



# Getty's Fortune

**Animal-rights activists wish this AIDS patient were dead.**

Jeff Getty was in the hospital fighting for his life. Suffering from the advanced stages of AIDS, his T-cell count had dropped so low they could be counted by hand. Doctors had given him a year to live at most, unless he was willing to undergo a highly dangerous and experimental operation. Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh had discovered that baboons can withstand huge injections of HIV without ever contracting AIDS. If T-cells from a baboon's bone marrow could survive in Getty's body, his doctors thought, they might just save his life. His already ravaged immune system would be virtually destroyed with chemotherapy and radiation; then Getty would receive injections of the baboon's bone marrow.

Nobody had ever survived the procedure before. But even if the transplant were to fail, Getty believed, helping to find a cure for AIDS was worth dying for. The FDA was worried that the operation itself might kill him, but as Getty told CNN, "I'm in a situation where I'm going to die anyhow." Like thousands of people with life-threatening illnesses, Getty was fighting for his life against the FDA's delay in approving new drugs and experimental medical treatments.

Getty was also facing another challenge. The Humane Society had filed a complaint with the National Institutes of Health to bar the operation. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) had launched a massive PR campaign against the FDA with the same objective.

But at last Getty finally got the govern-

ment's permission. On December 14, 1995, he went into the operating room at San Francisco General. Three weeks later, he left the hospital triumphant: "To the naysayers, who said that I would never recover from this procedure, well, here I am and you were wrong." Almost a year later, his T-cell count is up, and he's off almost all the medications he was taking before the surgery. He says he feels better today than he has in five years.

Virtually every medical breakthrough in this century has come about through animal research. Indeed, almost every Nobel prize for medicine awarded since the turn of the century required some kind of animal research. Dr. Joseph E. Murray, a professor emeritus at Harvard Medical School who won a Nobel in 1990 for his research on organ transplants, says, "It is impossible to champion AIDS research without using animal experimentation." As former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop puts it, "We would be in absolute, utter darkness about AIDS if we hadn't done decades of basic research in animal retroviruses."

For the new generation of animal rights activists, however, such research is a moral abomination. "We don't have the right to use animals as if they were parts off the shelf," says Megan Patterson, a PETA spokeswoman. Ingrid Newkirk, the group's founder, is more to the point. Even if animal research resulted in a cure for AIDS, Newkirk said in a 1989 *Vogue* interview, "we'd be against it."

And, like many an activist group before them, PETA even supports the commission of illegal acts to further its struggle. "Arson,

property destruction, burglary, and theft are 'acceptable crimes' when used for the animal cause," declares PETA chairman Alex Pacheco. Some animal rights activists have even sabotaged AIDS research facilities, in the process costing patients not only more money but also valuable time.

"Animal liberationists do not separate out the human animal," Newkirk told *Vogue*. "So there is no rational basis for saying that a human being has special rights. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." Counters Getty: "In the animal extremists' world, rats live and I die. I don't appreciate PETA's willingness to help me into my coffin."

Bu North Carolina State University Philosophy Professor Tom Regan, widely regarded as the intellectual guru of the animal rights movement, doesn't see it that way. "We have no basic right...not to be harmed by those natural diseases we are heir to," Regan wrote in his 1983 opus, *The Case for Animal Rights*. "If abandoning animal research means that there are some things we cannot learn, then so be it." Asked once which he would save, a dog or a baby, if a boat capsized in the ocean, Regan responded: "If it were a retarded baby and bright dog, I'd save the dog."

Animal rights groups reportedly spend some \$200 million a year to fight for their cause—and the success of Getty's procedure only insures that the fight will intensify. Even though Getty's body rejected the baboon cells, he says, "I'm feeling better than ever." Dr. Steven Deeks, who helped perform the transplant, says, "Jeff's health has clearly improved." What really irks animal rights activists is that Getty paved the way for future transplants by proving the procedure is safe. "If they had admitted failure, and had decided not to waste any more time and money, that would be one

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thing," says PETA spokesman Dan Mathews. "But now we know that the [University of Pittsburgh] researcher is going to ask the FDA for approval for yet another experiment. That's when we decided to throw our hat in the ring." In fact, PETA began opposing the procedure at a press conference in the summer of 1995, several months before the operation.

