Jamie Rappaport Clark

The Science of Saving

Jamie Rappaport Clark crept through the woods as silently as the branches and leaves underfoot would allow her to be, and thought of how differently she was spending her summer vacation from her peers. Most of her classmates at Towson University were probably tanning on a beach somewhere, or perhaps trying on their new business suits to prepare for job interviews. Jamie, however, was in the middle of the wilderness, stalking peregrine falcon chicks. "I was teamed up with Cornell University, releasing and tracking

these peregrines at a site on the Chesapeake Bay," Jamie explains. "I followed the chicks everyday to make sure they were fed and safe from predators. It was the leading edge recovery effort for the falcons after they were nearly wiped out by DDT and other pesticides."

Twenty years later, Jamie stood at the podium at the World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho. While she usually avoids public speaking at all costs, she felt privileged that day, and before the

nation's premiere falcon and raptor researchers, she proudly announced that the peregrine falcons had fully recovered as a species and were to be officially removed from the endangered species list. It was an emotional moment for Jamie, who was then serving as the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "To have worked releasing them as a kid in college, and to then be announcing the bird's recovery success as the director, was very exciting," she remembers. "It's very rare to see such full circle success because conservation outcomes, especially those involving endangered species, are very long term. You're not in this field for instant gratification; rather, you watch trends and keep plugging away."

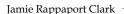
Today, Jamie is the President and CEO of Defenders of Wildlife, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and conservation of native plants and animals in their natural environments. Founded in 1947, the organization focuses on protecting the whole of biodiversity through a unique blend of science, policy, advocacy, and law, as seen in the scientists, conservation biologists, in-house lawyers, lobbyists, and policy experts that make up the organization's 140 employees. "Defenders is a science-based wildlife conservation organization," Jamie describes. "We do more than just advocate. Our scientists and policy experts inform policymakers and federal and state agencies, such

as the Department of the Interior and state fish and game agencies." It's the science of saving species, and Jamie has been practicing it all her life.

While Defenders participates in some international work, the organization primarily focuses on conservation activities in North America. They are well known for their work to restore gray wolves back to Yellowstone and the Northern Rockies, for their efforts to protect habitat and wildlife corridors

for Florida panthers, and for their work with ranchers and other landowners to provide the tools and education to live safely and productively on the landscape with wolves, grizzly bears, panthers, and other top predators. "While we work with the full breadth of biodiversity, we've stayed true to the mission of the organization by focusing on protecting predators, which are often misunderstood," Jamie notes. "Many of the wolves and grizzlies we work with are called apex predators. The logic behind our approach is that, if you take care of the top species in an ecosystem, you naturally takes care of all those species that depend on that ecological system as well."

Jamie's work at Defenders is but one link in the extensive chain that is her career in conservation—a career that stems from the deep love of animals and nature that she has harbored since childhood. Though she was born in New



York City, her time there was short-lived. Her father was in the Army, so the family moved Jamie and her four siblings every year and a half. "I had no roots," she laughs. "I attended two different second grades and three different high schools, so as a result I'm incredibly flexible and adaptable." Her father's final duty station was in Northern Maryland, so upon retiring, the family finally laid its roots down in the area.

Because the family grew up with limited means, Jamie and her siblings had to earn the things they wanted. The children shared everything, and she learned the value of money from an early age. "I would babysit for fifty cents an hour, but it added up, so by the time I reached middle school, I had saved up enough to buy myself a ski jacket. I was so proud of that jacket that I wore it all the way through college," she recalls. "Today, that upbringing has made me incredibly sensitive to the gifts people give to Defenders. We are a nonprofit, and the donations we receive are people's hard earned money, so we really appreciate that and work hard to spend it wisely."

Despite all the moving around she and her family did, she found that as long as she had a pet, she was happy. "I loved being around animals. It felt good to me, because their love for humans is so unconditional," she says. "I would go through the neighborhood looking for animals, and I'd bring them home with me. I'd say, 'Look, Mom, it's a stray, can we keep him?' And she'd tell me, 'No, Jamie, that's Mr. Smith's dog, who lives four houses down. Take him back.""

Jamie went on to attend Fairfield University in Connecticut, where she began pursuing all the necessary courses to go to Veterinary School. She transferred to Towson University in Maryland for her junior and senior years to be closer to her mother, who had fallen suddenly ill. The summer before her senior year, after being nominated by her professors, she was selected to work with Cornell University on the recovery project to release peregrine falcons on the east coast.

