

The Phenomenon of Monkeys as 'Surrogate Children'



My name is Rose. I can't have any children due to the fact of having cancer as a child. Now I'm all grown up and wanting a child of my own! So recently one of my best friends purchased a monkey and she dressed it up and took it over to my house. I fell in love with it. It reminded me so much of a child. Then about a week ago she moved out of state and took the monkey with her. And I made up my mind then and there that I wanted a baby monkey. I haven't got a lot of money so is there anyway you can help me and let me pay for a monkey in payments? I'll even pay double if I could possibly pay in payments. I would do anything to have an adorable little monkey. I would be a great owner. I love animals. Would you please help me find a monkey to buy?

The text above was taken verbatim from a recent e-mail message. Rose's "appeal", under a subject line proclaiming, "*I am willing to give a monkey a good home!*", represents a phenomenon which can appropriately be referred to as 'monkeys intended to act as surrogate children.'

Though this phenomenon has not reached levels to warrant inclusion in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, regrettably, it is not uncommon for childless couples, individuals or "empty-nesters" to seek acquisition of a baby monkey to fill a psychological void in their lives.

The presence of a completely dependent baby monkey may be intended by many of these individuals to ward off loneliness and depression due to a lack of human contact; or it is often the case that the baby monkeys are used as objects for projection of nurturing instincts. Regardless of any intentions, and despite the fact that baby monkeys' features bear a striking resemblance to human primates, those who believe simian primates are a suitable "substitute" for human children are - at best -misguided.

Setup For Disaster

Kari Bagnall, founder of 'Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary' in Gainesville, Florida is all too familiar with the tragic consequences (for all concerned primates) that can result when a formerly dependent baby monkey reaches adolescence. It should not be shocking to learn that monkeys grow up to be just that - **monkeys**.

For this article, Kari relayed two stories illustrating real-life tragic endings of 'failed surrogate childhood' for Buddie and Tyler, capuchin monkeys who are now permanent residents of Jungle Friends:

Buddie, our little diabetic capuchin monkey, was the surrogate child of two gay women. Buddie was the baby they could never have, they loved and adored her, taking her with them everywhere they went, including trips to the mall to sit on Santa's lap. Yes, they thought they had found the perfect solution, until...At the early age of three, Buddie started attacking one of the women so viciously she was no longer able to go near Buddie without provoking an attack. She was also not able to go near her significant other when Buddie was around. This was tolerated for a while until it became apparent that neither woman was safe -- they called it a "blood bath" the last time Buddie had escaped her cage when they were trying to get her back in.

Tyler was the surrogate child of Vinny and Russ. Russ described Tyler's early life biography in his own words:

"Tyler was purchased to be the child that my lover Vinny and I could never have. Being unable to afford to go the adoption route that some gay couples have had success with, we settled on Tyler as the closest we could come to fulfilling our dream of having a child together."

"Tyler was originally named Vinny Jr. At first he was so much like an infant. He wore diapers, cried for a bottle in the middle of the night, wore baby clothes, and even looked like a baby to us despite the fur and tail. "

"Vinny Jr., who we originally thought would bring us closer together, ultimately became a frequent topic of arguments we would have. My ex blamed me for Vinny Jr. not being trainable since he felt that I would spoil the

monkey and undo all of his efforts to train him. Needless to say Vinny Jr. bonded to me and not his other daddy. He became brazen enough to start attacking his other dad when he was about two years old. The minute my ex would say the "NO" word or try to get him to do something he did not want to do, Vinny Jr. would draw some blood from him. Once our baby started attacking him, my ex turned away from him completely and wanted nothing to do with him."

"In the beginning Vinny Jr. would go everywhere with us but after the rebellions started we would fight constantly since Vinny would want to leave the kid home alone while we went out and I would not hear of it. "

"When we first got our baby he seemed like the perfect child. We used to boast over the fact that our child would remain a child for life and never grow up and leave us, nor cost us a fortune for a college education. Of course once reality set in and our baby started to behave like the monkey it is innate for him to be, all our dreams were shattered."

At the age of five Tyler had heard the word "No" one time too many! After the police left, the mace cleared the air and Russ was stitched up, it seemed apparent to Russ that there was something wrong with this picture. Russ contacted Jungle Friends and in the end I went to New York to prepare Tyler for his journey to the sanctuary.

