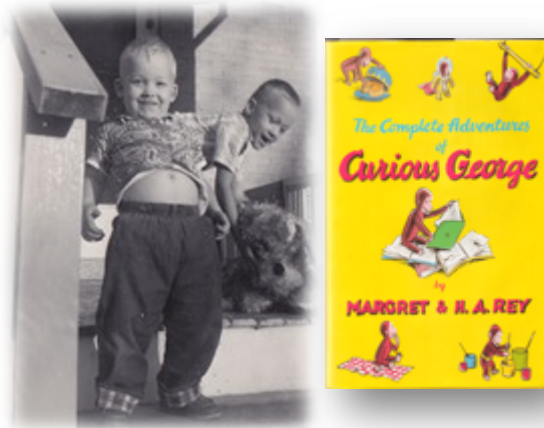


How I got into the monkey business

My earliest aspirations to study primates in the wild were sparked around the age of three or four, while being read stories by my mother from the 'Adventures of Curious George' (Margret & HA Rey), the stories of a mischievous young chimpanzee (see photo, right.). It was that time I am told, that I told her, "When I grow up, I'm going to Africa and live with chimpanzees". In Junior High School my nickname was 'Monkey Mike'. In High School I was an Explorer Scout volunteer at the Denver Zoo, working behind the exhibits alongside the zookeepers where I spent much of those three years working in the Zoo Hospital and



in the Primate Section (photo, left).



In the summer of 1977 after graduating from High School I went to the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, in the Leeward Islands chain of the Lesser Antilles, as a volunteer for an organization called the International Expedition Training Institute, something like Earth Watch in those days. Paying for the trip with savings from many summers of mowing lawns, winters of shoveling snow, and a part time job cleaning rooms at the local elementary school, I joined a group of college students from around the US to observe vervet monkeys there in the wild. A former British colony, St. Kitts and Nevis is the smallest sovereign state in the Western Hemisphere, in both size and population. At the time that I was there, it was said that there were

more wild monkeys than people living on the island. It was a great adventure, being for me the first time to ride in an airplane, and the first time to travel east of the state of Colorado!

We were left to our own devices, put up in the bungalow of the Governor's wife located on an isolated stretch of beach along the Caribbean side, about 30-minutes walk into the main town of Basseterre. There was no structure to our activities, every morning we just piled into an electric golf cart and went off looking for monkeys. We spent the afternoons snorkeling in the ocean, another first for me.

The money we paid to the organization went to support the research facility run by the University of California under the direction of Drs. Frank Erwin and Michael Raleigh, who were doing captive studies on the role of serotonin levels in the blood on dominance behavior using captive vervets in large enclosures.

The childhood dream and my interest in primates and the natural world in general however really solidified into a career choice in Japan as a 20 year old

freshman undergraduate exchange student from Fort Lewis College (FLC) in Colorado. I spent my first 17 months in Japan at Kansai Gaidai University (Hirakata, Osaka), taking courses in language, art, sociology, psychology and the cultural anthropology of Japan. Interested in practicing my Japanese skills I wanted to sit in on the classes of my Japanese friends on the main campus to see how much I could understand. I was referred to see the dean of student affairs, Prof. Shimizu who kindly invited me to sit in on his classes. An avid collector of beetles, when he learned of my interest in animal behavior he took me under his wing and would often invite me to his house on campus in the evenings to talk about animals over dinner with his family. When I told him of my particular interest in primates, he showed me three books in Japanese on primatology, and asked if I was interested in reading one of them. I chose ‘ニホンザルの生態, 1969 (The Ecology of Japanese Macaques), written by Masao Kawai, then faculty at the Primate Research Institute (PRI). Over the next few weeks, I read it from cover to cover, staying up late into the night, learning all the technical Japanese terms along the way. Thus began my education about Japanese macaques and primatology in Japan.

One evening over dinner at Shimizu sensei's home, he told me that he had written to Kawai sensei, and had arranged an appointment for me, if I could go to PRI in Inuyama. I felt a bit intimidated at the prospect of traveling all the way there, but that soon faded away when one of my Japanese classmates offered to go along with me. A few days later, we were on the train traveling to Nagoya. We spent the night at his family home before taking the Meitetsu train the next morning to Inuyama.

On July 20, 1979, my classmate and I traveled to PRI, where I met Kawai sensei in his office up on the 5th floor of the building. We discussed his book and his work on primates in Japan, Cameroon and Ethiopia. After a cup of tea, he kindly signed the copy of his book I brought with me. He then suggested that since I lived near Kyoto I should meet another primatologist and close colleague of his, Prof. Junichiro Itani, in the Department of Zoology on Kyoto University's main campus in Kyoto.

