

**Remember Jerom
February 13, 2002**

Jerom Chimpanzee should have been twenty years old this month. Had he lived the life of his ancestors, he might be dwelling in a riverine forest, making knowledgeable decisions about where to spend his time - in a fig tree overlooking the savanna, chasing red-tailed monkeys through the canopy, following a friend off into the undergrowth. He might have developed into a proud and handsome individual, carrying 130 lbs. on his tall frame, his jet-black hair and dark face giving him a secretive look. He might have populated a forest with his offspring, ensuring the future of wild chimpanzees.

Jerom never lived this life - he was created for humans, so that we may pursue our unattainable goal of living without disease. Although intelligent and often full of opinions, such individuals are not consulted before their lives are stolen from them for use in biomedical research.

Jerom lived until nearly the age of fourteen at the Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center, a federally-funded laboratory in Atlanta, Georgia. He was taken from his mother when he was an infant, raised as if an orphan, and experimentally infected with HIV at the age of two. When I met him eleven years later he was alone and dying. Instead of a proud figure, he was lean and gaunt, his hair dull, his skin pale, his eyes sunken from wasting and bright with fear and fever. He was distrustful of humans, unsure of himself, and frustrated at his lot in life. He suffered in almost every way a caged chimpanzee can suffer, and then he died. To the people who created him, his only value was the data that came from his blood. To me, everything about Jerom was of value.

If Jerom was alive today, it is likely that he would still be living alone, in sight of other chimpanzees he'd never again be able to touch. If he was twenty, he would have spent the last eighteen years indoors, without even once in that time feeling a cool breeze or warm sun on his face. In eighteen years he would have spent every single day in a wet concrete cell, his only entertainment provided periodically by a human, in the form of a small plastic toy, shreddable box or newspaper, or maybe a cartoon on television. He would have spent the last eighteen years eating only what humans decided he would eat, and only when they decided - no matter what he really wanted or liked, no matter when he was hungry.

Jerom died six years ago, February 13th, and no longer has to endure such treatment - conditions determined by lawmakers and researchers to be "humane" and codified by the Animal Welfare Act, but known to be barbaric and cruel by many of us who have been there. Jerom may be lucky - ten of his fellow research subjects are right now continuing to live this life at Yerkes. Two of them - Buster and Nathan - are

caged alone as was Jerom, and have been for years. For years. Imagine it - hundreds upon hundreds of days without the touch of another save a latex-and-tyvek garbed human once in a while, and then only at the whim of the human. The other eight live in pairs and trios, but suffer the same conditions of confinement and disrespect.

Buster and Nate are both a bit older than Jerom would have been now. The reasons for their social deprivation are unknown. Neither are known to have developed clinical symptoms of AIDS, so it's likely they're not alone for health reasons. Maybe it's inconvenient for Yerkes to give them the social outlets they no doubt crave.

Every year I tell this tale to move your heart. If you are reading this because you are a part of the struggle for the independence of biomedical research subjects, fight on - they need you still.

If you are reading this and remain unmoved, permit me to try a different tack: in the nearly twenty years that chimpanzees have been used as biomedical research subjects for HIV prevention and vaccines, no successful drugs, vaccines, insights or any other advances have been discovered or created as a result of the chimpanzee studies. With the possible exception of Jerom, chimpanzees do not develop AIDS; the virus acts very differently in the chimpanzee immune system than in the human. If you can't care about the chimpanzees, consider the money wasted on them - money that could be spent actually helping humans. Millions of dollars every year are spent on their upkeep alone, not to mention the wasted research dollars, wasted time, and wasted energy.

Don't just take my word for it. Groups of medical doctors around the world have joined together to protest not the inhumane conditions of laboratory life, but the faulty scientific premises underlying biomedical research. Not just the chimpanzee work, but studies on tens of thousands of monkeys, dogs, rabbits and other nonhumans as well. You should be concerned - every one of these individuals suffers for your medical needs, and is directly affected by the products you consume, and the tax dollars you spend. Your funding supports a system that is cumbersome and archaic, and produces negligible results at best. Advances in technology combined with epidemiological and clinical human studies have been shown to produce far better and more applicable results for humans.