"It's clear to me that they wish I were dead," Getty says. "The only reason they have renewed their attacks is because I am not." But he is hardly the only person being hounded by the animal-rights movement. "I got death threats from these people," claims Cleve Jones, founder of the Names Project, better known in straight circles as "the Quilt." Jones became a target of harassment after serving as the 1995 grand marshal of the Gay Rodeo—rodeos, of course, are also anathema to the animal-rights lobby. While Jones understood why some people might view certain rodeo events as cruel to animals, he could not fathom his opponents' fanatical hostility. "I was trying to help raise money for AIDS research," he says exasperatedly. "When you're trying to fight a retrovirus, animal testing is not only appropriate but critical."

But activists such as Mathews, who feel such compassion for animals, have little left over for humans. "We have a lazy, sick society," he sniffs. "People bring diseases on themselves." His solution? "Don't get the disease in the first place, schmo." Getty is no stranger to such twisted sentiments. While in the hospital recuperating from his transplant, he received several threatening phone calls. "I wish that you had died," fumed one anonymous caller. "And the baboon had lived."

**G**iven the misanthropy of groups like PETA, it's hard to believe that last year a *New York* magazine poll found animal rights to be the "number one hip cause in America," eclipsing the homeless and even AIDS. Even celebrities have clamored to join the animal rights crusade. But from Paul and Linda McCartney to Alec Baldwin and Kim Basinger, the star circuit is abuzz over this latest celebrity cause. Basinger posed nude in PETA's "I'd Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur" campaign ads, as did models Cindy Crawford, Naomi Campbell, and Christy Turlington,

as well as openly gay singer-songwriter Melissa Etheridge.

But Etheridge had a change of heart in April, when she came out in the *Advocate*, a leading gay and lesbian publication, to announce her break with PETA. Nine months after posing in the ad with her lover, Julie Cypher, Etheridge renounced her association with the organization. "My father died of cancer and I've lost many friends to AIDS," she said. "So I do believe in animals losing their lives to eradicate cancer and AIDS from our lives. I believe in that."

Just before Basinger and her husband Alec Baldwin had their baby in January, Americans for Medical Progress, a leading biomedical research advocacy group, took out a large ad in the *Los Angeles Times* showing a photo of an AMP employee's son on life support. "Dear Alec Baldwin and other celebrity supporters of animal rights," the ad read, "when you help PETA this is who you hurt the most.... Millions of suffering people like Baby John, who was born with a deadly heart defect, count on animal research to save their lives."

Baldwin's response was a nasty letter to AMP: "I will be forced to sue you... until you are bleeding from your eyeballs." He also argued in the letter that "the overwhelming majority of [animal research] can now be accomplished with cell research and computer modeling." In fact, says NIH director Dr. Harold Varmus, "studying animals is essential to virtually all phases of medical research."

Jeff Getty, however, tells of one promising new drug that looked perfectly safe in the computer model, but would have been deadly in the human immune system. "We found out through animal testing," he insists. "The main thing that animal research tells [those] who are taking these drugs is that they're safe." He also recalls that more than 100,000 rhesus monkeys were sacrificed in the search for a polio cure. "If animal rights activists had their way 50 years ago," he says, "we'd be sitting around talking about the hundreds of thousands of people dying of polio."

Nevertheless, for the moment Hollywood seems to have taken its stand on the issue. When Christopher Reeve gave a 1990 speech at the fifth annual "March for the Animals Celebrity Gala," he sug-

gested that "some" animal testing should be allowed, specifically citing AIDS research. He was booed off the stage.

What makes this face-off so explosive is that, unlike the dozens of other modish causes adopted in celebrity circles—which can be reconciled with one another quite easily enough—AIDS research and the animal-rights movement are completely incompatible. Without animal research, people who could be saved will die. "You can't be for AIDS, breast cancer, and diabetes research," Getty points out, "and also support militant animal rights groups."

The Hollywood moralizers must thus choose their symbols very carefully. Actors And Others For Animals is selling a blue animal awareness ribbon, "so that *all* of us, *all* of the time, can show our appreciation for *all* of earth's inhabitants." Unlike other awareness ribbons, says the group, the "one-of-a-kind emblem features a delightful dog and cat to encourage curiosity and discussion about animals."

Struggling against such fatuousness are groups such as AMP, which took out a full-page ad in *Daily Variety* on the day of this year's Academy Awards. "The Red Ribbon You'll Wear Tonight Tells the World You've Made a Choice," it read. "You can't be for AIDS research *AND* Animal Rights."

As Peter Stahley, founder of the Treatment Action Group in New York, puts it, "PETA is a threat to my life. I've been on AZT and other drugs, and I'm alive because they were tested on animals first." Such claims infuriate animal rights activists. David Wasser, for example, claims that Prozac was "designed and tested entirely in humans. No animals were used at all." In fact, says Prozac manufacturer Eli Lilly & Co., the drug was "extensively" tested on animals before it went to market.