A week later I was sitting in Itani sensei's office in the laboratory of Physical Anthropology, learning about his research in Africa on hunter-gatherers, pastoralist, and yes, chimpanzees in Tanzania! What was set up to be a 30-minute afternoon chat turned into several hours of discussion into the early evening! I was awe struck by his many accomplishments, his passion for research, and most of all his humanity and willingness to talk with a young student, whose only qualification was a passion for primates.

A prolific writer, Itani sensei gave me a copy of one of his many books, to read; ‘ゴリラとピグミーの森, 1961 (In the Forest of Gorillas and Pygmies)’. It was a best seller about his 1960 safari starting from Nairobi, traveling from Kenya across Tanzania, Uganda and the Congo by car in search of potential field sites to study gorillas. At the start of his East African safari, as many anthropologists did at the time, he went to the National Museum of Kenya in Nairobi to meet the renowned paleoanthropologist Dr. Louis Leakey for advice about where to go. Itani sensei said that Dr. Leakey had told him “not to bother looking in Tanzania for chimpanzees, because he had already just set up a young woman there to study them at a place called Gombe”. Ignoring this ‘advice’, Itani sensei went to Gombe and met this

young woman, Ms. Jane Goodall, at her camp in Gombe Stream on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika. He was her first professional visitor since starting her research there and they became lifelong friends. Due to the upheaval leading to independence, research on gorillas was not yet possible, so five years later in 1965, after much effort to habituate chimpanzees at a number of different sites, Itani sensei and his students established the Kyoto University chimpanzee field site in the Mahale Mountains, approximately 70 km south of Gombe stream on Lake Tanganyika.

My first meeting with Itani sensei, turned out to be another important step in my journey to becoming a primatologist. At the end of our discussion he invited me to attend the weekly seminars in the laboratory and suggested I visit Arashiyama on the outskirts of Kyoto to see Japanese monkeys. He passed me on to Yukio Takahata, then a PhD graduate student of his, to get the details about how to get to Arashiyama. Before I left, Itani sensei gave me his name card with a short note of introduction to hand to the park director written on the back of it. Itani sensei's advice for starting a field study was to first go and become a monkey! This was the advice he gave to all of his students when starting out their research. He thought it was more important to first learn everything you can about the species you can from direct experience before filling your head with big theories and other peoples' conclusions. This was good advice indeed. As an undergraduate on study-leave, I did not have the pressure of producing results, my job was simply to become a monkey and let them teach me what was important to them in their daily lives, and go from there.

A few days later I was in the town of Arashiyama, nestled at the base of the mountains on the western side of Kyoto. Passing through the gates at the entrance to the Iwatayama Monkey Park, there is a steep climb straight up a long series of steps, followed by a more gentle path and a series of gentle switchbacks leading up to the feeding grounds. From there I had a spectacular view of Kyoto below. While climbing up the path I met a young man about my age who was a regular visitor and member of the park's monkey photographers' club 'Monchichi'. With his help I found the director, Mr. Nobuo Asaba, and gave him Itani sensei's name card and introduced myself in my most polite Japanese, which was actually the local Kansai dialect I picked up; but that seemed good enough for him.



With the ceremonial protocol of producing the all important recommendation from Itani sensei to Mr. Asaba, I was ready in early August 1979 to begin a year-long study on the behavior and ecology of this troop of 250 Japanese macaques, the Arashiyama B troop. After visiting a couple of times from Osaka to begin learning to identify the monkeys, Mr. Asaba offered me the use of the small

curator's office / research library / make shift guest room next to the visitors museum there on the mountain top. This would allow me to save time traveling back and forth from Osaka, and most important for me, to save money. He even let me take some of the produce fed to the monkeys every day that was left over, to add to my stir-fried dinners.

Mr. Asaba was a jack-of-all-trades, but had no training in biology, so he was devouring everything he could get his hands on about primatology. When he took over the running of the park in 1976, there was nothing but a dilapidated rest station for tourists and a hut to store provisions for the monkeys. He learned to identify the names of all the monkeys from the primatologists working there at the time he arrived; Dr. Naoki Koyama (PRI) and Takahata. From 1976 onwards, Asaba san and his staff maintained the genealogies, taking attendance everyday, recording all births, deaths, disappearances and the entry of new males.