Jamie spent eight weeks at the release site on the Chesapeake Bay—the experience that ultimately led her to realize that vet school was not the path for her after all. "I loved being outside and reconnecting with conservation at its core," she recalls of that transformational time in her life. "It exposed me to the world of ecology, and to the

art of putting the puzzle pieces together of how conservation impacts the health of the planet."

Around that time, her work in conservation was supplemented by reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Although Carson had died by the time Jamie was introduced to her work, her legacy served as a constant source of inspiration to the young woman. "She was a trained naturalist and writer, and she cared deeply enough to give her life to conservation," Jamie notes. "She taught me that one person really can make a difference." Having decided against veterinary school once and for all, she attained her Masters Degree in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Maryland.

While working on her thesis, Jamie was hired as a research technician in Cardiovascular Respiratory Physiology and the treatment of chemical warfare agents at Aberdeen Proving Ground. Her research provided her an opportunity to earn her PhD in Physiology, but she quickly realized that it was not the right fit for her after all. The PhD would lead her into the research world and academia, so Jamie moved on to become, at the time, the sole female wildlife biologist working with the National Guard and Army on endangered species and conservation nationwide.

The military proved to be an excellent place to work as a conservation biologist, since the Department of Defense has extensive amounts of land rich in biodiversity. "They had to comply with environmental laws just like everyone else," Jamie explains. "Because of encroaching development, these military lands have become islands of biodiversity, and the wildlife doesn't mind the bombing and testing that occurs." While working with the military, Jamie developed the ability to deal with conflict and negotiate with high-ranking Generals, and by the time she was twenty-nine, she had risen through the ranks to be appointed the Department of Army's first wildlife biologist at their headquarters in Washington, DC.

During this time, Jamie met a fellow biologist, Jim Clark, who was working for the military in Southern Maryland. He was relocated to Alaska to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service doing research on grizzly bears, but the two kept in touch until he was transferred to a national wildlife refuge off the coast of Texas to oversee the whooping crane recovery program. They began dating despite their long distance status and eventually eloped. Much to Jamie's

dismay, however, their marriage did not solve the "When you're married, problem of distance. you're supposed to live with that person," she laughs. "So I decided to shift my professional path somewhat and work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service so Jim and I could align our careers." They continued to live apart for a short time as Jamie began working intensively in the Pacific Northwest on the northern spotted owl and other endangered species, until a gas leak during a maintenance operation caused Jim's house to burn down. "Everything he had was suddenly gone," Jamie describes. "So he relocated to Washington, and we were transferred together to the desert southwest. Luckily, our careers have moved in tandem ever since."

The Clarks spent two years Albuquerque when Jamie received a call from the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, asking her to come back to D.C. to oversee the rebuilding of the endangered species program for the agency and work on reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act. She accepted, and the couple moved back to Washington, where they have been ever since. "My work on the Endangered Species Act gave me increasing visibility, since I could problem solve and work in tense environments," Jamie notes. Her work also gave her great exposure on Capitol Hill, and she was promoted up the ladder to become the first woman appointed in the Senior Executive Service ranks of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "I was thirtyfive and working in Rachel Carson's former office in the Interior Department," Jamie marvels. "She was my greatest mentor, and it seemed too good to be true."

Jamie's success continued so that, in 1997, when President Clinton was elected for his second term, she was nominated by the President to take over as the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "It was very quick and scary, especially because I was a career biologist, so I had very little political orientation," she confesses. "I was hesitant to take on the job because I felt it was something I wasn't qualified to do and it would take me further away from the wildlife and the outdoors I enjoyed so much. I had a close working relationship with the Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, and the other people in charge. They believed in me, making it possible for me to step up and work hard to not let them down."

Despite her hesitations, Jamie was

confirmed by the Senate in July of 1997, making history at the age of thirty-nine as the youngest person to serve as director. During her tenure, she also gave birth to her son, whom she named Carson, after Rachel Carson. It was a wonderful and challenging time, and after four busy years, when Clinton left office, Jamie did as well.

After stepping down from her presidential political appointment, Jamie took on consulting work for the Nature Conservancy. While she loved the Conservancy for many reasons, she ultimately accepted a senior conservation position with the National Wildlife Federation. "It was a very personal decision because I could spend more time with my son, and I had recently lost my mother, whom I was very close to," remembers. "I needed to decompress a little, time in government especially after my appointment, and the National Wildlife Federation position closer to home gave me the chance to do that."