Take this economic and medical concern, and add to it the ethical dimensions of what I'm telling you. 200 AIDS chimpanzees languish in biocontainment cells - some large, some small, all artificial and restrictive - around the US. Over 1500 more chimpanzees used to study gout, hepatitis, malaria, reproduction, and other human conditions, and others not being studied at all, may have a bit more space and possibly a chance to smell fresh air, but live similarly deprived lives in laboratories here and around the world. Every one of them has a face, a name, a personality. Every one has been enslaved because humans decided that this injustice is justified.

The CHIMP (Chimpanzee Health Improvement, Maintenance and Protection) Act, which was enacted last year to provide alternatives to laboratory housing, may improve the lives of some of these individuals in the coming years by removing them from the laboratories and giving them larger areas with larger social groups. But the CHIMP Act is not enough - in order to remedy the wrongs, research on chimpanzees must stop, and reproduction must be halted. The recent deaths of Pablo and Annie Chimpanzee, beloved residents of the Fauna Foundation, Canada's only chimp sanctuary, prove that it's not enough to get them out. Pablo and Annie were not old individuals, yet four years of unconditional love and respect in sanctuary were no match for the decades they spent in research. Most striking about their autopsies were the massive adhesions tying their organs together, caused by years of being darted, the preferred laboratory method of sedating chimpanzees. No amount of love, space or choice could have undone that trauma.

Giving laboratory chimpanzees larger cells with access to the outdoors, social groups, food choices, and alternatives to darting is a step but is not enough, and is not what they deserve: they deserve respect - they deserve to not live in service to humans. The one thing they can never have in captivity is complete freedom of choice, and that's the one thing that defines a truly free people. And they are people - not humans, but people - and we are doing not only them, but ourselves a grave disservice by treating these people as if they were born to serve us, and not to live the dignified lives of which they are capable. Their lives, although research claims them, belong to nobody but themselves, and what they need more than anything is to be treated accordingly.

Research claimed far too many of them this year, and all of them at an age much younger than their life expectancy:

- Manual: Yerkes inmate, HIV+, Jerom's sometime-friend died of unknown causes on April 17, 2001, age 22;
- Sonia: Yerkes inmate, died of organ failure in a small cage and without her family, June 5, 2001, age 42;
- Gina: Coulston Foundation (New Mexico laboratory) inmate, died of exposure to sun and heat while locked outside, June 5, 2001, age 12;
- Sellers: Yerkes inmate, died accidentally of strangulation while on a gout study, unsupervised and alone in a tiny cage, June 11, 2001, age 18;
- Pablo: Fauna Foundation resident, died of excess internal scar tissue and all-around poor health, October 6, 2001, age 31;
- Annie: Fauna Foundation resident and matriarch, died of gangrene of the intestine and all-around poor health, January 10, 2002, age 42;

- Koen: BPRC (Dutch laboratory) inmate, HIV+, died of unknown causes, January 29, 2002, age 28.

These are just the individuals with human friends who cared enough to tell their stories. Without doubt there are many others. In memory of all of them, and with grief for the two babies who were recently taken from their mothers at the Coulston Foundation to be sold into the entertainment industry so that we may laugh at television commercials, and on behalf of the remaining AIDS Project chimpanzees at Yerkes - Buster, Nathan, Arctica, Joye, Betsie, Jonah, Marc, Roberta, Tika and Hallie - I ask you to remember them, and remember Jerom.

Please write to Yerkes' Director Stuart Zola:

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Atlanta, GA 30322
404.727.7844
zola@emory.edu

Tell him you care, and that you'd like an explanation for the treatment of these individuals.

Rachel Weiss