

Christian Biographies and Testimonies

Year 11



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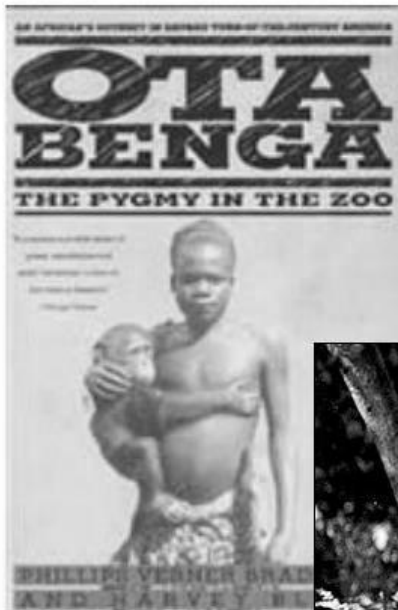
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Ota Benga

the man who was put on display in the zoo!

NJBibleScience.org

Ota Benga



Ota Benga (c.1881 or 1884 – March 20, 1916) was a Congolese pygmy who was featured in a 1906 human zoo exhibit at the Bronx Zoo alongside an orangutan



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Samuel Verner, an American explorer, bought a young man named Ota Benga in the Belgian Congo in 1903. Mr. Verner was working under a contract to the St. Louis World's Fair. He was supposed to bring several Pygmies to America for a living display of the stages of evolution, and then return them to Africa.

Three years later, with the World's Fair over and Mr. Verner in financial straits, Ota Benga was placed in a new home: the monkey house at the Bronx Zoo. The director of Bronx Zoological Park, William Hornaday, recognized a unique business opportunity. People would pay to see this human exhibit, at a time in history when black people were thought to be at the bottom of the evolutionary scale.

The story of Ota Benga is a sad and maddening example of the kinds of blunders that occurred at a time when the theory of Darwinism was rationalizing the evolution of humanity... that man had indeed ascended from savages to masters of civilization.

At first, Ota Benga was permitted to walk around the park's grounds freely. Soon, however, he was locked in a cage in the monkey house, often in the company of an orangutan named Dohong. Bones were scattered around the cage to make Ota Benga's sharpened teeth seem more savage. "To a generation raised on talk of that absentee star of evolution, the missing link, the point of Dohong and Ota disporting in the monkey house was obvious," wrote Mr. Verner's grandson, Phillips Verner Bradford, and Harvey Blume in their 1992 book, "Ota: The Pygmy in the Zoo."

Thousands of spectators flocked to the exhibit on the first weekend, and the New York Times reported that "the joint man-and-monkey exhibition was the most interesting in Bronx Park." While the spectacle provided plenty of laughs, the Times added, "it is probably a good thing that Benga doesn't think very deeply....If he did it isn't likely that he was very proud of himself when he woke in the morning and found himself under the same roof with the orangutans and monkeys."

The Colored Baptist Ministers' Conference, among others, quickly denounced the "degrading exhibition." "Our race is depressed enough," said the Rev. James Gordon, "without exhibiting one of us with apes. We think we are worthy of being considered human beings with souls." Gordon also objected to the exhibit as a demonstration of Darwinism. "The Darwinian theory is absolutely opposed to Christianity," he said.

When Ota Benga was in his mid-20s, he was moved from the zoo and spent the next few years at orphanages for black children in New York. In 1910, he moved to a Baptist seminary in Lynchburg, Va., where he did odd jobs as well as hunted and fished.

Six years later, in March 1916, Ota Benga used a stolen revolver to kill himself.

Reference: The Wall Street Journal"

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB113919007594765671>

The story of Ota Benga is one of the many tragic fruits of evolutionism. But it is one which contains a lesson in helping us to realize the importance of the Christian teaching that all men are brothers, all descendants of Adam and Eve. If all Christians had stood up for creation at the outset of the Ota Benga incident, this horror story of evolutionary racism might have been averted.

