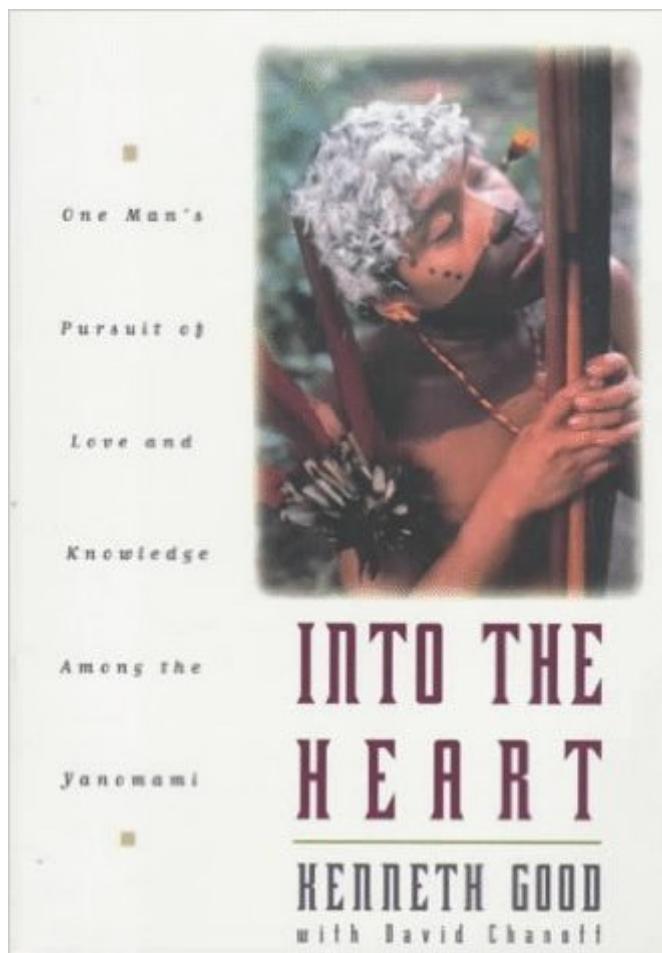


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Into The Heart: One Man's Pursuit Of Love And Knowledge Among The Yanomami



Synopsis

Anthropologist Kenneth Good went to the rain forests of the to study the Yanomami. He found more than one of the few remaining peoples untouched by modern civilization. During more than a decade of observation, Good found himself accepted, indeed virtually adopted, by the tribe and eventually fell in love with a young Yanomami woman. In the process, he made exciting new discoveries about the tribal people and about himself. Into the Heart is the fascinating story of his journey of discovery.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

With Into the Heart, Good and Chanoff have created that all-too-rare phenomenon-- a book that can be equally enjoyed by the general reader and the academic specialist. A riveting account of Good's years with the Yanomami people of Venezuela and Brazil, it can be read as a rich ethnography, an "insider's view" of the scientific research process, an edge-of-your-seat travel yarn, or a rainforest version of "Romeo and Juliet." I first encountered it quite by chance in the trade-book section of a chain bookstore, where the word "Yanomami" on the cover caught my eye. In my graduate training as a cultural anthropologist, I had read descriptions of the Yanomami characterizing them as "the fierce people." jungle warriors whose obsession with violence and warfare allegedly proved that human nature was innately nasty and brutish. So I was both astonished and pleased to read Good's nuanced descriptions of life in a Yanomami village, to find that this much-maligned group was composed of unique, complex individuals, some aggressive, some gentle, all impressively resourceful in adapting to their rainforest environment. I now use it as an auxiliary text in my

introductory classes, and student response has been overwhelmingly positive. Good's discussion of his research brings to life the interplay of scientific theory and data in a dramatic and accessible way. At the same time, his sketches of daily life among the Yanomami transport the reader so effectively that one can almost smell the meat roasting on the campfires, hear the low murmur of voices punctuating the night, feel the rhythm of lives enjoyed in attunement with nature and kin. The Yanomami no longer seem like strangers in a strange land, but like neighbors-- people we feel we know.

Since I didn't notice that it was mentioned in any other review, it should be noted that Yarima, the Yanoma girl he married, returned to the for good in 1993. Apparently she missed her tribal life and was very unhappy in NJ. Knowing this helps put the book into perspective. Google "Kenneth Good" & Yarima and you'll find some mentions of this. Still the book is a fascinating read, well-written and worth reading with the following caveats. While reading it, I felt there was something strange about the relationship; it struck me as more of an unusual obsession. Also, I had trouble sharing his perspectives about feeling at home living among the Yanomama, sometimes professing preferring it to modern society and claiming to feel he could comfortably live among them as one with them. Also, anthropologically he seemed rather weak in insightfulness as to the overall meaning of his experience (I was once an anthropology major many, many years ago, and still read occasional books in that area). However, I did feel he was right to discount much of Chagnon's depiction of them as "fierce people", but he flips too far in the other direction and seems to overlook the significance of much violence that he describes in passing. That said, he does make a nice effort at humanizing the Yanomama. I thought the most interesting things of the book are the descriptions of the practical aspects of his experience: getting started with the Yanomama, day to day experiences, travelling back & forth from the . As a story of his experiences, it was a very interesting read. Also, the reactions of Yarima and later her brother, to some aspects of modern society and technology were fascinating. I thought people who read this, should have some understanding of how it later ended.

"Into the Heart" by Kenneth Good with David Chanoff was for me the most inspiring book of this decade and this century. When I began reading it, I could not put it down until I read the last sentence, in the wee hours of the morning. This book had such an impact on me that I was compelled to read it over and over again. It was THIS BOOK that inspired me to travel to the in October 1999. I would highly recommend this excellent account of life among stone age people for

anyone who has an open mind and wants to learn of aboriginal cultures in South America. This book is for everyone who likes to read about adventure, travel, altruism, love, and the dangers one may encounter travelling in "unchartered waters." It would have been difficult for me not to identify with the protagonist (the author) as I read of his struggles to learn the language, to gain acceptance in Yanomami society, to learn the simple code of ethics in a primitive culture as well as his efforts to acquire survival skills such as learning to fish, hunt, climb trees, go on long treks. My own sense of wonder and excitement grew when I read of the author's "first contact" with hitherto uncontacted Yanomami tribes, and the reaction of these people upon seeing an outsider-a white man-for the first time! I was filled with admiration for the author when I read in chapter 9 that he distributed his very last malaria pill to a Yanomami tribesman, a deed for which he almost paid the ultimate price. His inner struggles with his conscience are apparent when in chapter 7 the author could no longer be the casual observer, the detached scientist-researcher, and allow the stabbing of a poor, whimpering, malaria stricken woman.

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