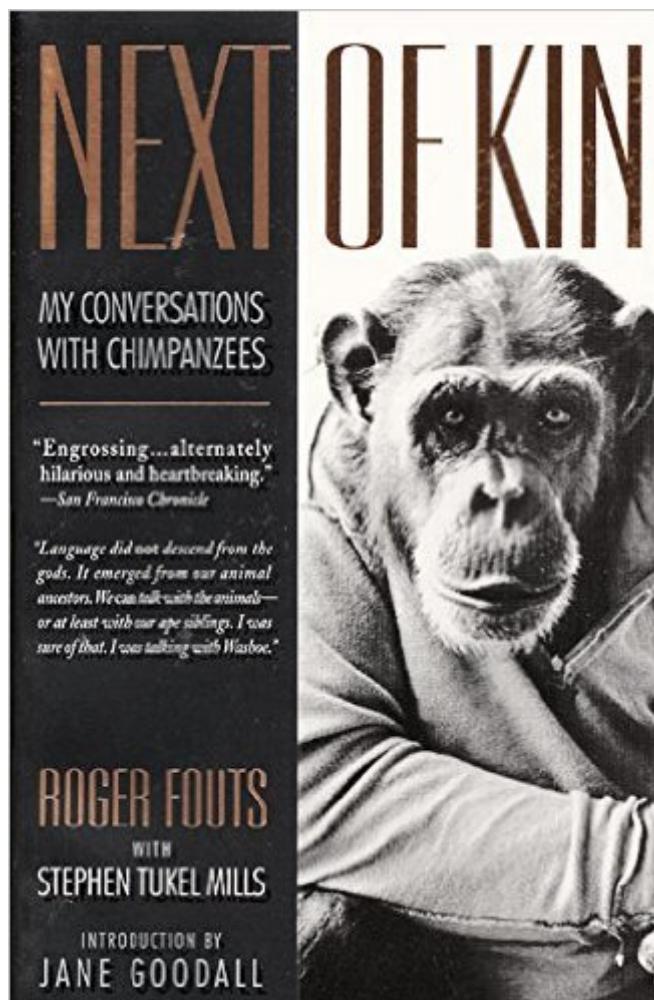


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Next Of Kin: My Conversations With Chimpanzees



Synopsis

For 30 years Roger Fouts has pioneered communication with chimpanzees through sign language--beginning with a mischievous baby chimp named Washoe. This remarkable book describes Fout's odyssey from novice researcher to celebrity scientist to impassioned crusader for the rights of animals. Living and conversing with these sensitive creatures has given him a profound appreciation of what they can teach us about ourselves. It has also made Fouts an outspoken opponent of biomedical experimentation on chimpanzees. A voyage of scientific discovery and interspecies communication, this is a stirring tale of friendship, courage, and compassion that will change forever the way we view our biological--and spiritual--next of kin.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Next of Kin: My Conversations with Chimpanzees" is one of the most amazing, heartbreakin, and inspirational books I've ever read. The book is written by Roger Fouts, a primatologist who devoted his life to studying the language patterns of chimpanzees. While in graduate school, Roger was introduced to Washoe, a precocious young chimp who became fluent in American Sign Language. Eventually "Project Washoe" expanded to include many chimpanzees, all who learned to communicate with humans using ASL and demonstrated unique personalities, complex emotions, and astounding intelligence.I've always been a big animal lover, but reading this book taught me so many things that I never knew before. Anyone who questions an animal's ability to think or feel will

get a sharp reality check after reading this book. Chimpanzees are people, too, just as much as human beings are. Unfortunately, the majority of humans in this world don't agree with that logic, and thousands of animals, including chimpanzees, are routinely kidnapped from their natural habitats and bred in captivity for the sole purpose of participating in biomedical research. In many cases, medical laboratories house animals in appalling conditions and literally torture them to death. "Next of Kin" details the horrors that go on behind closed doors at biomedical laboratories, and chronicles the steps Fouts and other animal activists have taken to protect chimpanzees from being treated inhumanely. I absolutely loved this book. Reading it made me feel close to Washoe and her chimpanzee friends, even though I never met any of them before. (Sadly, Washoe passed away last fall at the age of 42, but I hope to visit members of her family at the Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute in Washington someday.)

This is one of the best books I have ever read. I could hardly put it down. It is the autobiographical story of a graduate student who wanted to be a clinical psychologist working with children, but who didn't have either the grades or the money to get into a first-tier Ph.D. program. His advisor suggested that he apply to the University of Nevada, where he was admitted to the department of experimental psychology, a far cry from clinical. For money, they offered him a half-time assistantship, working for Allen and Beatrix Gardner, researchers who were trying to teach a chimpanzee to talk. His interview with Allen Gardner did not go well and he was sure he wasn't going to get the job, but after the interview ended he was asked if he would like to see the chimp. "As we approached the fenced-in nursery school, I saw two adults playing with a child in the shade of a tree. At least I thought it was a child. When the child saw us coming she leapt up and began hooting. Then she began sprinting in our direction--on all fours. We were only a few yards from the four-foot-high fence now. Washoe continued to speed toward us and, without breaking stride, vaulted over the fence and sprang from the top rail. What happened next amazes me to this day. Washoe did not jump onto Allen Gardner as I had expected. She leapt into my arms." He got the job. He didn't know anything about chimpanzees, especially about changing diapers on an infant chimp, and he didn't know anything about American Sign Language, but he learned fast. For the next several years he was part of a project to teach ASL to Washoe and to demonstrate that a nonhuman animal could learn a natural, human language. They didn't treat Washoe the way animals are usually treated by researchers.

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