provide for the continuing care of the remaining sixty-three chimpanzees it abandoned on islands in Liberia. Humane Society International now oversees the project and has committed to care for the chimpanzees for the rest of their lives.

Have you ever rescued a ladybug?

Of course. Hasn't everyone? How can you resist them? I was the "Don't kill it!" screamer in my household and still am.

Name three things that make you happy.

Kindness, laughter, friends/family (both human and non!).

What one book, documentary, or speech has had a profound effect on you?

There are too many to name, some fiction and some nonfiction. Almost every single book, from hardcover baby books like *My Little Puppy* and *The White Squirrel* to heart-wrenching

novels like *Ring of Bright Water* and *Call of the Wild* and so many books about animals in Africa.

Regarding your food choices, how do you describe yourself?

I am a longtime vegetarian. It started with chicken and turkey when I was fifteen years old. I had a turkey someone had given me because he wasn't "right" when he was born. One day I was carrying him somewhere, cradling him on his back, when I looked down and saw our Thanksgiving dinner right there in front of me. That was the last time I ate any kind of bird. The rest followed along later in bits.

If you had one message to deliver to others, what would it be?

Take action. Do good.

If you had one wish that was guaranteed to come true, what would it be?

I'd want my mom back. She is my soul mate. Of course, I would also wish that the cruelty to and suffering of animals would end. My mom would tell me that if I only had one choice, I should choose the second.

What advice do you have for people who say that they want to help animals in need but are too debilitated by what they witness?

I understand. It took me a long time to make myself "see" the truth. Witness is the perfect word. Once you have witnessed cruelty and abuse, it can't be unwitnessed. Taking action is what gets you through. Taking action is what will empower you. And taking action truly helps you to move past the debilitation.



Animals

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“My heart responds to Jennifer Skiff’s book because animals and humans are connected — we help, teach, heal, and rescue one another. Please read *Rescuing Ladybugs*, learn, and follow your heart to connect with and help our family of animals. Everyone will benefit.” — **DR. BERNIE S. SIEGEL**, author of *Love, Animals & Miracles*

Countless times throughout our lives, we’re presented with a choice to help another soul. *Rescuing Ladybugs* highlights the true stories of remarkable people who didn’t look away from seemingly impossible-to-change situations and instead worked to save animals. Prepare to be transported to Borneo to release orangutans, Brazil to protect jaguars, Africa to connect with chimpanzees and elephants, the Maldives to free mantas, and Indonesia, the only place where dragons still exist in the wild.

“Everyone will love *Rescuing Ladybugs*. With a perfect balance of memoir, stories, and testimonials, this remarkable book and the heroes in it will make you laugh, will make you cry — and, more than anything else, will invite you to become a member of the kindest, most joyous, and most rewarding movement on the planet: the compassion movement.” — **NATASHA MILNE**, coeditor of *One Hundred & One Reasons to Get Out of Bed* and host of *My Home Planet* podcast



“Thank you for the inspiration!” — **K. DAWN**, DawnWatch



JENNIFER SKIFF is an award-winning journalist who traveled the globe as a correspondent for CNN for more than a decade. Passionate about animals and their welfare, she serves as a trustee, adviser, and spokesperson for charities around the world while working with lawmakers to create positive change.

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