

## Old Flo, the matriarch of Gombe, is dead

JUST a year ago, *Sunday Times* readers met Old Flo, the battered and prolific matriarch of the Gombe Stream chimpanzees in Tanzania. Now she is dead. JANE GOODALL, her chronicler and friend, tells the touching story of her last days—and of Flo's son, Flint, whose grief ended in his own death.

SHE WAS LYING at the edge of the tiny Kasakela stream. When I turned her over, her face was peaceful and relaxed without sign of fear or pain. Her eyes were still bright and her body supple.

Even now, a month later, it is hard to believe that Flo is dead. For more than 10 years this old chimpanzee has been an integral part of life at the Gombe Stream, with her torn ears and bulbous nose, her occasional spells of wild sexual activity, her dauntless, forceful personality. Flo had three offspring when first I knew her—her sons Faben and Figan, and her daughter Fifi. Subsequently she gave birth to another son, Flint, and, five years later, a second daughter, Flame. Flame died young, but last year Fifi had her own first baby, so that Flo became a grandmother. No other female at Gombe has headed such a large and united family during our years of research.

When I arrived at Gombe in 1960, Flo was already old. Her hair was skimpy and her teeth worn almost to the gums. Probably she was born almost half-a-century ago—strange to reflect that her grandmother, as an infant, might actually have seen Dr Livingstone when he camped on a grassy hill only a couple of miles from the Kasakela Valley during his journey round Lake Victoria 100 years ago.

In our early years Flo was the top-ranking female of her community. Younger females, after some minor breach of conduct, would run screaming in terror when Flo chased them, her every hair on end, barking hoarsely and stamping her feet. As the years



Hugo van Lawick

A dying Flo: the mother who enriched human understanding

passed Flo increasingly showed signs of age; her movements slowed and she seemed content to sit and watch her world go by. But even during the last year she was liable to be roused by a threat to any of her offspring. She chased off a male baboon, at least her equal in weight, when he threatened Flint.

To the end Flint, even though eight and a half, was abnormally dependent on his mother. At this age most young males spend at least some time travelling separately; Flint not only remained almost constantly with Flo but still shared her nest at night.

It was obvious, too, that Flo herself had come more and more to depend on him. There were

times when we felt angry with him, for he constantly pestered his old mother for grooming when she lay at rest, like a spoilt child wanting constant attention. But we had to remember that, but for him, much of Flo's old age would have been lonely.

We were all expecting the end for several weeks before it came. Flo moved more and more slowly, pausing every few yards to sit and rest. When Flint did leave her in peace she often just sat, staring ahead with a vacant, unseeing expression, or lay for an hour at a time with one bony hand shading her eyes from the glare. All the time she became more emaciated until we could see every bone under the skin.



Mitzi Hankey

A grieving Flint: the son whose death is a touching testimony to a chimpanzee's love for his mother.

So far as we know, Flint was the only one with Flo when she died; he was in a tree overhead when we found her. After a while he approached the body, bending right down to stare into the dead eyes. He reached to touch her, briefly groomed her arm, and then moved away.

Mitzi Hankey, studying family relationships, kept a constant watch on Flint after Flo's death. He became increasingly depressed and lethargic. Even when he met the other members of his family and, for a while, travelled with them, he was not consoled. His sister Fifi, in particular, was gentle with him and groomed him, and Fifi's baby, Freud, played with his uncle. But though Flint

seemed to relax for a while with these two familiar companions, he soon left them also.

By the second week, Flint was spending most of his time lying on the ground, often under thick clumps of vegetation, always close to where he had last seen Flo. His eyes, which sank ever deeper in his head, acquired a glossy lustre and sometimes he stared unblinkingly ahead with a gaze that gave an impression of insanity. He ate seldom, and by the end of the third week had lost more than a third of his weight. Within a few days he too was dead.

Flint's death is a tragedy in every way; at the same time it is an amazing testimony to the depth

and significance of the affectionate bond which can unite a chimpanzee child to his mother. I, as a mother myself, have learnt much wisdom during my years of association with Flo. I owe her a personal debt of gratitude and, for me, Gombe can never again be quite the same.

Flo has contributed much to science. She and her large family have provided a wealth of information about chimpanzee behaviour—infant development, family relationships, aggression, dominance, sex—about 40,000 hours of observation if records on the different family members are pooled. If, as I believe, an understanding of chimpanzee behaviour can help towards a better under-

standing of some aspects of our own, then her contribution is truly of inestimable value. But this should not be the final word. It is true that her life was worthwhile because it enriched human understanding. But even if no one had studied the chimpanzees at Gombe, Flo's life, rich and full of vigour and love, would still have had a meaning and a significance in the pattern of things.

Jane Goodall is Scientific Director of the Gombe Stream Research Centre. Her study of the chimpanzees is *In the Shadow of Man* (1971, Collins, £2.50). She is married to the photographer, Hugo van Lawick, and they have one son.  
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## The BBC introduces Big Brother

By Tony Geraghty

GRATIFICATION has come after an eight-year wait for the people who shed a tear when Children's Hour—Uncle Mac, Auntie Kathleen et al—disappeared from the BBC's radio schedules. Last night they heard the first programme in BBC Radio's new series for children, the first since Children's Hour died after an attack of audience deficiency in 1964.

Radio has come a long way since then, however. The new weekly programme is called 4th Dimension, its title being decided by a children's competition won by a Master Tony Shelly, aged 12, to whom the grateful BBC sent a bicycle. Other suggestions included The Amazing One-Legged Horse Show, Jigadig and Megalomania. Perhaps even Norman and Henry Bones, Children's Hour's famous boy detectives would have been a bit stumped to find a relevance to those titles.

And Uncles, of the pre-war variety, are definitely out. John Dunn, Radio Personality of the Year, who introduces the programme, is to project the "older brother" image instead. Asked whether Dunn would have beads and long hair the producer, Graham Gould, a 43-year-old bachelor whose triumphs included Jennings at School, replied: "Not that sort of older brother."

Would the programme seek to improve? "Oh yes, though not obviously. In our ancient Egyptian adventure series, in which the boys hunt and don't get anything, there is a line about not hunting for the sake of killing but for the hunting itself." The various characters will be kind to vultures and crocodiles, is a by-product of the Tutankhamun exhibition, miniature copies of which Gould found in every school he visited while researching for the programme.

The package includes an audience participation quiz conducted by Tony Blackburn, Animals Unlimited, Dial-a-Scientist, and a four-minute cartoon series featuring the indestructible Captain Radio.