

First Place: Bob Schulze Award for Prose – Middle School

“George”

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School: Petoskey Middle School - Remote Learning

The experiment was first tested on George. The disease had slowly crippled him over the course of just three months and his condition would only get worse. His handlers were dejected. George had worked his way into their hearts with his quirky personality and mischievous antics. But, during the last month, they watched in despair as the simplest tasks like picking up a ball became impossible for him to perform. He was afflicted with a debilitating disease that also affects humans: amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or ALS.

Doctor Anthony Smith had been observing George's condition from the start. Last night, he was up most of the night, his face pressed to the eyepiece of his microscope, so that he was surprised he hadn't left a permanent mark on his face. Today, he was exhausted, but he arrived at the lab early anyway. His clothes were rumpled, but he didn't care. It was a big day for him and an even bigger day for George. He couldn't afford to waste any time.

He opened the door to George's room and made his way to his desk. Some of his colleagues were already in the room observing the diseased chimp and looked expectantly in his direction. He knew what they were thinking. Had he uncovered anything that would help George? Had he received the necessary approval?

Picking up his data sheet, Doctor Smith made his way over to where George was resting. The others looked sadly on. After a quick inspection of George, it was clear that the poor chimp didn't have much time left. The data showed that there had been another large decrease in George's active nerve cells. Luck was on George's side though. That morning, Doctor Smith had received the green light for the procedure. He gave his coworkers a nod and said, "It's time."

The procedure began at 11:00 a.m. Doctor Smith took a deep breath to calm his nerves. He felt as though he were standing on the edge of a cliff. So much depended on the outcome of this operation. It involved a new technology, not approved for humans, which if successful, could be used on them in the future. To the doctors, it made perfect sense to attempt the operation on George. Without the operation, George would die. Doctor Smith went over to the chimp to try to comfort him as the other doctors put him under anesthesia.

At 2:33 p.m., the procedure was over. The doctors and nurses stood quietly around him, some recording his vitals, others monitoring his appearance, and still others just wanting to be near to comfort him when he woke up. The magnitude of what they had done hung in the air. For the first time, the doctors had successfully inserted a large amount of small computer chips into an animal. If the operation was successful, the chips would serve as a replacement for the dead nerve cells caused by ALS. This could allow George to control his limbs again.

At 3:14 p.m, George began to stir. He awoke with a dazed expression on his face. Slowly, his eyes moved around the room and he seemed to recognize the eyes that stared back down at

him. As the minutes passed, it was soon clear that the first step of the experiment had been successful. George had survived the surgery. Now, there was just one question left: did the surgery fix his disease?

Dr. Smith quickly retrieved a bag from a cooler in the corner of the room. George's eyes followed his movements as he reached inside the bag and pulled out a bunch of colorful fruits. They were George's favorites: strawberries and blackberries. Dr. Smith set them on the table in front of George. George's gaze fixated on the fruit; it was obvious that he wanted them. In his current state, however, it was impossible for him to grab a fruit. This could all change, however. Right beside the fruit lay a single button. When pressed, the button would activate the computer chips inside of George.

The other doctors in the room stared nervously at Dr. Smith, waiting. He reached a trembling hand towards the button. The instant the button was pressed they would know whether all of their research and hard work had paid off. As Dr. Smith pressed the button, the room grew deafeningly silent. George remained perfectly still, his eyes focused on the fruit. And then...

George lifted his arm, grabbed a berry, and ate.