

## **Campaign to End the Use of Chimpanzees in Entertainment**

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My name is Sarah Baeckler, and for a little more than a year - from June 2002 to July 2003 - I worked as a volunteer at Amazing Animal Actors, a chimpanzee training compound that supplies performers for film and television productions, possibly including some of yours. There are about five major chimpanzee training facilities supplying the industry, and Amazing Animal Actors is one of them. The director of Amazing Animal Actors has been in this business for over 30 years. Over the course of my 14 months working there, I spent approximately 1000 hours at the training compound. The events I witnessed horrified me. I am not exaggerating when I tell you that I saw sickening acts of emotional, psychological, and physical abuse every single day on the job.

Before I tell you exactly what I saw, I want to share a little of my background so you can understand the experience I brought to this assignment. I hold undergraduate degrees in Primate Behavior and Anthropology and a Master's degree in Primatology. Chimpanzees are my specialty. Prior to my work at the Amazing Animals compound, I spent five years working with captive chimpanzees in zoo and sanctuary settings. My graduate research focused on studying the interactions between chimpanzees and their caregivers. In short, I have a very solid scientific understanding of both chimpanzee behavior and the nature of chimpanzee - human relationships. When something is wrong with a chimpanzee, I can see it, even while casual observers may note nothing unusual. And from the first moment I set foot inside the Amazing Animal Actors compound, I knew a lot of things had gone wrong.

The compound is located in north Malibu and hosts an assortment of exotic animals including 5 chimpanzees, a

Harris hawk, a Bengal tiger, and a lion. The larger ranch on which the compound sits is also home to horses, goats, alpacas, long horn steer, and a buffalo, and I worked with all of these animals during my time there. Inside the compound, the chimpanzees are housed in two groups, each group living in a fenced-in cage roughly 10 feet square and 8 feet tall. One group consists of the three younger chimpanzees, Cody, Sable, and Teá, all of whom are three years old. The other group consists of the two older chimpanzees: Angel, a six-year-old female, and Apollo, a four-year-old male.

The trainers physically abuse the chimpanzees for various reasons, but often for no reason at all. If the chimpanzees try to run away from a trainer, they are beaten. If they bite someone, they are beaten. If they don't pay attention, they are beaten. Sometimes they are beaten without any provocation or for things that are completely out of their control.

I never abused any of the chimpanzees myself, but I was specifically instructed to hit or kick them at the first sign of any aggression or misbehavior. Since I wanted to learn how severe the abuse could get, I asked for advice on how hard the chimpanzees should be hit or kicked, and I got answers like these - and what you're about to hear are verbatim quotes. One trainer told me, quote, "Hard enough that they know you mean business but not so hard that you do permanent damage." Another said, "Aim for her head because it's really sturdy." And I heard the director of the compound say, "Kick her in the face as hard as you can. You can't hurt her." When I expressed nervousness one day about being bitten, a trainer handed me a hammer and said, "If you need to hit her, use this," and he pointed to the handle end of the hammer.

As you just heard from Dr. Goodall, normal, healthy, young chimpanzees are playful, curious, energetic, and mischievous, but these traits don't serve them well when training begins, so one of the things that chimpanzees in the entertainment industry have to endure is an initial 'breaking of the spirit.' In other words, they have to learn how NOT to act like normal chimpanzees. On my first visit to Amazing Animal Actors, I met Teá, one of the three younger chimpanzees and a fiery independent spirit. She was the most recent

arrival and hadn't fully adjusted to her new surroundings. At only two years old, an age when she would still be riding on her mother's back in the wild, she refused to allow anyone to pick her up or hold her. She played fairly roughly with me but stopped short of hurting me. If I put my hands anywhere near her armpits or waist, however, she would run away, clearly thinking that I was going to try to pick her up.

