

Chasing after chimpanzees: The making of a primatologist, William C. McGrew

William C. McGrew is a renowned primatologist with a career now nearing 60 years. A pioneer in cultural primatology and primate archeology, he is also a prolific writer, having published eight previous books. However, rather than focusing on his extensive scientific contributions (e.g., tamarins to termites, tools to transects), in this autobiography he takes us through his life via a collection of vignettes. As each vignette stands on its own, the reader can open the book on any page and read a particular story without having to worry about the details described earlier. When needed, the reader is referred to other vignettes, which are easy to find given that each vignette is numbered. Still, there is a timeline implicit in the organization of the book, so it is recommended to read it from beginning to end.

The book is divided into four major sections, and it additionally includes a preface, a chronology, and an index. In "Early Days" (13 vignettes), we learn of the author's origins, introduction to apes at an early age, and several other memories about his childhood and adolescence. It is noteworthy that W. C. McGrew had his first forays into scientific research as a teenager, first by auditing college classes at a biological station during summers and later through various interactions with Professor Charles C. Carpenter (University of Oklahoma), including field excursions to capture lizards in Southwestern USA and northern Mexico. It was also in this stage (age 19) that he published his first scientific paper.

The second section, "Adulthood" (27 vignettes), opens with a transatlantic crossing to the UK, where the author would start his postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford, and includes memoirs encompassing the period between 1965 and 2018. Here we get a sense of the author's tastes and interests, and several vignettes place him on defining stages and situations of the second half of the 20th, such as anti-Vietnam war rallies, the Apollo 11 mission, Bob Dylan concerts, or in Berlin just months before the fall of the Wall. There are even some unexpected interactions with well-known public figures, such as John R.R. Tolkien (the writer) or Pat Riley (the NBA Hall of Fame inductee). It is also here that we learn about his family's origins, a change of nationality, and hobbies.

Given the author, the title, and the beautiful cover photo, a distracted primatologist could buy the book expecting to find a volume packed with hard data and find itself a bit lost after reading the first two sections. To such readers: don't despair! The second half of the book, although still written on a relaxed style, tackles several aspects of the academic world and primatology. As its title indicates, the third section of the book offers a rather broad picture of what life is (or meant to be) in "Academia" (29 vignettes). On a quite pragmatic *overture*, the first vignette's title is "publish or perish," most surely a warning to all of those interested in developing a career in scientific research. But as we progress through this section (and the following), publication, rather than being an end in itself, turns out to be better understood as a byproduct of personal experiences involving mentors, collaborators, students, and friends. Overall, this section offers a glimpse at the professional life of W. C. McGrew outside the fieldwork setting as, publications aside, we learn about his training in primatology, fund seeking, teaching, and participation in academic events (many readers will be left "craving" for a Wenner-Gren symposium).

The last section, "Fieldwork" (41 vignettes), is the one most directly linked to the title of the book: the bulk of vignettes pertain to the life and work of the author during his research of wild chimpanzees in Africa. Memoirs in this section are basically divided into two types: research topics (and sites) that the author worked on and *modus vivendi* under fieldwork conditions. Here, W. C. McGrew takes the reader through the stages of research in primatology, from questions to methods, from fieldwork troubleshooting to study subject habituation, following all the while a relaxed narrative sprinkled with suspense, serendipity, and good humor. Given the topics covered, this section represents a pocket-size introduction to fieldwork in primatology (surely very useful for students and early career researchers).

The author introduces the book with an exploration of the reasons why he decided to write an autobiography. He does not offer a definitive answer to the matter, but the scope and reach of the 110 vignettes that compose the book offer the reader the opportunity to build its own. Regardless of any pragmatic

assessments, it is always inspiring to read a memoir narrated on such a clever, funny, and unpretentious tone, as W. C. McGrew does. Finally, note that all proceeds from the book will be donated to organizations dedicated to the rescue and care of chimpanzees.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT


The author thanks C. M. Schaffner and K. Bales for reading and commenting earlier versions of this book review.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed.

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