DONOVAN'S STORY

Donovan is a survivor. Although he is now living his best life at Chimp Haven, his first several years were filled with suffering and despair that would be almost unbelievable had it not been documented in hundreds of pages of medical records and reports.

Donovan was bred solely for purposes of medical research and taken from his mother at 16 months old, in August 1996. Chimps in the wild are weaned at age five, and they can stay with their mothers for 10 years or longer. The notorious Coulston Foundation shipped Donovan and his cagemate Sakari—who got along well—to labs at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and National Institutes of Health. In these labs, they were subjected to infectious disease experiments that included invasive procedures such as liver biopsies and abdominal surgeries.

After arriving at the FDA, Donovan beat Sakari so viciously that they had to be separated.

At two years of age, Donovan was bled every week, with one to three liver biopsies every month. In all, he endured more than 40 liver biopsies, 200 bleeds, and multiple gallbladder aspirations until he was six years old. One time, a liver biopsy needle hit his gallbladder. In another liver biopsy surgery, experimenters crushed and removed the tip of a liver lobe.

In June 2001, the FDA shipped him and Sakari back to the Coulston Foundation, known for its cruelty and horrific conditions. Nearly one year later, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) found their housing conditions in single cages so deplorable that Donovan, Sakari, and 12 other chimpanzees were suffering from weakness, weight loss, mineral deficiencies, excessive hair loss from overgrooming, and depression. The USDA urged the facility to release the chimps voluntarily or face penalties. They were sent to the Alamogordo Primate Facility, whose operator (Charles River Laboratories) later faced multiple counts of criminal animal cruelty for the deaths of multiple chimpanzees. Donovan continued to suffer for years with the physical and psychological damage from five years of intensive and invasive experimentation in government labs.

Eventually, Donovan was transferred to Chimp Haven, and AAVS is grateful to the caregivers who have helped him heal, both physically and emotionally. Having overcome so many obstacles, Donovan is now the alpha of his social group, with a leadership style that is compassionate, tolerant, and protective. With life anew at Chimp Haven, Donovan is not only surviving—he is thriving.



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