Jamie was then hired by Defenders of Wildlife in 2004 as Executive Vice President, a position specifically created for succession to President and CEO. In October of 2011, she took over as President and CEO. "It's a great fit here," she notes. "It's allowed me to focus on my passion and roots in wildlife conservation, advocacy, policy, and science. With a team of 140, it's like a microcosm of the Fish and Wildlife Service, which has a staff of nine thousand."

Still, Jamie's presidency has not come without its challenges. Because she inherited the organization in the midst of the Great Recession, she had to downsize during her first week at the helm. She had to make hard decisions, but with the help of the board chair, combined with her knowledge, relationships, and network, she was able to resolve most of the financial problems within her first year as president. She then devised a new strategic plan to keep the company effective, strong, and focused on conservation outcomes for the future.

In many ways, Jamie feels she stumbled upon her career success. "I like being in waders out in a river, studying wildlife and solving conservation problems." she says. "But I kept trying new things. I would get these great opportunities, but often, I simply ran out of hours in the day. I did most of the course work for my PhD, but I never finished my dissertation. I was offered a spot at Georgetown Law School, but I

had a young son and a demanding job to balance already. As far as I was concerned, though, if I was making a difference, and folks thought I was value added, that was incredibly fulfilling to me."

Jamie credits her success to her military upbringing, which taught her to adapt to any situation, but mostly to her mother, who was her biggest cheerleader, and pushed her to never give up. This, in part, has enabled her to be the leader she is today, working with and managing people with proficiency and grace. "I feel what I lack in brilliance, I make up for in common sense, and so much of leadership is common sense," she laughs. "I really strive to be consensus-oriented. I'm able to make those tough decisions though, so that we come out at the end of the day with a unified product. Some like to use the position of CEO for power, but I care more about results. Power doesn't fulfill me. I'm happy to lead from all sides, and I try to not make quick decisions so as not to lose creativity from my senior management team."

With her unique background, Jamie may be a rarity in her workplace, but she uses this to her advantage. "I'm one of the few CEOs in the environmental sector that's a biologist," she remarks. "Most people in this role are business and finance types, and there are very few people that have the executive branch experience that I do. I may be considered an oddity, but my experience gives me the unique perspective needed to overcome the conservation challenges we face today."

Despite her success, Jamie's greatest obstacle has been her introverted nature and her unease with public speaking and visibility. "I've had to testify in Congress, and recently I was invited to do a series of talks at Skidmore College. I've found that the more you do, the easier it gets," she notes. "I always remind myself that what I do matters, and I believe that my son and his generation deserve better than what my generation will deliver. Our kids and our grandkids deserve a healthy planet with healthy natural resources—that's the legacy each generation leaves to the next."

While her lecture series at Skidmore College helped her continue to overcome her fear of public speaking, she was also able to firm up the advice she would give to young people entering the workforce today. "We were talking about why conservation matters, and I told those students that when they come out of school, they don't need

to be trained scientists to make a difference," she "It really comes down to having an appreciation for science and for the fundamental elements of how important the web of life is, and how it impacts our physical space. You can't argue a case unless you understand what you're arguing for, so you need that basic comprehension of science to know how it fits together. If you're in business making decisions that affect the economy of this country, it's important to understand how science influences the health of the economy and the change of the climate. Climate change is the transformational issue of our generation, and will be for those who come after us. The science of what a changing climate is doing today to the economic and environmental fabric of our planet is something we need to care about."

In the end, Jamie's message is one that every American should adhere to, especially as the nation stands at its current crossroads. recession has forced businesses and government to their knees in an effort to plug the country's financial bleeding, while at the same time, strange and devastating deviations in weather patterns have brought global climate change to the forefront of the nation's attention. Both the economy and the environment are suffering, and while many people believe the two are too contradictory nature to be solved simultaneously, Jamie argues for just the opposite. "It's not a decision between conserving the environment and stimulating the economy. That is a false dichotomy," Jamie explains. "In reality, they go together as flipsides of the same coin. A small example is the millions of dollars that go to vacationing and ecotourism. People go to national parks, wildlife refuges, and beaches, and if the environment implodes, it will hurt the economy. It's all about finding balance." By using science as a basis to save species, environments, and economies, Jamie and her team continue to work toward a better tomorrow.

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- By Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®

About Gordon J. Bernhardt

President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on

providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and Gordon's Blog.