For most of my second day at the compound, Teá wasn't there. One of the trainers said that he and the others had recently had a day-long "battle" with her, and that they were now able to pick her up. Part of this battle involved Teá "hitting her head," he said, which resulted in a big gash that required stitches. So I presumed that Teá was missing because she was receiving care for her injuries.

When I saw Teá again shortly after this, I was shocked. I felt like I was looking at a completely different chimpanzee. A large swatch of the hair around her left eyebrow had been shaved off and a cut from the so-called "battle" was visible. I believe she had been beaten, and there was no spark at all in her eyes - no evidence of her previous high spirits. Seeing her reminded me of Jessica Lange's character in "Frances" or Jack Nicholson's in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest". That's how different Teá was.

Her eyes darted around checking out everything that was going on, but from my training I was able to recognize this activity not as healthy curiosity, but fear. When the head trainer returned from lunch, Teá instantly became rigid and alert and started howling at him - "threat barking" is the technical term, but I think you get the picture. Today, over a year later, Teá is still reserved and untrusting.

Sable is another of the younger chimpanzees. She is very inquisitive and is always watching what you are doing, taking it all in. I was warned that she would not hesitate to bite me if she thought she could get away with it, and that I should feel free to "clock" her if she did. I played with Sable fairly easily inside the cage and didn't have any major problems with her, but when I took her out to change her diaper, I had very little control over her. One day in August 2002, a female trainer who was watching me said, "Don't be afraid to just hit her." I hesitated, so

the trainer demonstrated for me: she made a fist and punched Sable in the head with her right hand, just above her left eye. Sable screamed and jumped tighter into my arms, no longer squirming. The trainer had to wave her hand like this to shake off the pain - she had hit Sable that hard.

Because Sable has such a curious nature, she continued to test her limits, and she continued to suffer for it. Over several months between September 2002 and June 2003, I witnessed trainers punching her in the back, kicking her in the head, and throwing objects at her including a rock, a mallet, and a sawed-off broom handle.

Cody, the third of the young chimpanzees, is much more timid than his two cage mates. While Teá was determined not to let anyone hold her or pick her up, Cody is the opposite. He is very clingy and is always seeking out someone to pick him up. If he is put down inside his enclosure and he thinks you are going to leave, he becomes extremely upset, screaming loudly and nervously seeking reassurance from both his cage mates and any humans in the vicinity. Scientifically speaking, he is an anxious, fearful individual, and his insecurity probably stems from the trauma he has experienced so far in his three years of life. On several occasions, I saw Cody abused for no reason at all.

In September 2002, I saw a volunteer ask the compound director how to get Cody to stand up, and the director grabbed Cody's ear and forced him to stand by pulling his ear sharply until Cody screamed in pain. A month later, when another volunteer was trying to change Cody's diaper, she asked the director how to get Cody to lie down. This time the director grabbed Cody by his lower lip, pulled him forward, and then pushed him down until he was lying on his back. Again, Cody screamed and whimpered in response. I saw volunteers and trainers hit Cody on the head with a lock, take a full windup and punch him in the back, kick him in the head, and hit him with a blunt instrument known as "the ugly stick." None of this is necessary.

The two older chimpanzees, Apollo and Angel, are four and six years old, respectively. Because they are older, bigger, and stronger than the others, the trainers react much more strenuously to any behavior

they consider aggressive or out-of-line, which means, in plain English, that Apollo and Angel receive the worst beatings of all the chimpanzees within the compound.

From the interactions that I had with Apollo, I can tell you that he is definitely a mischievous fellow. When he greets his human friends he likes to pull their shirts up and explore what's underneath. He tries to get people's attention by throwing pieces of food at them through the bars of his cage. He loves to be tickled and chased. All this is entirely normal for a young male chimpanzee. He does seem to test his limits with the people around him, but he was never anything other than playful and friendly with me. Nevertheless, I watched him suffer brutal beatings at the hands of the other trainers. On one occasion, I watched as the compound director started punching Apollo repeatedly with all his strength, throwing his whole body into each punch.

