

Diary #1 Hominid

Hominid Species: *Homo habilis*

Time Period: 1.8 million years ago (m.y.a.)

Location: Great Rift Valley. Present day Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, East Africa.

Gender and Approximate Age: Female, 13 years old.

It is a cool morning in the copse lining the stream where our group has spent the night sleeping. I awake with the sun peeking over the horizon of the savanna and casting its long rays through the leaves of the tree in which I am currently sprawled out. ---I slowly make my descent from the tree using my strong powerful arms to gently lower my body down to the woodland floor. Even early in the morning and as stiff as I am from several nights spent in a tree, this task is not hard. My feet are now firmly on the sandy soil that constitutes and supports this little wooded oasis in the midst of the great wide open grassland that surrounds us. As I look around I see others of my band rousing to the day. Up and down the banks of the shallow, tree-lined stream others are descending from trees where they have rested the night. The day has begun.

It is now time to set about the invariable task of finding food. Before doing so however, I head to the stream for water to refresh my dry mouth. There I meet with others already quenching their thirst. The water level has steadily been getting lower since we returned to this area a few weeks ago. The dry season will soon be upon us and before long we will have to move on from this place for one with enough water to support our numbers, though for today, we can still get water here. I crouch in the middle of the stream and use my hands to dig in the sandy silt that covers the stream bed, creating a small but sufficient hole from which to drink. I rinse the dirt from my hands as I watch the water swirl and pool in the hole I just dug. I drink heartily from this small reservoir even as it is being reclaimed by the stream and filling with sediment. My thirst now abated, I stretch my body into its full upright carriage and scan the surrounding area searching for my sister. It takes me several minutes to find her amongst the crowd of our troupe but I do and we, along with several other young childless women, set out to forage for the day.

We begin by going to a site that our mother and grandmother would take us to when we were small and not as capable as we now are. It is one where the foraging this time of year is easy enough for children to help feed themselves and it is not far from the stand of trees near the stream that has been providing us shelter for now. When we arrive we notice that various others from our band have had the same idea and are here before us. There are a handful of women both old and young, grandmothers and mothers, and their young children as well. We help ourselves to some of the fruit that is higher off the ground. Using the full length of our up stretched arms and standing posture to reach the fruit, we take that which would be inaccessible to the children and nursing mothers. We take only enough for our immediate needs so as not to hinder their procuring food for both the present needs of the children and for food sharing later. We then head out to a

spot on the outer reaches of our range. It is one where my sister and I have found nuts at this time of year in the past. We reach the spot at the sun's peak in the sky. It is now very important that we gather as many nuts as possible and return to the thicket by the stream. We are far from the group and thus far from safety. I do not wish to be caught out in the open expanse of the savanna when it gets dark.

On our return trek we meet up with other small groups from our band who have been out scavenging. Several of them have had no success today; this is not abnormal for scavenging is hard work and does not always pay off, though one band we run into close to camp has been quite lucky. They happened across an antelope freshly killed by a lion. They were able to scare of the fierce predator by means of wooden sticks crudely used as clubs and by the sheer force of their numbers, there were five in this particular scavenger party. It also helped that the lion had exerted itself in the heat of the day during the pursuit of the antelope and was not fit to fight for its food again. The scavenger party on the other hand was adequately cooled by the wind which sweeps across the open grassland. This is what allowed them to return to the group victoriously with the disarticulated forelimbs of the antelope. Perhaps in a few days they will return to the carcass with more stone flakes and hammers to retrieve the hind limbs and other bones which may be good sources of marrow.

Back at the stream we find others have had success in their quest for food. There are several rabbit carcasses, caught by those who had run the rabbits down to catch them and then would throw their bodies down to the ground to kill them. There is an abundance of fruit, it still being the rainy season even if it is almost ended. There are also several varieties of roots, roots always being a reliable source of food. Some amongst the groups returning are those who traveled all day, there and back, to retrieve rock from the quarry for the group. Rock is a necessary component in the tools we need to dismember, skin, and butcher the carcasses we find and the small animals we are able to kill ourselves as well as opening nuts and marrow bones and grinding roots. This is the reason the rest of the group is more than willing to provide food for the rock gatherers and toolmakers when their tasks prohibit them from gathering it for themselves.

As the remainder of our collective unit returns from the day's activities we, the group I foraged with today, focus on the chore of opening the nuts we collected for food sharing with the group. We quickly find the large rocks, which had been brought here sometime ago with this purpose in mind and left here for use during seasonal occupation of this site. Now at the rocks we turn our attention to cracking the nuts and gathering the meat from inside the shells. Once we finish with our job we head back towards the larger group in order to share our food and partake in the food gathered by others.

With my belly full from the day's harvest and the late afternoon early evening wind sweeping across the grassland I sit in a small group on the outskirts of the grove of trees. I can hear the stream murmuring in the background, just out of site from where I sit in the waving grass. The sun is beating down its warm evening rays and I am currently engaged by waiting for my turn at grooming. At this moment, I am watching some of the others groom each other, an activity I which I enjoy thoroughly even though I am not very high on the social ladder. There are those in our group who I can not even watch groom each other. I am, however, allowed to watch and even participate in the group I am with now. Participation takes many forms in this important social pastime for me. It consists not only of picking lice and other bugs off each other but in communicating with

each other through grunts, gestures, and some rudimentary vocalizations. I have hopes for moving up socially and truly believe it will happen soon. I pat my belly and feel the firmness that is unmistakable. Yes, I am carrying a child within me. It makes me shudder a little to think about what this means. I have seen others go through childbirth and know it is a dangerous time for both mother and baby. I have seen many survive this difficult ordeal, but I have also seen a few die during childbirth and several more shortly afterwards. It makes me anxious. Though, I am also very excited. This will be my first child and I have seen the joy of the mothers of our group with their babies clinging to them. I want this joy, this motherhood for myself.

The grooming goes on until the sun is setting at which point we all begin to disperse for the night, returning to the safety of the trees. From my vantage point, up in the tree where I will sleep, I look out across the savanna, which now looks like a dying fire because of the sun's retreating rays, and I swear I see eyes looking back. Tonight, I am grateful for the distance between us, the protection of the trees, and the safety of membership in my band.

The stars are out and as I lay on the cusp of sleep I hear hyenas in the distance. They are in pursuit of an animal. Moments later, I hear the cry of some animal that just wasn't fast enough tonight. The sound of hyenas laughing follows closely. Up in my tree in the relative safety of my group I drift off to sleep with one final thought streaming through my mind...not me, today, it was not me.