Dr. Jerry Bergman, Answers in Genesis

Questions

1. Who was Samuel Verner?
2. For what purpose Samuel Verner purchase the African, Ota Benga?
3. To which country Where was Ota taken?
4. The poster states that Ota Benga was born between 1881 and 1884. Why is his date of birth not exact?
5. Approximately how old was Ota Benga when he was bought by Samuel Verner?
6. Why wasn't Ota Verner returned to Africa as soon as the St Louis World's Fair was over?
7. Why was William Hornaday keen to have Ota as an exhibition in the zoo?
8. Write a paragraph about the treatment he received, and his feelings and emotions of Ota during his years at the zoo.
9. During this time in history, most people believed in 'social evolution' which was an aspect of Darwin's theory of evolution. Explain in your own words the theory of 'social evolution'.
10. How did the Colored Baptist Ministers stand up for Ota?
11. Where did Ota live, and what did he do, after he left the zoo.
12. What feelings and emotions do you think he carried with him, even after he left the zoo?
13. How did Ota end his life?
14. Explain in your own words the final comment by Dr Jerry Bergman

Ken Elliot

Australian Medical Missionary to Burkina Faso, West Africa

Scorpions, sandstorms and scurvy. This is the true testimony of how Ken Elliott survived seven years in the desert as a prisoner of Al Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda is an Islamic militant organization who spearhead a global Islamist revolution to unite the Muslim world under an Islamic caliphate, (an Islamic political system). Its membership is mostly composed of Arabs, but also includes people from other ethnic groups. *Wikipedia*

Imagine this: you are 82 years old, you were kidnapped by fanatical Islamic extremist months ago, and you are somewhere in the Sahara Desert.

You have one companion, a Romanian fellow hostage, 40 years younger than you. You have nothing to read, nothing to listen to, and your guards won't speak to you.

They won't let you leave your makeshift shelter for fear you'll be spotted by French or American surveillance drones.

It is ferociously hot in the daytime, and bitterly cold at night. You have one blanket. You dig into the sand to try to make your bed more comfortable and you get bitten on the hand by a scorpion.

The pain is acute. It gets worse and worse. It travels up your arm to your shoulder. You have no painkillers, no treatment of any kind, so you wait for the pain to fade. Eventually, after two days and nights, it does.

Now imagine that day follows identical day, and night follows identical night, for seven more years. And that you get bitten by scorpions 20 more times – on one occasion, the pain travels up to your right shoulder, across to the other, and down to your left hand.

The exclusive story of how Ken Elliott survived seven years in the desert, shown on the program 'Foreign Correspondent' on ABC TV, Australia.

In 1972, Dr Elliott and his wife Jocelyn, from Perth, Australia, founded a hospital in the West African country of Burkina Faso. They ran it for 44 years. Ken operated on thousands of patients, from all over West Africa, charging them little or nothing.

Then, in January 2016, Ken and Jocelyn were kidnapped by Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militants. Jocelyn was released soon afterwards, but Ken was kept hostage for seven years and four months. He was quietly released last year, aged 88.

In his first interview since his release, Ken Elliott has told the interviewer about acute boredom interspersed with rare moments of fear; about heat-stroke, and bitter cold; sandstorms that nearly blinded him, and a diet that nearly killed him; and about his abiding faith in God, who he believes brought him safely home in the end.

On the same night that the Elliotts were kidnapped from their home near the northern border, the Al-Qaeda militants had launched a savage attack in Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou.

In the Café Cappuccino, a favourite haunt of ex-pats on the main street of the city, guests were gunned down without mercy. Thirty people were killed – including 20 foreigners.

Kidnapping for ransom had been a standard fundraising ploy of the Islamists for more than a decade. Dozens of foreigners – mostly white European mining engineers, missionaries, aid-workers, or tourists – had been kidnapped and held for months or years.

Usually, in the end, European governments had covertly paid ransoms for their release. Some estimates put the kidnappers' earnings from ransoms since 2008 at well over \$200 million.

