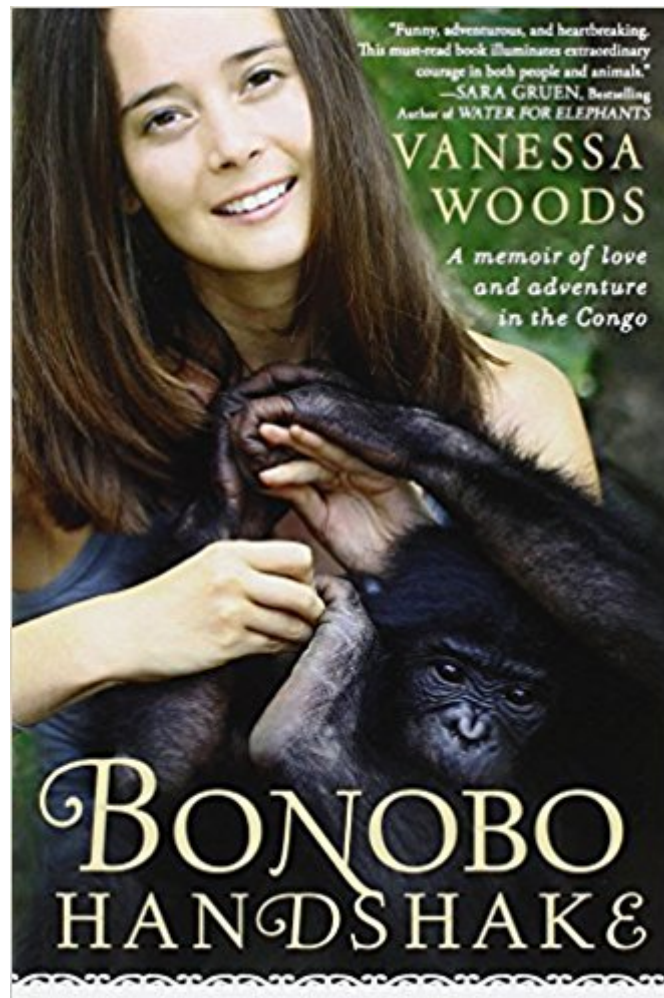




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Bonobo Handshake: A Memoir Of Love And Adventure In The Congo



Synopsis

A young woman follows her fiancé to war-torn Congo to study extremely endangered bonobo apes who teach her a new truth about love. In 2005 Vanessa Woods accepted a marriage proposal from a man she barely knew and agreed to join him on a research trip to the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo. Settling in at a bonobo sanctuary in Congo's capital, Vanessa and her fiancé entered the world of a rare ape with whom we share 98.7 percent of our DNA and who live in a peaceful society in which females are in charge, war is nonexistent, and sex is as common and friendly as a handshake. A fascinating memoir of hope and adventure, *Bonobo Handshake* traces Vanessa's self-discovery as she finds herself falling deeply in love with her husband, the apes, and her new surroundings in this true story of revelation and transformation in a fragile corner of Africa.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Devoted to learning more about bonobos, a smaller, more peaceable species of primate than chimpanzees, and lesser known, Australian journalist Woods and her fiancé, scientist Brian Hare, conducted research in the bonobos' only known habitat—a civil war-torn Congo. Woods's plainspoken, unadorned account traces the couple's work at Lola Ya Bonobo Sanctuary, located outside Kinshasa in the 75-acre forested grounds of what was once Congo dictator Mobutu Sese Seko's weekend retreat. The sanctuary, founded in 1994 and run by French activist Claudine André, served as an orphanage for baby bonobos, left for dead after their parents had been hunted for bush meat; the sanctuary healed and nurtured them (assigning each a

human caretaker called a mama), with the aim of reintroducing the animals to the wild. Hare had only previously conducted research on the more warlike, male-dominated chimpanzee, and needed Woods because she spoke French and won the animals' trust; through their daily work, the couple witnessed with astonishment how the matriarchal bonobo society cooperated nicely using frequent sex, and could even inspire human behavior. When Woods describes her daily interaction with the bonobos, her account takes on a warm charm. Woods's personable, accessible work about bonobos elucidates the marvelous intelligence and tolerance of this gentle cousin to humans. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Woods was an Australian primate lover, flitting from job to job while she tried to decide what to do with her life. Brian Hare was a newly minted American PhD. They met at a chimpanzee sanctuary in Uganda, fell in love, and a year later were on a plane to the Democratic Republic of Congo, which had suffered a decade-long war, fought over its vast resources of diamonds, gold, cobalt, and other minerals, and in which more than five million died. The human suffering had fostered a rise in the bush-meat trade, and one of the prime targets was bonobos, the "other" chimpanzee. The story of Woods and Hare's research at the only bonobo sanctuary in the world mixes the intimacy of memoir with the science of behavioral research. As Woods comes to know her new husband, she also begins to know the resident bonobos. Bonobos share, use sex to settle arguments, and possess almost 99 percent of our DNA. This mostly joyous book is not afraid to talk about the terrible recent history of the Congo, but ultimately it comes down on the side of hope for the Congo and the bonobos. --Nancy Bent --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

