

**Remember Jerom  
February 13, 2005**

Jerom died age 14 - complications caused by HIV infection  
Manual died age 22 - cause unknown  
Betsie died age 22 - acute peritonitis + liver abscesses  
Roberta died age 22 - renal failure  
Nathan died age 23 - sepsis  
Buster died age 25 - cause unknown  
Hallie died age 25 - cause unknown

The seven chimpanzees listed above were all residents of the Yerkes National Primate Research Center's Chimpanzee Infectious Disease (CID) building. Of CID's original 13 residents, five remain (one was moved to quarters in the main colony several years ago), and live in conditions which haven't changed much since I was their caretaker almost a decade ago. The building is a dank and dark concrete, steel, and cinderblock dungeon, with no outdoor access, tiny windows, and little human activity.

The seven chimps listed above all wasted away and died due to years of unhealthy living conditions characterized by lack of sunlight or fresh air, cold and damp quarters, sedentary lifestyle with limited exercise options, lack of social companionship, questionable diet, intense stress, intense boredom, and infection with a virus with unknown long-term effects on chimpanzees. All of them were young, by laboratory chimpanzee standards - all of them should have lived for at least another 15 or 20 years.

I have mixed feelings about the deaths: on one hand, those seven are free. Nobody will ever hurt or terrify them again. But on the other hand, the CID 13 were a family - they grew up together, and even though they were separated by bars and walls, they supported and entertained each other. The building was full of noise and action; now it must seem empty. The few who remain must have to work harder to find enjoyment in their days, and solace when things are hard.

The surviving individuals - Marc (23), Jonah (23), Arctica (26), Joye (26), and Tika (26) - have served their time, and deserve respite at Chimp Haven, the NIH's new alternative to laboratory housing. If they are not allowed to leave Yerkes and permanently leave research, it is foreseeable that they too will die tragically early deaths, without ever having the opportunity to live reasonably comfortable lives.

Nine years ago I watched Jerom Chimpanzee go to his death. He had been experimentally infected with several strains of HIV when he was a baby, and had lived with the virus for nearly 11 years before he started showing unmistakable symptoms of AIDS. He was separated from his small social group, and left on his own to deal with the disease ravaging his body. He didn't trust humans, and didn't want much to do with us until he got sick. By then he needed a friend, and he let me help him try to find some comfort.

At that time in my life, Jerom was the reason I jumped out of bed every morning. I didn't look for that relationship, and I didn't question the need to use chimpanzees in AIDS research until I met Jerom. But when I saw what the building, and the virus, and the social

deprivation were doing to him, I began to understand the injustice of what I was a part of. The time I spent at Yerkes turned me against biomedical research on nonhuman primates.

I began to understand that the chimpanzees used in research had ideas, feelings and opinions that demanded consideration and respect. And as I learned that there have been very few advances in human health credited to the use of chimpanzees, I believed that there was no legitimate justification for the research. Even if something were to be gained by using chimps, recognition of their own interests should prevent us from using them. Just this week, the Governor of Massachusetts stated that we should not use human embryonic stem cells even if they could be used to cure diseases (including his wife's Multiple Sclerosis), because "there is an ethical boundary that should not be crossed." If that justification can be used to protect undeveloped fetuses, why shouldn't the same logic apply to fully-sentient beings like chimps? Just because we can use them for biomedical research doesn't mean that we should. 1500 chimpanzees in the US alone suffer in federal and private labs; their use and upkeep wastes millions of dollars that could be used to fund prevention initiatives, or to find alternatives to the use of nonhumans.

The CID chimps are not providing answers to questions that pertain to the health of human beings; their imprisonment in that building serves no purpose. It does not appear that any of them are on active study. Francis Novembre, CID's Principle Investigator, has not published an article about these chimps since 2001, and then all he had to report was that the virus which killed Jerom had some effect on the immune systems of Manual and Tika (experimentally infected in 1997). He had hoped to use this virus to establish chimps as a model for AIDS vaccine studies. That hasn't happened (a 1999 NIH workshop established that Jerom's virus would not be used in vaccine research). He had hoped to learn why some of the chimps have shown some "progression" toward AIDS, but why most haven't developed AIDS. After twenty years, Novembre still has little understanding of what the virus has really done to them. And he has not questioned the effect of the housing conditions on the chimps' immune systems (most of the seven who have died were not experimentally infected with Jerom's virulent virus; one of them (Tika) survives).

Yerkes, funded by federal money, is retreating even further behind its veil of secrecy. Reports from inside the lab indicate that employees' movements are restricted - they're not allowed to visit many areas of the lab. Information about research subjects is not shared, and information about the current status of the CID chimps is no longer recorded in the lab's computerized Animal Records System. The CID chimps are an ugly stain on Yerkes' record, and the lab is doing its best to make them disappear.

These chimpanzees need to remain in the public eye. I am looking for information about the current status of the chimpanzees in CID: Who is still alive? What is their current health status? What is their current housing situation - are they all together, or is Tika alone? Are they thought to be eligible for transfer to kinder conditions at Chimp Haven? I will guard the identity of anyone who can give me information about these individuals.

The name of Chimp Haven's authorizing statute is the Chimpanzee Health Improvement and Maintenance and Protection Act. If anybody's health begs for improvement and protection, it is the five remaining chimpanzees of CID. Remember Jerom, and remember his family - help get them to Chimp Haven before it's too late.

Rachel Weiss