

BEATRIX (TRIXIE) GARDNER - A TRIBUTE

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Beatrice (Trixie) Gardner died suddenly on June 5, 1995, in Padua, Italy, while on a European lecture tour. The world has lost a great scientist and chimpanzees have lost a great friend and advocate.

Beatrice Gardner earned her B.A. from Radcliffe, her M.S. from Brown University, and her D.Phil. from Oxford University studying with the Nobel Laureate, Niko Tinbergen. From 1959-1963 she served on the faculty of Wellesley College. In 1963 she and her husband Allen joined the faculty of the University of Nevada at Reno. While at Oxford University she was the recipient of an NSF Fellowship. She was also the recipient of the NIMH Research Scientist Development Award for ten years from 1967 to 1977.

Trixie and Allen are best known for the innovation of teaching sign language to cross-fostered chimpanzees which began with Project Washoe in 1966. The Gardners replicated and extended Project Washoe with four other chimpanzees, Moja, Pili, Tatu, and Dar who lived like human children from birth. From a scientific standpoint the replication and extension is more significant than the initial discovery. Later, in the Fouts laboratory the infant chimpanzee Loulis learned over 50 signs of ASL that he could only have learned from his adopted mother, Washoe, and three other chimpanzees cross-fostered by the Gardners.

Scholarly journals and books in psychology, biology, anthropology, philosophy and linguistics as well as popular articles, books, and films have featured the work of the Gardners. Perhaps, the clearest testimonial to the significance of this landmark achievement is the storm of controversy that it continues to evoke.

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So far the Gardners have only reported the main outlines of the vast record of their five experimental subjects running to 35,000 pages of handwritten notes and many hours of film and video tape. The analysis and reporting of the complete record dominated their lives in recent years and this is the work that Allen Gardner and his students must now carry on.

Beatrix Gardner was a great scientist who was devoted to rigorous observation and faithful reporting. She was also a genial, gentle, dignified, and terribly modest human being and a truly caring and nurturing mentor who left an indelible mark on students. She always taught them to see and report what chimpanzees and children actually do and to be suspicious of what grand theoreticians say they should do. Her motto was to let the chimpanzees and the children speak for themselves.

The University of Nevada, Reno, established the somewhat generically named:

UNR Primate Research Fund
c/o UNR Foundation
University of Nevada
Reno, NV 89557

to receive donations in Trixie's memory. The money will be used to support the students.