there should be more of a disclaimer for those might be upset by descriptions of graphic violence. The author introduces these without warning -- you're reading along happily and suddenly you're confronted by truly horrific descriptions of rape, cannibalism, torture, mutilation, and killing. While raising awareness of the war in the Congo is necessary, I personally cannot read such horrors without it sinking deep into my psyche and haunting me forever. Since I am not able to remove such darkness once it gets into me, I would've preferred being warned about those scenes. (In fact, after the first exposure I was able to find someone to warn me about what portions to skip.) It is quite possible to enjoy the book even when skipping those scenes.

"If I have learned one thing from Congo, it is this: If there are those you love, whoever or wherever they are, hold them. Find them and hold them as tightly as you can. Resist their squirming and impatience and uncomfortable laughter and just feel their hearts throbbing against yours and give thanks that for this moment, for this one precious moment, they are here. They are with you. And they know they are utterly, completely, entirely ... Loved." ~Vanessa Woods

I go bananas for apes, so it's no surprise that I fell in love with this book! Woods stumbles into the world of Bonobos accidentally when she meets her husband, Brian. Bonobos live in the shadow of their close cousins, the chimpanzees, and can only be found in the jungles of Congo. Their peaceful and accepting way of life is worthy of emulation, especially in a country where violence, war and death are a way of life. "LOLA YA BONOBO is the only bonobo sanctuary in the world. More than sixty orphans live in a seventy-five-acre forest just outside of Kinshasa...All ape sanctuaries, including Lola, exist because of the bushmeat trade. In many African countries, where livestock is scarce and expensive, the easiest way to get protein is to shoot it." While Woods assists her husband with his psychology study and tests of the Bonobos at LOLA, she finds herself immersed in the stories of the sanctuary staff, the adult Bonobos, and the orphans that keep streaming in after being rescued from wildlife traders. It's a heartbreaking read at times, but I loved how Woods made the story as light-hearted as she could. She invites the reader into her marriage and heart, and I am so grateful for the awareness that this book raises about the plight of this loving primate. I feel motivated to get my ape on once again. I'll have to scour my shelves for another book about apes because their world is one I love to lose myself in!

I agree with the vast majority of reviewers who gave this book high ratings (and if you liked it, you should also read *Lucy* by Laurence Gonzales--fiction but fascinating). I've been interested in bonobos for quite awhile and learned so much from Ms. Woods' poignant account of her time in the Congo, her research and her husband's, and the selfless people who work at the sanctuary. I feel compelled to comment on the one and two star ratings, particularly regarding Ms. Woods' writing abilities and credentials. So, okay, she's not Hemingway...but this is a personal memoir (which also included a lot of facts about her subjects and Congo) and her 'voice' comes through loud and clear. She is at once engaging, humorous, compassionate and caring. I laughed, wept, and felt compelled to learn more about both the Congo and the bonobos--an author can't achieve much better than that. As to the following comments: "Absolute drivel, written by an armchair adventurer whose observations about Congo were made from the comfort of her bonobo sanctuary" ... Ms. Woods was/is far more than an armchair adventurer. She had researched chimps for several years before

going to the bonobo sanctuary; she is a graduate of the Australian National University with a Masters degree, and is now a Research Scientist in Evolutionary Anthropology at Duke University, not to mention an award-winning journalist. I'm guessing she knows more about bonobos than 99% of the planet, including everyone who has read (and reviewed) her book. And her focus was not to write an account of the wars there (though I'm impressed with her knowledge about them and glad she shared it), but rather to share her experience and involvement with regard to the very specific tests and experiments done at the sanctuary. So, hmmm...I wonder what purpose would have been served if Ms. Woods would have deliberately put herself in harm's way by blustering into war zones. Aside from peacekeepers, war journalists or soldiers deployed to do so, I can't think of anybody who would want to! I hope I meet this fascinating woman some day and I hope she continues her worthwhile work.

I loved this story as I have the first three Valentine Valley stories I've read. However, I think Josh has to be my favorite male character (although difficult to "choose"). Whitney irritated me at times with her treatment of Josh and I didn't really care for her eventual almost insistence that they have sex. She seemed to think that she had to attempt to treat him like the men before him; didn't like that about her. I felt like all the other women eyeballing Josh as if he were eye candy..such a sweetheart he is - so understanding and kind and patient. Not at all sure she deserves this guy! She finally seems to come to her senses toward the end and realizes how very blessed she is to have him in her life. Regardless of a little irritation with Whitney, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I'm just starting "A Promise at Bluebell Hill", Monica and Travis' adventure and look forward to many more Valentine Valley books! Seems to me this would be a perfect place to enjoy life and its simplicities.

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