



*Simba with "Pole Pole," a young gorilla male whose name in Kiswahili means "take it easy."*

# OUT OF AFRICA

*A Ridgeback bitch named Simba left a legacy of love*

"Simba" (Alama ya Simba) was born March 31, 1988, in Tanga, Tanzania, on Amboni Farm, which at the time was managed by Swiss veterinarian Dr. Peter Schachenmann and his wife Barbara. The Schachenmanns had several Ridgebacks on the farm, where their work included controlling the baboons. The big alpha male Gondo (whose name means "eagle" in Kiswahili and who was the father of Simba – and all mixed offspring in the neighborhood, most of them with a ridge!) was killed by three male baboons after he got older and was no longer able to control them efficiently. Sad enough, but I think a fitting death for a still really African-bred Ridgeback!

Together with five sisters and five brothers, Simba grew up on the farm, but then unfortunately all the other pups died – probably from a viral disease. Simba was left alone with the adult dogs and the farm staff. Our friends the Schachenmanns asked if we would like to take her to Switzerland. We were happy – it would be our first Ridgeback, and not our last!

Simba was taken to Nairobi by another friend, Dr. Markus Borner, who today still works in the Serengeti for the Frankfurt Zoological Society, in his small bush airplane painted with zebra stripes, which he uses for monitoring the big herds of wildebeests and other game. From there, Simba flew in a transport kennel on Swiss Air to Zurich. (For many months after, whenever she heard an airplane pass by far up in the sky, she laid flat on the floor ... )

As you can imagine, I was the happiest woman, finally to have my first Rhodesian Ridgeback, "out of Africa"!

Simba was originally called "Alama," which in Kiswahili means "mark" or "sign" – she had a little mark on her upper leg that looked like a lion's paw. Our 8-year-old daughter Philippa changed it to "Alama ya Simba" – "mark of the lion" – and called her Simba. Simba was never a champion, but she had a marvelous character and was Ridgeback through and through!





*Simba with another gorilla friend, "Rafiki," who, like his brother Pole Pole, was rejected by his mother at the Zurich Zoo.*

She never "rocked the ring": Europeans thought she was very small (she reached exactly the minimum 61 centimeters, or 24 inches, at the withers required by the standard), and her ears flew in the wind even when she wasn't running. And how she could run! At a meet with greyhounds and whippets on the racecourse near Zurich we found Simba could reach the speed of a whippet: more than 60 kilometers, or about 37 miles, an hour (though she could hold it only for about 100 meters, or 330 feet). Nevertheless, she became "Miss Speedy of Swiss Ridgebacks" in 1990!

During those years I hand-raised several orphaned gorilla and orangutan babies at the Zurich Zoo, where my husband, Christian R. Schmidt, was vice director at the time. Simba was not permitted to breed by those then in charge at the Swiss Ridgeback Club, even though she had an interesting pedigree, was very friendly to humans and animals, was very healthy (never saw the vet except for vaccination time) and lived to more than 14! But she was the best foster mother you could imagine for many gorillas, orangutans and other primate babies.

Of course she could not feed the orphans herself, because she had no milk, but she looked after them, played with them and helped them take their first steps by pushing them with her nose. She stood over them and let them climb her legs, always holding one paw after the other up into the air (suffering at the tough little hands of the quite strong primates!) and looking at me as if to ask: "Is this really OK?"

Simba became famous for her role of "gorilla and orangutan foster mommy" in all of Switzerland. In 1994, we moved to Frankfurt, where my husband became director of the famous Grzimek-Zoo, and Simba of course accompanied us.

At 5 years old, Simba had already started to go white. First her face became white, then her legs, then finally almost her whole body. But she never was sick and got very old. The Africans would have called her "Mama Mzee," old mommy, as they call elderly white-haired women they honor and respect deeply.

On May 21, 2002, Simba died – actually, in an accident: As she waited at the main gate of our house, she saw me coming and started to welcome me. There were some steps between us. Simba fell down and was unfortunate enough to break her shoulder. She died in my arms. I brought her ashes back to the shore of Lake Victoria, where she can listen to the hippos' noise ...

I shall never, ever forget Simba, my little great Rhodesian Ridgeback from Tanzania! Other Ridgebacks followed her in my life since 1988, and all of them were wonderful dogs. They gained champion titles and had wonderful puppies. But Simba, the unforgettable foster mother of so many gorilla and orangutan babies, without any title and any puppies of her own, was the greatest: She showed me how a really good Rhodesian Ridgeback "out of Africa" should be!



*Alama ya Simba (foreground) alongside her friend, Champion Shangani Binti Bahati.*



*Annemarie Schmidt-Pfister of Kennel Makololo with Simba and 3-month-old Shangani Binti Bahati, from Wolfgang Blumberg's Shangani Kennels in France.*