On another day, a trainer punched Apollo in the face and then pinned him against the fence with his knee. What was Apollo's offense, you may be wondering? Apparently, he had reached out to try and touch Angel, his cage-mate, as she passed by. In the wild, this kind of touching would simply be a greeting, but I guess the trainer chose that moment to assert his dominance and remind Apollo to whom he should be paying complete attention.

And on a third occasion, the director hit Apollo three times with a broom handle, first winding up and hitting him with something akin to a baseball swing, and then whacking Apollo twice at close range and really hard.

Finally, once, when I was unpacking a bag that had gone with Apollo on a television commercial shoot, I found an electric cattle prod inside.

By now you are probably wondering how this type of abuse can go on. Isn't it illegal? Unfortunately, while there are laws strict enough to prohibit this type of abuse in California, they are hard to enforce. California's state penal code prohibits "cruelly beating" an animal, but law enforcement agencies are usually reluctant to pursue these charges. Also, most

of this abuse goes on behind closed doors where no witnesses can see it, making it even harder to prosecute. The reality is that very few offenders are ever prosecuted, and even fewer actually serve time for their crimes.

You may also be wondering if what I observed at Amazing Animal Actors is simply an exception - that the problem there is really just a few "bad apple" trainers, while their counterparts at other training facilities are working in a much more humane fashion. I don't think so. While I have not worked at other facilities, I did visit another and heard about several more. At the facility I visited, I saw the same kinds of signs that were evident at Amazing Animal Actors. The older chimpanzees watched the trainers very carefully as they went by, signaling that they knew to keep their attention on them. I heard threat barks oriented toward the trainers. The younger chimpanzees were timid and hesitant with their trainers and appeared traumatized and fearful of what was going to happen next. I even saw one of the trainers start to hit one of the young chimpanzees and then stop because she realized that a number of people were watching.

Finally, a confidential source described her experiences at another chimpanzee training facility in California. She said that the trainers there commonly "thumped" the chimpanzees to keep them in line, and also "flicked" them in the ears or face. Interestingly, at Moorpark College, where I took courses in Exotic Animal Training and Management, a professor once told me that they would never consider having chimpanzees in the college's zoo because they were, and I quote, "not willing to inflict the kind and amount of punishment required to train them." This professor, who had worked for yet another chimpanzee trainer in the industry, said that "people beat them with baseball bats to control them." He also said "some trainers will whack a chimp if it doesn't do a small behavior, like a smile, because later the chimp might think it can get away with more." In short, abuse and physical violence are seemingly commonplace in this industry, and it's not even a secret. In fact, it's taught in a training school that is currently producing many future animal trainers and zoo workers.

And as you'll read in the reports you've just received, it is naïve to assume that chimpanzees can be compelled to perform complex tricks with simple positive reinforcement such as a jellybean or other treat. As a primatologist, I agree. The tricks are just too complex, and the rewards are just too small to hold their interest. The plain truth is this: the only thing that will make them stop behaving like curious, rambunctious chimpanzees and, instead, routinely perform mundane tasks over and over again on cue is abject fear of physical pain.

Three months ago, I left Amazing Animal Actors. As I drove away after my last day there, I was relieved that I would not have to witness such horrendous abuse anymore, but at the same time I had a sickening feeling, knowing that these chimpanzees I had spent over a year getting to know would still be there tomorrow, and for a long time to come, enduring the kind of abuse I saw there every day. I can only hope that some day in the not too distant future, perhaps with the help of this campaign, these individuals up here, and your help as well, the chimpanzees at Amazing Animal Actors and all the others like them in the industry can retire to good, safe, loving sanctuaries. If the market for chimpanzees in entertainment no longer exists, these chimpanzees will have a chance at living out the rest of their lives in peace. And those yet to be born will never know the pain and suffering endured by those who came before them.

Thank you. I hope you'll choose to help us.