

Chapman, M. (2013). The Girl with No Name: The Incredible True Story of a Child Raised by Monkeys. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

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Marina Chapman, with Vanessa James and Lynne Barrett-Lee, in “The Girl with No Name,” describes the compelling story of Marina’s constant struggle throughout the course of her early life in Colombia, South America. As the front of the book depicts, Marina was kidnapped around the age of four years old, as she remembers, while she was out in a garden picking pea pods. Her kidnappers however, dumped her off in the middle of the jungle, abandoning her, and Marina was left to her own devices for survival. Marina’s adaptation to jungle living and her will to survive at such a young age in the wild is miraculous, and Chapman answers all questions readers may find themselves wondering. For example, readers may be curious as to what she ate, where she slept, and even how she went to the bathroom without the luxuries of a toilet. Chapman candidly reveals all these details, as well as how she came to learn these strategies for surviving in the jungle, a key component of the book. The area of the jungle Chapman came to call her home was also inhabited by a tribe of monkeys, who she repeatedly called her family. As she mimicked the ways of the monkeys in her daily routines, Marina was able to find more ease in activities that were necessary, such as eating, grooming, and staying alive.

Chapman reinforced the recurring theme of family many times throughout the course of the book. One can assume family remained a central theme due to her childhood that lacked the

traditional sense of family, with a father and mother as guardians and companions. In her early days in the jungle, Marina described that she constantly found herself asking, “Why had my mother still not come for me?” (p. 35). However, this was another area in which she was forced to adapt, as she seemed to learn to accept that she would likely never see her mother again.

Mariana was able to replace the idea of her family at her home with her monkey family, that first would only allow and tolerate her presence, but later treated Marina as if she was one of their own species.

Marina does come across a human tribe in the jungle, as she followed a woman she found herself drawn to, who had left their camp to give birth to a child. When she reveals herself to the human tribe, they refused her to live alongside them, even threatening to kill her. Marina faces adversity in her attempts to find somewhere that she felt she truly belonged. Her time in the jungle was not short-lived, as she predicted she spent almost six years in the wild. Her rescue from the jungle involves Marina’s unexplainable connection, again, to a female, who was a hunter. The hunter’s traded Marina to what is later to be revealed as a brothel, in a community called Loma de Bolivar. Previous to her discovery of the business, the brothel-owner Ana-Karmen conducted, Marina was given beatings on numerous and regular occasions by Ana-Karmen for her ineptitude in human mannerisms, which escaped her due to her becoming feral. Chapman describes the brothel from the viewpoint of a child, as she was at the time, saying, “There were lots of beds, and lots of men, who’d disappear into the girls’ bedrooms, spend an hour or two there, then disappear again.” (p. 150). As Marina was rescued from the jungle, she believes, around the age of ten years old, she became a resident at the brothel only a small

number of years before she was deemed acceptable to have sex with the male clients. However, yet another woman she was drawn to in the community warned her not to become “a piece of raw meat...For the men.” (p. 152). When Marina suspects it is her turn to become this “raw meat,” she runs away from the brothel, and finds herself in the city of Cucuta.

Marina’s time spent in Cucuta was spent as a “gamina”, that is, a street youth. During this period in her life, Marina was able to use her foraging skills she attained in the jungle on the street to feed herself. Although she prided herself in her expertise when it came to stealing, she brought herself to go door-to-door asking for work, and in return, be given food and shelter. Luck was not on her side again, and she found work in a crime-ridden household, which contained a mob-like family called the Santos’. She was treated just as poorly as she was at Ana-Karmen’s brothel with intense, regular beatings, and she found herself pleading for any opportunity to escape. With the help of the Santos’ neighbour Maruja, yet another woman she became drawn to and trusted, Marina was able to escape the near torture she endured at the Santos residence. Marina, for a short period, lived in a convent to escape the wrath of her previous household, but as she resented the restrictions the nuns at the convent enforced, she knew this was yet another dwelling she could not stay. Marina finally became free with, again, the help of Maruja, and with that, was able to begin the rest of her life.

The concepts of family and maternal love prove immensely important through the course of “The Girl with No Name.” Marina had eventually come to a point during her time in the jungle when she “stopped thinking about the life [she] lived before and began feeling part of [her] new monkey family” (p. 61). As a young child, it seemed as though all she craved was love and companionship, which is understandable as these aspects are elements in which many

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children receive from their home-lives. Marina's lack of a traditional family forced her to find somewhere she belonged, and the monkey tribe provided her with all the family-like elements she needed. The first incident where "Grandpa monkey" (p. 49) saved Marina's life was a true testament that the monkeys really did look out for her, as family members do to take care of their own.

Although she failed to find another "family" that was as precious to her as her monkey family in the events following her rescue from the jungle, she never stopped searching for a place in which she belonged to fill this void in her life. The search for a new family always began with Marina's close connections to the female figures that were each distinctive in changing the course of her life. The first woman from the human tribe in the jungle, who Marina saw give birth, was essential as it led her to attempt to become a part of this tribe of her own kind. Although this attempt was unsuccessful, Marina made another attempt as she disregarded her survival instincts and revealed herself to the female hunter. The hunters Mariana encountered previous to this incident had only been men, and she was afraid of them. Although this woman took advantage of Marina for her own personal gain by trading her to the brothel, Marina's life took another turn. Without the help of the woman who warned Marina to protect herself from becoming "raw meat" (p. 152), Marina most likely would have been forced to become a prostitute under Ana-Karmen's brutality. Finally, Marina's saviour Maruja was a key component to Marina's final escape to a new life. Perhaps Marina's absence of a motherly figure forced her to continually seek out these instrumental women in her life in hopes of receiving something of the mother she never had.

Marina Chapman most likely had many intentions behind her decision to share the story

of her completely unorthodox childhood through this book, but I believe Chapman wanted to create awareness concerning the lives of many Colombian children. She describes that, “the streets of the city were riddled with violent crime gangs” (p. 170), and where children have to fight every single day just to, “avoid being gang-raped or beaten, and to avoid being shot or getting caught by the police” (p. 170). Many of the children she described encountering on the streets struggle with addictions, were involved in gangs, or sold drugs. Furthermore, there are still children who reside in brothels, receiving the same treatment as Marina, and who are forced to sleep with clients at very young ages. I do not believe Chapman is trying to portray a “poor me” story, but one in which readers are forced to reflect upon the many children living in these treacherous conditions, even today, which is an all-encompassing social issue many are not aware of. “The Girl with No Name” would appeal to those in disciplines such as anthropology, through Marina’s interactions with the monkey tribe, as well as sociologists who would wish to study the effects on children who did not grow up in traditional family or household settings. “The Girl with No Name” was a riveting story of courage, a will to survive, and a desire to take control of one’s situation, and with that, I would absolutely recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the effects of an unconventional childhood.