



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Heroes and Role Models: Dian Fossey”

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For my bat mitzvah, I was asked to think about heroes and role models and how they're different. A hero is a person who achieved something really big in his or her life that many people will remember. A role model is someone that you would want to be like, someone whose footsteps you would want to follow. A hero can be a role model, but a role model doesn't have to be a hero. A role model didn't necessarily do something huge but is someone you look up to and admire. My criteria for people to be a role model to me are:

1. They must be a good person who has done good deeds.
2. They must make a positive contribution to the world (that is, they have done something that changed the world or changed people's thoughts or ideas).
3. They must stand up for what they believe in.
4. They must care for animals.
5. They must be someone that I and others would want to follow.

I have chosen Dian Fossey, a primate scientist and activist, as my role model. I believe we have much in common and I would like to follow in her footsteps. I believe what Fossey did in her life was amazing and she was right to do it.

Dian Fossey was born January 16th in 1932. She was an American zoologist who undertook a study of gorillas over a long period of time, 18 years. She originally majored in pre-veterinary courses but dropped out because she failed her physics classes. So instead she majored in occupational therapy. She received her PhD from Cambridge University in England writing about “The Behavior of the Mountain Gorilla” in 1976.

In 1963, Fossey traveled throughout Africa, even to the place where George Schaller carried out his famous study on mountain gorillas. Dian was hooked after that.

On her visit, Dian Fossey met with Jane Goodall and observed her research methods with chimpanzees. In Fossey's work with gorillas, she studied their behavior patterns, communication skills and eating habits. In doing so, she found 3 distinct groups of gorillas.

It took some time, but Fossey eventually got extremely close to the gorillas and bonded with them. As she interacted with them, she found that a way to recognize the gorillas is by their unique nose prints. Dian Fossey soon became the world's leading authority on the behavior of mountain gorillas.

She wrote books on her work and developed several gorilla funds. One is called the Digit Fund. Dian Fossey named this fund after one of her favorite gorillas, Digit. Sadly, he was poached and decapitated for 20 dollars. This crime started Fossey's activist work against poaching; she argued that poaching should be banned from every forest.

I completely agree with Fossey. I think she protested for a good cause and with good reason. Fossey's remarkable gorilla research lasted for decades until she was sadly murdered one night in 1985 while at one of her gorilla camp sites. The case remains open but most people believe a poacher angry at Fossey's protest activities murdered her.

Dian Fossey fits my role model criteria perfectly. She was a good person. She didn't cause harm and I do not believe anyone feared or hated her, except the poachers. **"The man who kills the animals today is the man who kills the people who get in his way tomorrow,"** Fossey said.

Dian Fossey made a positive contribution to the world by teaching people that gorillas are not to be feared and should never be poached. And people did indeed listen. Dian Fossey cared for animals and respected them, too. She led a major effort to save and help gorillas through the many funds she created. She protested against poaching until poaching was successfully banned! These are the reasons why I chose Dian Fossey as my role model.

I would follow in her footsteps. For example, I would like to help animals and find ways to save them. I would also like to go to Africa and study the animals like she did, maybe not get as closely involved, but see what it is like to be with animals in their native habitats.

The values I feel Dian Fossey represented are determination and courage to stand up to the poachers at the risk of getting hurt. Another value Fossey illustrated was loyalty, both to the animals as well as to the villagers near her study sites. Lastly, she modeled respect; Dian Fossey respected the animals' space and didn't annoy them when they didn't want to be interfered with. She respected the villagers around her sites as well. Fossey said, **"When you realize the value of all life, you dwell less on what is past and concentrate more on the preservation of the future."**

I chose Dian Fossey because of her remarkable journey and the ways she chose to act on behalf of the gorillas. Who would have known Fossey and I had so much in common in our desire to protect animals and keep them safe?

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