

**Remember Jerom
February 13, 1999**

Jerom 1982-1996

You were handed a death sentence at the age of two.
No more sunlight, no more love, no more happiness.
Twelve long years in service to humanity, punctuated
only by darts and needles.
Your death was a relief - if only it would release the others as well.

On February 13, 1996 Jerom Chimpanzee died of AIDS at Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center. More chimpanzees have been experimentally infected with the virus which killed Jerom, and almost 200 HIV+ and HIV- chimpanzees live in restricted housing conditions on AIDS projects in laboratories across the US. Twelve of them live at Yerkes.

If you've ever met or seen a chimpanzee, you cannot help but be struck by their uncanny similarity to humans. This is because the chimpanzee and the human are very close relatives. We are both Great Apes, and in fact, chimps and humans are closer in species than are chimps and gorillas. The battle over the ethics of using chimpanzees in invasive biomedical research rages on, precisely because of the paradox presented by the human-chimpanzee relationship.

Jerom Chimpanzee was experimentally infected with HIV as an infant at Yerkes. He lived in a small cage for his entire life, and shared a window-less building with 12 other chimpanzees. Jerom was diagnosed with full-blown AIDS in September of 1995, and was isolated from his two cage-mates. For the next six months Jerom lived in isolation, and was unable to play with or touch another chimpanzee. He was plagued by wasting syndrome, pneumonia, chronic diarrhea and anemia. Jerom was finally euthanized by researchers just days before his 14th birthday.

I was with Jerom for his last six months. I was his caretaker and his nurse, and watched his decline just as I have watched human friends die of AIDS. My life has been profoundly affected by my work with Jerom and the other chimps he lived with. I write for Jerom because I was his witness. I write about Jerom because for me he has become a symbol of something greater, and while I harbor private memories and a profound sadness for the son/brother/patient I lost, I am filled with a sense of disgust which grows and will not be silent every time I hear of the latest cruelties committed in the name of humanity and in the name of science. Jerom represents 200 chimpanzees in biocontainment in HIV studies. He represents the babies taken from mothers' breasts and given an experimental vaccine. Jerom represents countless chimpanzees taken from social groups in labs to live alone in a tiny cage while malaria

or hepatitis experiments are performed on their blood. He represents the quandary of the biomedical researcher, who is somewhere deep inside so conflicted by the immorality of this business that he or she never once sets eyes on his or her research subject. Now Jerom also represents the wild chimpanzees who sleep in trees in West Africa, and who unknowingly face the prospect of being chased, darted, and having blood drawn in pursuit of the SIVcpz virus - a sort of Holy Grail. And above all else, Jerom represents the fear, desperation and vanity of the human species, which refuses to look beyond itself and covets everything in sight for its own ends.

I ask you, on the anniversary of the first chimpanzee AIDS death, to give a moment of thought for these individuals whose lives have been usurped to fight this battle. These individuals have names and faces, and they suffer, in silence and in isolation in the labs. And they deserve at least a brief moment of your time.

If you are in support of this research, spend this moment in thanks and gratitude. Consider the supreme sacrifice we require of these chimpanzees. Be grateful for these living test-tubes and never take for granted what has been taken from individuals of their species in order that individuals of our species can live better.

If you are undecided about your feelings toward invasive research on chimpanzees, don't turn away, but instead ask questions, find out about this work and about these individuals, and form an opinion. This does effect you. Ask yourself the questions: At what point is human life worth more than nonhuman life? Do we have the right to use another animal species for our own means, however dire the circumstance?

If you are opposed to this work, spend this moment thinking of a way, however seemingly small, in which you can better the lives of these chimpanzees. Bleak living conditions, tiny social groups, and a routine of needles and medical procedures are not a pleasant way for a chimpanzee to spend his or her entire life, which can last up to 50 years.

Although the 100-200 HIV/AIDS Project chimpanzees in labs across the US are never mentioned in the media, these individuals do exist, and no matter which opinion you hold, they deserve a moment of your consideration. If nothing else, they have earned at least that much. Twelve of these individuals who live at Yerkes - Betsie, Joye, Arctica, Jonah, Mark, Roberta, Hallie, Tika, and Manual, Nathan, Buster and Sarah who are living in isolation - await the same fate as Jerom, who died at the young age of 14, and who never once was allowed the pleasure of sitting amidst the leaves of a tree.

Rachel Weiss