**Ivan’s Obituary**

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| An **obituary** is a notice of a death, especially in a newspaper, typically including a brief biography of the deceased person. Read Ivan’s obituary below. |

On Tuesday, Aug. 21, 2012 a 50-year life that began in the freedom of Africa, included a 27-year period of solitary **confinement**\* in a concrete cell in a U.S. shopping center, and drew to a close with relaxed naps under Zoo Atlanta's sunny sky, came to an end. One of the oldest gorillas in U.S. captivity, Ivan died following surgical assessment meant to discover why he was losing weight and feeling poorly.

Around 1962, Ivan and his twin sister were born in the African nation now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. When they were about 2, the youngsters were captured and sold by wildlife traders to a department store owner here in the U.S.

The sister died. Ivan lived as a pet until the inevitable happened, and he became too large to control. He was moved to the department store itself, in Tacoma, Wash. For the next 27 years, he lived on display, behind glass, in a 14-by-14-foot concrete cell. There, he smoked and ate hamburgers and lived utterly without ape companionship.

But times change, and **collective\*** action matters. More and more people began to understand that this confinement of a highly social, smart ape wasn't right. Locally and nationally, people began to fight for Ivan. And finally, in 1995, they won.

At Zoo Atlanta that year, Ivan walked on grass for the first time in decades. The zoo hoped he'd come to enjoy living with other gorillas, and though they made sure he resided with females for many years, it was never an easy or completely enjoyable road for him. At worst, the females picked on him, and at best, Ivan and a female would live side-by-side but not interact much.

As The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported before his death this week, Ivan was suffering from the aches and pains of an aging **primate**\*. He took vitamins and was given an easier-to-chew diet. He lived alone, but with visual contact with nearby gorillas.

Animal lovers will wish that Ivan had grown up to become a magnificent silverback in the DRC, head of his own group. Humans didn't allow that to happen. But after the terrible shopping-center period, Zoo Atlanta offered Ivan a life that could fairly be described as content. As the zoo's Ivan page shows with a timeline, photographs and a video clip, Ivan enjoyed his favorite routines and the sun, sky and grass of his enclosure. He had close bonds with people at the zoo. That he lived alone near the end seems at first a terrible irony. But it's clear that all those years without emotional connection took their toll. He couldn't make the adjustment toward enjoying gorilla-gorilla interaction.

Ivan's story has touched thousands of people. He reminded us that even as we must face the "big" conservation and environmental problems with an ecosystem approach, we can't forget the individuals, each of whom has a story, a personality and a history.

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| **\*confinement**: the act of being contained or imprisoned  **\*collective:** group; cooperative  **\*primate:** any member of the group of animals that includes human beings, apes, and monkeys |