

Donna Thomas & Paul Garstki talk about the making of A LEGAL PERSON

We first heard Steven Wise on NPR's Fresh Air with Terry Gross at the release of his book, *Rattling The Cage*. Our first reaction to his ideas were that they were wonderful and serious, but probably a bit crazy - exactly what we needed for a film subject. When we got in touch with him and secured his cooperation to make the documentary, we realized that his goals were not only serious, but entirely do-able. We began to follow him about, filming his talks and interviewing him in depth. As our understanding and research expanded, we decided that it was important to keep in the forefront the chimpanzees and bonobos at the center of his argument.

One of our tag-along journeys took us to The Center For Great Apes, a chimpanzee and orangutan sanctuary in Florida. Under the guidance of Center Director Patti Ragan, we were introduced to Grub. A morning spent in Grub's company convinced us that we wanted to profile him in parallel with our profile of Steve. We found that even a short time spent watching real chimpanzees in a environment where they could live as they pleased - rather than as performers for humans - provided the most convincing support for Steve's legal argument. With Patti's permission, we arranged to film Grub and his family over a week long period, ultimately gathering over 30 hours of footage.

On a tip from some local chimpanzee advocates, and just 50 miles from where Grub lives in security and relative freedom to do as he pleases, we encountered Roger in a terrible little roadside zoo, living in a terribly cramped and boring cage, his mind shattered. Roger became our "poster boy" for the terrible abuse inflicted on these chimpanzee individuals.

Inevitably, our work with chimpanzees led us to want to see them where they are not in an environment created by humans - in their natural habitat in Africa, the only continent where they live in a natural wild state. This desire coincided nicely with Steve's hope to visit Africa to do research for his next book (*Drawing The Line*). Drawing on the remains of our life savings, already greatly diminished from the documentary process so far, we arranged for travel to Kenya and Uganda for the two of us, and for Steve and his wife. Though it was physically and financially exhausting, the payoff was the ability to film Imoso, Grub's Ugandan counterpart, in the forest of Kibale, as he ate, slept, and hunted with his family. World-renowned Harvard anthropologist Richard Wrangham was our host in Kibale forest, served as our guide to Imoso's world. Already familiar with Steve and his work, he was able to make the crucial link to the natural behavior of African chimpanzees. In *A LEGAL PERSON*, he relates his amazing discovery that juvenile chimpanzees in the wild make and play with "dolls," external demonstrating their rich internal mental world.

A LEGAL PERSON was shot on mini-DV, for a budget of \$40,000, nearly half of that covering our travels in Africa. Equipment included a JVC GY-DV500 camera and Matrox RT2000 editing platform. We're now terribly broke, but proud of the film and hoping it will have a long life and large audience.