But the Elliotts were not tourists, or workers for a foreign company, or visiting aid workers. They had lived and worked in Djibo for 40 years. They arrived in 1972 in their well-used Land rover, with three small children and almost no money, with a mission to provide medical treatment. There was no hospital, and especially no surgeon.

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. There are no two-storey buildings, no private cars, few bitumen streets, and a lot of donkeys. It is hot, dusty and remote.

Devout Christians both, they agreed when they married that God's purpose for them would not be fulfilled if Ken's medical skills were exercised in Australia.

"Australia was packed out with doctors more or less, at least it seemed to us," says Ken.

Most such enterprises require the need to raise funds. But Ken and Jocelyn did not do this.

"We had this idea that we would not ask for funds but only pray for them, up there," Ken said. "It was just amazing how we got what we needed when we needed it."

Their surgical equipment, and much else besides, came from the gift of an unused Cold War emergency hospital that the American ambassador gave them as an unsolicited gift. Friends, relatives, strangers, churches in countries they had never visited, came through with donations.

The hospital was very basic. There were no beds, because their patients were used to the floor, and in the heat preferred to sleep outside. Jocelyn raised and educated their children while Ken became a full-time surgeon. Ken treated hernias, cysts and tumours and broken bones.

Patients came from all over Burkina Faso; from Mali and Niger, from the Ivory Coast and Benin – and of course, from the local town, Djibo. The majority were Muslim.

When asked whether Ken prioritized Christian patients he said, "Whether you are Christian, or Muslim, or without religion, it doesn't matter to him. You come along, you are a human being, you get treatment."

And for the next seven years after the kidnapping, the Australian public heard next to nothing about Ken Elliott. A video released by his captors in 2017 featured him and five other hostages. They were forced to make the video, asking the Australian government for ransom money. But there was no more communication that that.

Then, in May 2023, Ken Elliott was quietly released. He was 88. He returned to Perth, which he had left in the mid-1960s. And finally, in early 2024, his story was told and went to air.

When asked for more details about the kidnapping he said, "Jocelyn and I had no alternative but to go along with them," says Ken. "We were driven in a ute into the bush."

Three days later Jocelyn was released, but Ken was driven far to the north through the desert. For most of that time, he was with a fellow hostage, a Romanian called Julian Ghergut, who had been a security guard at a manganese mine in Burkina Faso when he was kidnapped.

"When I met Julian," says Ken, "he had been a captive for nine months. 'How can anyone stand this for nine months?' I asked myself. I ended up being there for seven years and four months."

Julian was eventually released a few months after Ken in 2023. There was a 40-year age gap between them, and they were very different people.

"But I was grateful to him," says Ken, "and I hope he was grateful to me."

On one occasion at least, Julian Ghergut may have saved his life. Ken was out in the desert, answering a call of nature, when a sandstorm blew up. Soon he couldn't see his own hand in front of his face. He was guided back to the camp by Julian bashing a tin plate with a spoon. Without shelter, Ken might easily have been buried alive.

There were other hazards, apart from sandstorms, scorpions and boredom. The diet was appalling. Boiled macaroni for breakfast; damper torn into pieces and soaked in water – "soggy bread," Ken calls it – for lunch. And sticky rice, which Ken couldn't eat, for dinner. No fruit. No vegetables. The occasional bit of meat when a sheep was slaughtered.

After a while on this diet, Ken contracted scurvy, the disease that struck down so many pre-modern sailors, and that Captain Cook famously warded off with pickled cabbage. It has many symptoms, one of them internal bleeding into the muscles of the legs.

Ken's legs swelled up. For months, he couldn't walk. He could barely crawl. His captors said they couldn't find any vitamin C.

Eventually, one of the "bosses", as Ken calls them, came and looked at his legs. The next morning he found five different brands of Vitamin C by his sleeping place. "I started to get better after that."

His captors showed no interest in using Ken's medical skills. Some of them were profoundly skeptical about Western medicine anyway.

"Muslims don't get sick," one of them pronounced – which after decades of treating sick Muslims in Djibo, came as news to Ken Elliott.