Everything had to be carried on the backs of the aging staff up a narrow footpath. Asaba san widened the footpath into a road passable on motorbikes and a narrow six-wheel vehicle built to carry heavy construction supplies of all kinds. The rest station was expanded to include a visitor's concession stand with tables and

benches, an office, staff rest section and a small sleeping room he often used himself to lock-up valuable equipment. He also constructed the visitors museum, hired a curator/naturalist from a local university who learned the IDs of the monkeys and helped in conducting lectures for local children who came up as part of their biology curriculum. Later on, I also lectured to the grade school children about my work on monkeys there in Japanese.

My new digs on 'monkey mountain' had a nice collection of books on primatology, multi-volume illustrated set of plant taxonomy keys, and a copy of every paper or manuscript written about Arashiyama macaques by Japanese and international researchers who ever worked there. Most of the primate books and all the keys were in Japanese of course, but that was fine by me. I had stopped speaking English for the most part after the first 6 months of Japanese classes, and was determined to 'go native'. From the beginning I started writing my field notes as best as I could in Japanese too. The room had a bunk bed, a gas stove unit connected to a propane tank outside, a sink without running water, electricity, and a radio to keep me

company into the late hours of the night, when I transcribed my data into spread sheets (there were no computers or excel yet), and compiling my thoughts into a diary.

One of my early interests was to know what they were doing at night in the forest. Where did they sleep, and did they change sleeping sites with the changing seasons? I learned the animal trails and easiest ways to get to the sleeping sites. I would walk alone into the mountains, sometimes well after dark with a headlamp and a hand hewn cedar walking stick, tapping on the trail as I walked along, to warn vipers of my approach, and to catch myself if I slipped. It was also handy for controlled slides down the steep slopes when a short cut was the better option. After coming back, I would read the books, transcribe notes and listen to 'All Night Nippon' a popular radio program with the latest music in Japan.

After the first 3-month trimester in 1978 as an exchange student at Gaidai, I needed to support myself, teaching English conversation for the university and taking on private students. In the early days, I lived out of a backpack for several months, sleeping on the floor, in the rooms of my Japanese classmates, until I finally had enough money to rent a small room of my own near the Gaidai campus; convenient for my classes and for getting to the train for my various teaching jobs.

The free accommodation on the mountain at Arashiyama, four days a week, while observing the monkeys was a great help to make ends meet. It also meant I could be there when the monkeys came out of the forest in the morning, and I could follow them to the sleeping site at night. This was the perfect arrangement for learning to become a monkey, even when I didn't wake up before the monkeys arrived, they woke me up when they started jumping on the metal roof and calling out to their group mates who had not yet reached the clearing.

Around that time I managed to get a job with a national company, Shogakkan English Academy, a basic conversation class for Elementary School children. I would visit small classrooms run out of local office space, by the company's Japanese instructors. I was their monthly guest 'native speaker', providing the kids exposure to people from abroad. I did this weekly, Monday through Wednesday. Each month I would receive a packet from the company with a list of classrooms and travel directions to the places that month that I was to visit. Each time was a different school in a different town across Osaka, Kyoto, and Nara Prefectures. This way I quickly became proficient at navigating the trains and reading train schedules. This teaching job was a good introduction to Japan and Japanese culture as well. I was able to make a lot of new friends from various walks of life that way.

Sometimes I would go straight to Arashiyama after work, coming down from the mountain to Kyoto on Friday in time for afternoon seminars, then either sleep over in the lab to type up my notes on the lab's single electric typewriter, or walk back up the mountain to get up early the next morning for observations. In April 1980, I officially enrolled as an auditing student at Kyoto University. It was that year, while auditing classes and learning about Japanese macaque behavior and society, that I made up my mind to continue primate studies in Japan and to one day become a professor of Kyoto University, following in the footsteps of Itani and Kawai. One small detail however, I was still on study-leave from my undergraduate program in Biology back at FLC, and I needed to graduate from college before I could enter graduate school here in Japan.

Reluctantly, I returned to Colorado in August 1980, via a side-trip to Kenya, where I met up one last time in Nairobi with Itani sensei, many of his colleagues and some of the graduate students from our lab in Kyoto. They were conducting anthropological fieldwork on pastoralists like the Samburu, Rendille, Gabra and Turkana in Kenya. I traveled around the country a bit, and spent two weeks with a young graduate student from California, Fred Bercovitch (see CICASP alumni) who was doing his PhD research on olive baboon mate choice at Gilgil.