It is very unfortunate that Buddie and Tyler were robbed of the opportunity to remain with their biological mothers, and that their natural inclinations were stifled by attempts to mold them in to human children. However, in many ways, Buddie and Tyler are lucky for they happen to be part of a small minority of cast-off 'failed substitute children' who are placed in a permanent reputable sanctuary. At Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary, Buddie and Tyler are permitted to be monkeys; they live in social groups with other monkeys. No longer are they forced against their will to behave unnaturally, nor are they in danger of being harmed as a result of retaliation and punishment for resisting "discipline".

Others are not as lucky. For example, another capuchin monkey, named Gus, suffered greatly at the hands of the "empty-nesters" who attempted to subrogate his natural inclinations. The woman who fancied herself as "Gus' Mom" posted the following on a public internet discussion list:

I went in to change Gus and he attack me the worst he has ever attacked me. Garry heard me screaming from outside and came in just in time to see Gus flying towards me face, blood was everywhere, my blood, He grabbed the baseball bat and knocked him off me into a chair and grabbed him by the neck as hard as he could and threw him back into his cage and rushed me to the hospital. I had 31 bites and tears on both arms, hands, legs and my left ankle was hurt the worst and one bite to my left boob. He kept attacking relentlessly, screaming and coming at me, nothing whatsoever to provoke him. I had just finished changing his diaper, he wheeled around, grabbed the leash off the cabinet door and flew into me screaming and attacking. I'm hurt really bad this time, walking on crutches. The authorities were called in, they know it is a monkey (Gus), pictures have been made of me and the monkey, he has gone into quarantine and after six months, he is going to be put to sleep. They wanted to take his head immediately. God above knows I tried with that monkey...I've given him every excuse to compensate for the other attacks...he did not want to get out of bed....he wasn't ready to be put back into his cage....he was testing me, the "alpha" bit; however, today there is no excuse for what he did other than he is mean and viscious or a brain tumor? You would have had to seen him to know what I am talking about, the facial expression, the screaming, the relentless attacks, coming at me over and over again.

Dr. Shirley McGreal, Chairwoman of the International Primate Protection League, an organization that has been championing the cause of primate protection worldwide since 1973, states, "That any human, male or female, could imagine they could provide the quality of care for a baby monkey that a monkey mother does is insane delusional thinking. Yet many people do imagine that any monkey raised by a human is lucky.

An ongoing case involved a Brooklyn family who actually consider that they "adopted" their pet Diana monkey, whom they purchased from a dealer when she was a baby. The animal's origin is not clear. If she was caught in the wild, someone had shot her mother to get her. No primate mom would ever hand over her baby - in fact, when baby primates die, their mothers often carry them around for days trying to restore life to their bodies. And, when a mother primate dies, her sub-adult offspring often lose the will to live and join her in death. If the pet Diana was born in captivity, her mother and other members of her group would have to be tranquilized to kidnap her. The Brooklyn family who bought her dressed her in diapers and human clothing. But, then the family got a wave of media sympathy when New York State authorities tried to move her to a sanctuary, the cage in the background was visible on TV. That's where the monkey would spend her nights - alone, and no wild baby monkey ever sleeps alone."

"Before she was two years old, this family took two steps to having a designer pet - designed for docility - they had her uterus and ovaries removed and had all her canine teeth extracted. Anyone doing this to a pre-pubertal human child would be in trouble." "Later on this family will have trouble as their monkey matures. Even if the human family provided appropriate food and medical care, it can't provide for a monkey's sexual needs. That's when the biting and destructiveness gets really serious and the monkey is likely to be discarded, to a sanctuary if she's lucky, or maybe to a lab or back into the breeding/dealing cycle."

Even people who do not oppose monkeys (and apes) being held in captivity by private individuals often realize that there are grave consequences to the erred belief that monkeys can be "trained" to behave like human children.

Upon being asked if he is familiar with situations in which monkeys are acquired to act as surrogate children, Kevin Ivester, a former board member of the Simian Society of America, commented, "I know of numerous examples and also know that in most cases disappointment will be the end result for the human and displacement (following mutilation, both physically and mentally) of the monkey, either to other homes, sanctuaries or to the 'great beyond'."

A self-described 'private primate caretaker' in Maine, elaborated further:

There are a number of women obtaining monkeys purely as child substitutes. They dress them up in children's clothing and feed them bottles way past the age of normal weaning. Some primates accept the wearing of clothing; some do anything and everything within their means to remove these articles of clothing. The problems associated with clothing on primates may range from; causing abnormally warm body temperatures to promoting the idea to the casual viewer that monkeys are just like human children. Bottle-feeding primates into adulthood has may add to the possibility of causing of tooth decay, obesity and the development of diabetes.