Of course, they tried to convert him. But Ken was adamant: "The Lord has been good to me. There's no way I was going to dishonour Him by converting to Islam. Or even pretending to convert."

"Didn't you ever feel that God had abandoned you?" asked the interviewer.

"Never. No. He was always there," said Ken.

The Elliotts have been assured by the Australian government that no ransom was paid and no other benefit bartered to the kidnappers for his liberty. They agree with the government's policy of not paying ransoms.

"That would just encourage more hostage-taking all over Africa, expatriates or local people," says Jocelyn. And Ken confirms that he told Jocelyn before she left him that he didn't want anyone to pay a ransom for him. "Absolutely not."

The reason for Ken's release remains a mystery. Perhaps it was to do with a complex multi-government deal involving the release of Islamist prisoners – though the Australian government is not revealing any information.

For the Elliotts, there's no mystery.

"We believe that the only reason why we were released," says Ken, "was because there were a few hundreds, if not thousands of people praying for it. And we believe in prayer."

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-08-29/ken-elliott-burkina-faso-al-qaeda/104274992>

Activities

1. Outline Ken's work in Burkina Faso.
2. What indicates Ken's generosity towards Muslims.
3. List 2 incidents that show Ken's great faith and trust in God.
4. What disease did Ken come down with as a result of his diet in captivity? What is the cause of this disease? How did God answer his prayer for healing?
5. What is a ransom? Why did Ken not want the Australian government to pay a ransom?

David Livingstone - 39 Warriors

A Scottish missionary, after a long time in Africa, returned to his sending church in Scotland to report on his work and the ministry and to call more labourers to go to Africa. He arrived at the church; it was winter, cold, and raining. There were not many people who came, and he was a little disappointed.

Many of the people present were elderly. It was great that they were there, but they were not suitable for the mission field. He still felt that he should give the same message, so he proceeded with the message.

He explained they needed more labourers and ended the talk. This is how he ended it:

“Who will go? Who will go? Who will go?”

He didn’t know that the organist had a little boy assistant. As the organ music played, the boy stood up and shouted, “I will go! I will go! I will go!” The name of that little boy was David Livingstone.

He then advised David, “If God has called you to Africa, I suggest you become a medical doctor, and you can go to Africa as a medical missionary.”

David grew up, went to medical school, and became a doctor. He then went to Africa as a medical missionary and laboured tirelessly.

There was a particular tribe that they were trying to reach, and it was very difficult. The chief sent him a message saying, “We are going to come tonight, and we are going to murder you and everyone in your compound.”

David Livingstone kept diaries, and all of this is written in them. In his diary, he wrote, “Lord, we’ve laboured so faithfully. Please, please protect us. Please help us.”

He was fearful of what might happen, concerned that their ministry would be obliterated and everyone would die. But the warriors didn’t kill them. A couple of years later, they eventually introduced the chief of the tribe to Jesus, and the entire community converted and followed Him.

David Livingstone later said to the chief, “You sent me a message that you were going to come and kill me and everyone in the compound.”

The chief replied, “Yes, we came.”

David asked, “Why did you not kill us?”

The chief said, “When we came to the compound, we saw thirty-nine giants surrounding the compound. We counted them — they were big warriors, and there were thirty-nine of them surrounding the compound.”

A couple of years later, David Livingstone returned to his sending church in Scotland and told that story. At the end of the meeting, the church secretary approached him and said, “Doctor Livingstone, do you remember the date when the chief was going to come and kill you?”

He replied, “Of course I know the date.” She gave him the date. The secretary of the church opened the church diary and showed him that on that date, there were thirty-nine people in the church in Scotland praying for him — and there were thirty-nine warriors surrounding the compound.

“Do not say that’s a coincidence.”

Adapted from YouTube presentation by J. John —

<https://www.facebook.com/jjohnnglobal/videos/1147787133532264/?vh=e&fs=e&mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=8Jc8GDIHxzUN62ga>

Activities

1. When did David first respond to God’s call to be a missionary?
2. Why did David study medicine?
3. What did the African chief plan to do?
4. What was David’s response to the message from the chief?
5. Why did the chief and his men not attack?
6. How do we know that this story is true?
7. Find a verse from Psalms that tells us how God protects us when we call on Him. Write the verse.