In January 1981, I picked up where I had left off with my studies at FLC. Because I had maintained contact with the college and FLC Japan Program director Prof. Jim Ash while in Japan, I was able to get several elective course credits cleared by independent study projects in Botany and Biology, based on data I had collected in Japan. From my earlier experience on St. Kitts, I was given the opportunity to research and co-author the section on vervet monkeys, for the book *Mammalian Communication: A Behavioral Analysis of Meaning* (2nd edition) written by my Animal Behavior professor, Roger Peters. Roger did his PhD studying the scent communication of wild wolves on Isle Royal in upper state Michigan under the wolf Guru, L. David Mech. Roger was an inspiration and became a close friend. He changed the title and course content of his Animal Behavior class once, so that I could take it twice! Roger introduced me to my first Colorado based primatologist/anthropologist, Duane Quiatt, with whom I later worked with at Arashiyama for short while. The mentorship and friendships gained from these two scientists meant a lot to me getting started.

I took heavy course loads and attend the intensive summer course in order to graduate as soon as possible. I had a 'reserved desk' in the library where I parked by backpack and books everyday from opening time in the morning till closing time at night. I graduated in the spring of 1983 with a Bachelors of Science degree. Rather than return to Denver, over the summer I audited classes with the professors' consent for free, in the Anthropology Department. I also worked off campus at the 'Arigato' Japanese restaurant, while I was waiting for the results of my MEXT Japanese government scholarship application for graduate studies back in Kyoto.

With the recommendation of Itani sensei, I successfully obtained the scholarship on my second try and returned to Kyoto on October 1st, 1983 as a research student before officially entering the Masters program from April 1984. The first 12 months of 'living with Japanese macaques' at Arashiyama as an undergraduate in 1979-1980 was the foundation for my three-year research project (1980, 1983-1985) on female mate choice and partner preference at Arashiyama for an MSc and DSc in Zoology. The Laboratory of Physical Anthropology was renamed the Laboratory of Human Evolution Studies when Itani sensei became full professor in 1981.

On the day of my Masters graduation ceremony in March 1985, riding back to campus in a taxi with Itani sensei after a celebratory drink and light meal, he asked me if I was ready to go to Tanzania and study chimpanzees. I had been waiting for those words for nearly all my life! My earliest 'primatological' aspiration to go to Africa and live with chimpanzees was about to come true. The head start I was fortunate to get working on Japanese macaques as an undergraduate student, allowed me the freedom to start early on what led into my post-doctoral fieldwork

on chimpanzees.

In July of 1985, my senpai (senior) in the lab, Hitoshige Hayaki and I landed in the sleepy little frontier town of Kigoma, the departure point for all major boat travel north or south along the Tanzanian side of Lake Tanganyika. Just south of Kigoma is the tiny fishing village of Ujiji, where the journalist Henry M. Stanley found the elusive missionary and explorer Dr. David Livingston under a mango tree on November 10, 1871 after trekking 700 km across country in search of him. There he uttered those now iconic words, “Dr. Livingston I presume.”

Hayaki san and I had a few days to pick up six months of supplies and get them packed on the project boat before making the final push off for a 12-hour over night journey south to the Mahale base camp. On the day before our departure, I learned that Jane Goodall was in town from Gombe to pick up supplies. The next morning, we dropped by her lodging to introduce ourselves and pass on Itani sensei’s greetings. When she met us on the patio, I reached out my hand and said with a smile “Dr. Goodall I presume”. She laughed and we spent an enjoyable time over tea talking about her current work in Gombe and our upcoming research plans at Mahale.

That evening we left for Mahale, in a large wooden boat, hand built by the local research staff in Mahale. It was packed with supplies, barrels of petrol, field assistants and their families, to be dropped off at their home villages in the night along the way. Stretched out on the open deck of the boat, gently rocking with the waves, I gazed up at the stars above, anxious to get there and began my first experience with wild chimpanzee in Africa. That was the beginning of a 20-year period I spent studying chimpanzees in Tanzania at Mahale, Gombe, and Rubondo Island, and in Uganda in the Budongo forest.



So in a nutshell, that is how I got into the Monkey Business. And as they say, the rest is history. Forty-two years later (2021), just down the hall from where I first met Kawai sensei, on the 5th floor of the Primate Research Institute, I am writing this essay in my office, where I have been working as an associate professor since 2001. Over the years I have learned that multidisciplinary collaboration is the key to developing and expanding interesting research questions. I owe much to the many kind people who believed in me, and helped me along the way. Doing my best to honor that, I ‘pay forward’ that which I have been given over the years, to the people who come to me with their passion for primates. With my students and collaborators from around the world, we have published on over 15 primate species from apes to lemurs, and other mammals, in Japan, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, India,

Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Uganda, Guinea, South Africa, and Brazil. My work has always been driven by a deep commitment to building bridges and friendships through international inter-disciplinary collaborations and mentoring.

For those of you starting out your careers, my advice is to make your dreams early and make them big, so you can have plenty of time to grow into them.

