

## Tami Santelli – The Great Ape Project

I have always had a passion for animals, and for great apes in particular. I'm not sure where it came from, and it took a backseat to other interests throughout college, but upon deciding to pursue a law degree at Lewis and Clark, this passion resurfaced in full force. I had the extreme luck to meet Doug Cress, the executive director of the Great Ape Project, at the Animal Law Conference last fall, and that chance meeting led to my amazing job this summer.

The Great Ape Project (GAP) is an international non-profit organization that works to extend greater protections to captive great apes, and, ultimately, to extend some basic legal rights to all great apes. GAP was co-founded in 1993 by Peter Singer, author of Animal Liberation, a book often credited with jumpstarting the modern animal rights movement. Peter Singer and his co-founder compiled a book of essays written by leading scholars and philosophers that addressed the compelling arguments for including great apes in our "moral community" and granting them some basic rights: the right to life, the protection of individual liberty, and the prohibition of torture. This book, The Great Ape Project, inspired the creation of organizations all over the world that are dedicated to the ideas set forth in the book.

I began my summer researching the laws, federal and state, regarding the interstate and intrastate movement of great apes. This project evolved, as it became clear that there really are *no* laws specifically on this issue. Moving a chimpanzee into a state is virtually as easy as moving a pet cat into the state. After discovering this, I spent the rest of the summer researching state possession laws. Possession of exotic "pets" is an issue that inspired increasing concern, as stories of escaped pet tigers and alligators have been in the news. States are beginning to address this, but, amazingly, many states do not currently regulate possession of exotic animals. I was incredulous when I realized that, in many states, you can order a chimpanzee online and keep one in your house.

My work product was a compilation of the laws and regulations from all fifty states, and an analysis of the weaknesses and loopholes. But, the most rewarding part of my summer was some time spent working on more practical applications of my research. For example, when calling the relevant state agencies, I spoke with an amazingly helpful official in Montana. Montana had just passed a new law, and he was working to promulgate new regulations regarding exotic animals. This official was concerned about a woman who had just imported two chimpanzees, and was interested in knowing what other states were doing regarding chimpanzees. The timing was amazing. Because I had been doing this research, GAP was able to provide him with information on similar state laws, and, hopefully, to aid in the creation of regulations that will afford more protections for captive great apes. It was truly gratifying to know that my project was worthwhile and will really be useful to people working in this field.

I can't express how fortunate I feel to have had this opportunity. My PILP stipend allowed me to spend a summer pursuing what I absolutely love – and also created the opportunity for me to make some amazing contacts in the field. THANK YOU, PILP!