AIDS is arguably more deadly than depression. If the animal rights lobby had their way, Jeff Getty might well be dead today. And that doesn't trouble them in the slightest. "Killing any sentient being is morally wrong," says Robin Webb of the Animal Liberation Front. "But, bearing in mind the number of animal lives it would save and the amount of suffering it would relieve, I would not weep for the individual vivisector." ❀



by Benjamin J. Stein

# Hot Summer Daze

**M**e no like dis. About six months ago, my bride, Li'l Alex, said that she wanted to take off from work for the whole summer. "We'll spend every day on the boat in Idaho," she said gleefully.

I enthusiastically set to work to make this watery vision a reality. I arranged to rent a lake-front house, at staggering expense—Sandpoint is not cheap—and then to rearrange my glorious work schedule to have us spend most of July and August in Sandpoint. The house is at a wide, sunny spot on the Pend'Oreille River right next to a large Sandpoint city-built dock that is used by the local children for splashing and cavorting in the pristine waters of the river.

Here are the problems, the killers that are making me feel as if I were about to go screaming berserk and break the rivets of my brain:

First, Alex is not here. She is in Los Angeles working on a giant secret lawsuit against some major powers-that-be in the entertainment business. So I am lonely. I really have very few friends here, and the ones I do have are often busy working for a living. I hate being lonely. Tommy is the best company on earth, but he's often riding his bike and swimming and playing on the trampoline with his pals. I am left alone to wander around this lovely small town like a derelict.

Second, it is much too hot here. I know it sometimes gets really hot in North Idaho, but this is ridiculous. It's been well over 90 for about four days now. Today, it's well, well, well over 100. This house has

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no air-conditioning, and even with fans, it's desperately hot. The biggest lie in America is to say that anyplace except San Francisco does not need air-conditioning in the summer. I didn't plan to spend a stone fortune on this rental house to broil and be miserable in it.

Three, I can't open the windows in any event because it is so incredibly noisy out at that accursed pier. Every teenager in North Idaho is out there today jumping in the water and screaming. Keeping their older brothers and sisters company are about 10,000 little children in tubes who are also screaming and making that high pitched sound that little girls make that goes right through earplugs, Sony Discmen, anything you can think of to put into your ears.

Escorting them, to make sure that no wimpy L.A. guy comes along and bothers their squalling brood, are several dozen bikers (at least they look like bikers) with long hair, tattoos, and "don't mess with me" looks on their faces.

Did I mention that I have a vicious bronchitis and sore throat that will not quit no matter what I do? Did I mention that my whole bathroom counter looks like a collection of every antibiotic known to man, and I still feel miserable? Or that I am dripping sweat and my head feels as if the Burlington Northern runs through it? After stopping to discard used brake fluid from the back of my throat?

I am not enjoying this at all. To make matters even worse, occasionally, between screams, I fall asleep. I dream I am back in my quiet, very cold, bright air-conditioned room at the Shoreham Towers, with Tommy lying beside me watching TV.

Then a child screams, her bearded, tattooed father guffaws, and I am back at my house of torture.

I decided to walk to my deck and see what was going on. Yes. Bedlam at the pier. And I had been promised that it would be quiet and peaceful. Well, so much for promises.

Tommy appeared in his bathing suit. "I want to go swimming," he said.

"All right," I said. I sat down on my deck and watched him swim. In about three seconds, he was playing with a group of little boys. Then their father, a fat bearded man with tattoos, picked them up and tossed them in the water—including Tommy. He—yes—squealed loudly with delight.

Hmmm.

A group of teenagers came along on their bikes. In some kind of strange potlatching ritual, they threw their bikes into the water and then did *not* dive in to rescue them, just let them lie there. I guess this may have to do with juvenile delinquency.

I went back inside, shaved, had breakfast, and then put on my bathing suit. I walked out to the pier. "Bueller, Bueller" went through the crowd. "Bueller, Bueller. Clear Eyes, Clear Eyes..."

I sat on a bench next to two very young women with babies. The women, aged 16 and 16, were the mothers of these babies. The fathers, scrawny fellows with tattoos, were playing nearby. I am bound to say that the fathers played very lovingly with their kids. Friends of the fathers and mothers, teens too, also played lovingly with the kids. While having kids at 16 (maybe 15) is far from optimal behavior, the mothers and fathers were behaving very affectionately towards their kids. Moreover, I intend to give each and every kid/parent a lavish gift before the end of the summer for not murdering their babies. No, never