Denise Bergon – A story of Courage

She asked the archbishop just one question: Is it acceptable for a nun to lie to save Jewish children?

The archbishop's written reply was just a few words long: "Let's lie, my daughter, let's lie."

With that blessing, a 30-year-old French nun named Sister Denise Bergon transformed her quiet convent school into a secret sanctuary.

The year was 1942, and Nazi troops were rounding up Jewish families across France, dragging parents and young children onto trains headed for concentration camps. Nearby, terrified Jewish children were hiding alone in the woods, starving and freezing.

Sister Denise was the Mother Superior of Notre-Dame de Massip in southwest France.

She had already quietly taken a few children in, pretending they were ordinary Catholic pupils. But she knew that to save more, she would have to build a massive web of deception.

She would have to lie systematically, for years, to the Vichy regime, the Gestapo, and even to most of the other nuns in her own convent.

Desperate for guidance, she secretly wrote to Archbishop Jules-Géraud Saliège of Toulouse. He was one of the very few French religious leaders who had publicly condemned the Nazi persecutions, famously declaring that the Jewish people were brothers and sisters to Christians.

His simple reply gave Sister Denise the courage she needed to act.

Resistance couriers and desperate relatives began smuggling children to her gates. Little girls like 12-year-old Annie Beck and Hélène Bach arrived, traumatized and exhausted.

Eventually, Sister Denise was hiding 83 Jewish children. To keep them safe, she only told three other people in the convent the full truth. The other 11 nuns were told the children were war refugees from another region. But Jewish children didn't know Catholic prayers or how to cross themselves, which risked exposing them.

Sister Denise came up with a brilliant cover story: she told everyone the children came from strict communist families who rejected religion entirely.

Whenever the children made a mistake during Mass, people just assumed they had never been taught.

The danger was constant.

When Nazi and local police forces came to search the convent, Sister Denise greeted them with absolute calm, showing them around the classrooms while the Jewish children hid in secret cellars right beneath the chapel floor.

At night, while the convent slept, she went out into the garden and buried the jewellery, cash, and identity documents Jewish parents had left with their kids, marking the locations only in her memory.

She also kept a secret ledger of their real names, determined to reunite them with their families after the war.

Her bravery paid off.

For 20 months, she ran this high-stakes operation under the noses of the Gestapo. When the war finally ended, the tally was miraculous: every single one of the 83 children had survived.

Sister Denise didn't just keep them alive; she protected their dignity. When surviving relatives came to reclaim them, she handed back every child alongside every single piece of buried jewellery and cash, completely untouched.

For the orphans, she worked tirelessly to find safe homes with relatives abroad.

Sister Denise never sought fame or wrote a memoir. She stayed at her quiet convent for the rest of her life, passing away in 2006 at the age of 94.

Decades after the war, the garden where she once buried stolen valuables in the dead of night became a place of beautiful reunions.

Elderly survivors, now in their 70s, would travel from all over the world back to Capdenac. They sat in the shade of a cedar tree planted in her honour, drinking tea with the woman who had risked everything for them.

They brought their own children and grandchildren to meet her—living proof of her incredible courage.

Looking at the generations of families gathered around her, Annie Beck smiled and spoke for them all, saying, "She was like a mother to us. She saved our lives."

True story from the book 'We Are Human Angels'. The book that has spread a new vision of the human experience and has been spontaneously translated into 14 languages by readers.

Questions

1. In what circumstances could it be right to lie? Give evidence from this story.
2. How many people did she tell that the children were Jewish? Why do you think she told only a few trusted nuns and not all the nuns?
3. How did she cover the facts that Jewish children did not know Catholic prayers and were therefore at risk of being discovered.
4. How many children did she save?
5. How did she keep the children's family possessions safe?