

Embarrassing Moments with Jocko

by

Elaine Marsh

Jocko, a spider monkey, came into our home at the same time I was self-consciously budding into womanhood. He moved into a cage in the living room of our small two-bedroom house along with a menagerie of other monkeys, birds, mice, rats, and a baby wildcat. These creatures were all for sale, and the inventory turnover was too slow for me. Jocko immediately made it known that he hated females by rattling his cage door and screeching whenever a female of any age came within his sight.

My mother, who had a special gift for training animals, tried winning Jocko's affection. Her first encounter with Jocko led to a nasty bite, which sent my father rushing to the local Thrifty drugstore. He asked the pharmacists about treatment for his wife's monkey bite. The pharmacist quickly directed him to the makeup counter. My father explained to the pharmacist how this monkey bite came about; the pharmacist pulled out peroxide and bandaids.

One day when I arrived home from school, Jocko's cage was empty. Great, I thought. He's been sold and may he never return. Then I walked into the kitchen to find Jocko throwing cans and bottles right and left out of the cupboards onto the sink and floor. He screeched in delight. He had created a mess of ketchup, oils, peanut butter, and canned goods. I had no control of Jocko and was not going to interfere with his delinquent behavior. To my horror he moved to the bedroom and tackled the already-

disorganized closet. Worst of all, he found the bathroom medicine cabinet, and spilled mercurochrome and lye on himself, which landed him a trip to the veterinarian.

Jocko became adept at finding a way to get out of his cage. One day he unlatched his supposedly locked cage door and escaped out the front door of the living room. Just about then my 6'2" tall and skinny-as-a-rail father caught sight of him and chased after him with my mother and us three kids trailing behind. The pursuit crossed in front of the hospital next door. The owners had called the health department at least monthly in hopes they could convince us to move or get rid of our unsightly menagerie. I prayed nightly the hospital would be successful.

Jocko, on his escape, ran past the hospital and into a laundromat. Customers were picking up their clothes when they saw Jocko enter. They became excited and started waving their hands and yelled at my dad, "Get that monkey out of here." This only made matters worse. Jocko became so excited that he tossed laundry about and relieved himself all over the clothes. My father, mother, two brothers, and I stood watching Jocko create chaos and dirty everything within his reach. Customers and owners glared at the five of us. Humiliation! I wished I could be adopted or become a foster child.

After this experience and periodic interviews by the health department in addition to our pictures in the newspaper, mother decided we needed to move and open a real pet store. This sounded like a good plan. Jocko moved from our house to the pet store. His antics only increased and he was never sold.