

**Remember Jerom
February 13, 2001**

Jerom Chimpanzee died from AIDS at the Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center, five years ago today. He was only a teen when he died - tall, dark and handsome. His aloofness made him seem so tough and self-reliant, and belied the fear I saw in his eyes when he daily demanded my attentions. I was Jerom's caretaker and nurse, and even now scarcely a day goes by that I do not think of him and how his life was created for and ended by biomedical research.

In the last six months of Jerom's life, the most accurate words to describe his character were "frustrated," "bewildered," and "afraid." During most of that time he was kept in isolation from his cage mates, and lived alone in an 11ft x 9ft x 9ft steel and concrete cell until the day of his death. More often than not, he could be found pressed up against the front of his cage, watching the chimps in the cells across from him, with his thumbs in his ears and his face twisted up in an unmistakable look of chimpanzee frustration. At times I found him bewildered by the changes happening to his body - when he was bloated, he'd poke questioningly at his distended belly; when he was anemic he'd inspect his gray tongue in the mirror. Other times he was scared by things I'd take for granted, like when I pulled up the sleeve of my tyvek suit to offer my arm for grooming - my skin was so strange to him that he jumped back in fear. More than once I saw him sob silently; many times I saw him, in absolute terror, attempt to evade the dart gun pointed at him.

Jerom was at his most charming when we were having fun. Like many chimpanzees, his favorite games were "chase" and "tickle." Every day I tried to make him laugh, and when I succeeded he'd turn away from me, and shyly bite down on one of his fingers, as if to keep from losing his cool. When the playing was over he'd sit down to be groomed. He always showed me which part of him I should work on, and watched my eyes intently as I worked, to make sure that I was really paying attention. He never groomed me back.

To this day, I am unclear about how to define my relationship with Jerom. I don't really think we were friends. I think that we became close because he needed somebody, not because he wanted me or my friendship. He had nobody else - not a researcher, not a veterinarian, not another chimpanzee - to entertain or comfort him, and take his mind off of the disease ravaging his body.

The relationship between a chimpanzee and his caretaker in the laboratory is intense, and can be compared to nothing else. The chimpanzee is not a pet, nor a child or a mentally impaired human. The chimpanzee in the laboratory is not living an enriched, safe or contented life in a zoo or sanctuary; nor is he a criminal proven

guilty of a crime. If the caretaker is the friend of the lab chimp, how can she let her friend suffer through an invasive procedure or experiment? If they are not friends, what explains the love and understanding they feel for one another? It's a terrible thing to be the keeper of the keys.

Regardless of the name I do or do not put on our relationship, I made a promise to Jerom, to remember him and work to end the type of research that took his life. I do not celebrate the anniversary of Jerom's birth, because I do not feel that a life created by human manipulation, and then lived and ended in anxiety, fear, pain and loneliness is a life to be celebrated. I remember his death because it was his death that made me know that humans do not have an exclusive claim to everything on our Earth, and that sometimes ethical decisions aren't always the ones that make our lives easier.

The type of research that killed Jerom continues to this day. Jerom's death has re-energized some scientists to find a strain of HIV that makes chimpanzees ill with AIDS, and such projects are active today. Producing a pathogenic strain of virus could, in theory, make the chimpanzee a somewhat more relevant model for human disease research, but would most definitely assure that more chimpanzees would suffer and die in the same way that Jerom suffered, or worse.

For the past four years I've written this memorial so that those of you who don't know can learn about Jerom and the 200 chimpanzees just like him who are infected with HIV in labs across the US. I've written so that those of you who have forgotten about them will remember. And so that those of you who care will work harder to see the end of biomedical research on chimpanzees. And so that those of you who do biomedical research on chimpanzees will think again about what you are doing. And so that I continue to honor my promise to an individual for whom I cared and for whom I still mourn.

The goal of this piece (as with all of my writings and commentaries) is to plead for the lives of those whose behaviors and actions clearly speak for themselves, but whose interests aren't recognized or are ignored by the research community. On this anniversary of the death of one research subject, I beg you AIDS researchers to stop using chimpanzees. I BEG YOU. Your work causes much suffering - not only physical, but more often psychological. You are making this happen, and you can make this stop. Yes, it can be that simple.

"Welfare" is not an acceptable answer - to take action that truly reflects the chimpanzees' best interests is to end the research. The relevance of your work to human health is not relevant to the interests of your research subjects. A very preliminary step toward achieving the goal of ending research could be to recognize the chimpanzees' requirement to have a life free from painful procedures and suffocating captivity for their true well-being.

I understand that to most researchers, this opinion seems quite unreasonable. When you read these words, and the words of other advocates, you find that we are unwavering and uncompromising in our demands. The reason we are so adamant about our position is that we are desperate to find a way for the abuse of obviously sentient and emotional beings to stop. We fight not because we hate you or we hate the idea of creating better health solutions for humans, but because we love the individuals who are your research subjects, and we abhor the byproduct of suffering as a consequence of improving human health. I continue to plead: if you have any doubts about the ethics of using chimpanzees in biomedical research, refer back to your moral imperative to not cause pain and suffering, and err on the side of caution: stop biomedical research on chimpanzees.

As always, I write this statement out of my love for Jerom, and his former building-mates Manual, Buster, Arctica, Betsie, Joye, Nathan, Sara, Marc, Jonah, Roberta, Hallie and Tika, some of whom wait to die of AIDS and all of whom pass their days in an oppressive and desolate dungeon. This year I also write in memory of Atlanta Chimpanzee, the matriarch of the Yerkes chimpanzee colony, who recently passed away in a tiny cage, in extreme pain and isolated from her family and friends. Like Jerom, Atlanta is free. May the knowledge of their lives and their deaths serve the chimpanzees they've left behind.

I would like to call upon the directors of the five NIH laboratories housing HIV infected chimpanzees (the Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center, the Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research RPRC, the Coulston Foundation, the University of South Louisiana - New Iberia Research Center, and the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center) to issue public statements about the current status of the chimpanzees on HIV studies. These individuals have had everything taken from them and denied to them due to the rigors of biomedical research. The public owes these chimpanzees a debt of gratitude, but cannot even begin to honor them unless they know who these individuals are and how they live. This statement should include the names, ages, infectious status, likes and dislikes (e.g. food and toy preferences), and cage and building mates of the chimpanzees on these studies. It should also include the number of personal caretakers they have, how many humans they see during the day, and what their housing conditions, enrichment schedule and daily routines are. Please join LPAG in requesting the center directors to provide this information, so that these chimpanzees can begin to have the recognition they rightly deserve.

Rachel Weiss