

# Gorillas in the Mist: The Story of Dian Fossey (1988)



**Directed by** :Michael Apted

**Genre:** Drama **Runtime:** 129 min **Country:** USA

"In a land of beauty, wonder and danger, she would follow a dream, fall in love and risk her life to save the mountain gorillas from extinction...At the far ends of the earth she found a reason to live, and a cause to fight for...They were beautiful."

**User Rating:** ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆ 6.7/10 (2,431 votes)

Dian Fossey (Sigourney Weaver) voyaged into the mountains of the Congo to study mountain gorillas.

She soon realises these animals are being hunted and warns authorities about the imminent endangerment of the species. Before she can do anything to save the species, a civil war forces her out of the country. She returns and climbs the same mountains again, this time from the peaceful Rwandan side. Soon she gets attached to a group of gorillas she is studying on a daily basis and the relationship grows closer. The paradise is lost however when poachers and animal traders continually kill the animals she loves. Fossey searches for justice and finds none, but determined to save the gorillas from extinction and despite the personal risks involved, she starts her own war against the people who kill her "family".

The film was shot on location in Rwanda, at exactly the place Dian Fossey was studying the endangered animals. Even the cabin you see in the film is the hut the legendary anthropologist was living in through these years. Interestingly, Sigourney Weaver became very involved with the gorillas, and most shots you see in the film are not special effects shots, but real live action footage with real gorillas. Weaver was in fact sitting right next to the silverback gorilla when he came running at her through the thick bushes of the forest..

Weaver gives an inspiring performance, and Bryan Brown as her lover and magazine photographer Bob Campbell, gives solid support. The real stars of the film, though, are the gorillas and beautiful location, captured by excellent camera work.

Discussion:

1. Which scene in the film do you find most memorable? Why?
2. Discuss Dian Fossey's character. In what ways does she change? What motivates her? How did she die? Do you think you could live in the way she did? Is it important to have a "cause" (something to fight for) in life?
3. Do you agree that the gorillas are the real stars of the film, or not?
4. Did the film change your ideas about animals in any way?



Dian Fossey 1932 - 1985

Dian Fossey was born in San Francisco, California in 1932. She was interested in animals her entire life, which led her to go to San Jose State University as a pre-veterinary student. She soon switched her major to Occupational Therapy and got her degree as an Occupational Therapist. In 1963, after a trip to Africa, where she met Dr. Louis Leakey, she became interested in

studying mountain gorillas.

In 1967, Fossey began observing gorillas in Zaire. Soon she moved to Rwanda, where she started the Karisoke Research Center. She lived there for almost 18 years among the gorillas, and eventually earned their complete trust. She was the first person to have voluntary contact with a gorilla, when one of them ("Peanuts") touched her hand. She was able to sit amongst them and play with them and their young. She became very attached to a particular young gorilla that she named Digit. She was able to watch him grow and he was very fond of her. Fossey was able to learn a great deal about mountain gorillas during her stay there. We now know much more about gorilla's behavior and their relationship to humans as a result of her work.

A few years later, Dian Fossey's favorite gorilla, Digit, was killed by poachers. In response to this, she started a campaign against gorilla poaching. National Geographic published an article about Fossey, and her work with the gorillas. The mention of Digit and the poaching problem in the article caused a large number of donations from readers. With this money, she established the Digit Fund and dedicated her life to saving the gorillas. Fossey went back to the United States and got her Ph.D. at Cambridge University. In 1980, she accepted a job at Cornell University and started writing her book *Gorillas in the Mist*, which was eventually made into a movie. After finishing the book, she returned to Karisoke to continue her work with the gorillas.

On December 26, 1985, Dian Fossey was found murdered in her cabin. Her death is still unsolved. The last entry in her diary reads: "*When you realize the value of all life, you dwell less on what is past and concentrate on the preservation of the future.*"

Today, her Gorilla Fund is continuing to support the ongoing efforts. There is still a team of researchers in Rwanda trying to protect the gorilla population. Fossey's work has raised the world's awareness to the dangers faced by the mountain gorilla. Mountain gorillas are now protected by the government of Rwanda and by other international organizations.