My personal opinion is this is a setup for failure in many cases. There are some instances of success but this does not seem to be the norm. Primates mature, just as we humans expect to. Primates go through a similar adolescent stage, just as humans. Primates in the private sector and in the wild go through this stage in their maturation process. It is imperative we allow them to develop as naturally as possible, when in a captive situation, for their psychological well-being. Problems often arise when the human attempts to insist the monkey or ape remain an infant. The primate rebels, just as human teenagers do, resulting in aggressive encoded behaviors by the primate. Biting and scratching by the primate often occurs, unlike a human teenager who is able to express themselves with defensive words more often than physical attacks.

We expect our teens to behave in this fashion, though we probably don't like it. My experience in reading email messages is that many people regress into a stage of some type of denial when it comes to their primates. They go to many extremes to manipulate/discourage/prevent this normal maturation process in their "primate child". Alteration of the primate is often used as an attempt to avoid such behaviors. Sometimes it seems to work often it does not. Removal of teeth, reproductive organs and even fingernails are sometimes noted.

The negative results I've read about vary from person to person, primate to primate. Some primates are condemned to living the rest of their lives alone in a cage with little or no personal contact with other living beings. Others are "sent away" because of their "bad" behaviors. Some primates may even be euthanized by the owner. Some primates are required to be euthanized by public officials because the primate bit someone These creatures are penalized and lose their lives for acting in a normal manner according to their species. This is tragic.

The people who consider their primates to be their children may become emotionally distraught, to the point of diagnosed depression, when tragedy strikes. Even those who realize the primates are individuals, needing special consideration, experience strong emotions when difficult situations must be dealt with. The person who is bitten by their own monkey may experience emotions ranging from disbelief to denial. "Why would my baby bite me?" is frequently asked in an email. Failure to realize biting/scratching is normal behavior in primates is perplexing to me. Even in documentaries about primates biting is shown to be natural behavior. Books about primates discuss this issue as well.

On the other hand, there is a growing opposition to all trade in nonhuman primates.

Hope Walker, Executive Director of The Primate Conservation & Welfare Society based in Port Townsend, Washington, offers the following information regarding the trade in monkeys acquired to be "pets":

The trade in non-human primates is simply tragic. The tragedy begins when a prosimian, monkey or ape is taken from the wild --such as rhesus macaques, a species which is imported for biomedical research and often dumped into the pet trade -- are then bred for the pet trade. Imagine the horror that these beings suffer, being stolen from their troops, to spend years languishing in a lab and then be sent to a "pet" breeder who repeatedly steals their infants.

The infants are bottle fed and, if they survive, find themselves on the open market, through live auctions and ads in trade magazines, newspapers or the Internet. When purchased, often for \$6000 - \$50,000 or more, they are shipped off to the new owners, who usually have learned the little they know from pro-pet primate organizations and the breeder that sold them the animal in the first place. As the monkey or ape grows, if it survives the trauma of losing its mother and the shipment, it matures into a wild animal capable of great damage to person and property, not to mention the very serious concerns regarding zoonotic diseases such as Herpes B, which is fatal to humans and which can lie undetected in Asian species of macaques for years. When the "pet" begins to bite, scratch, or otherwise attack, the owner either mutilates the poor being by removing its uterus, teeth and/or finger nails, or dumps it on a sanctuary.

Unfortunately the sanctuary "solution" is about to run out for these owners -- the few legitimate sanctuaries for non-human primates in the United States are either almost at capacity or at capacity and we believe something must be done. Our organization is taking a two-pronged approach to the problem -- education and sanctuary. We have developed an information kit, with fact sheets and a mini-poster, in order to educate the public, and we are actively working to raise funds in order to build a primate sanctuary, whose function will be to offer permanent, species specific sanctuary to ex-pet and biomedical non-human primates.

All things considered, it is usually a 'Lose-Lose-Lose-Win' situation when individuals acquire monkeys to be "pets". The monkey's biological mother loses when her baby is torn from her breast to be sold as a "pet". The surrogate parent often loses when the monkey matures and becomes unmanageable. The monkey herself/himself usually loses by having her/his instincts stifled; by not receiving proper care; when inappropriate harsh discipline is administered in attempts to control the monkey; and through surgical mutilation, such as tooth removal. The only "winner" in this scenario is the dealer or breeder who profited from selling the baby monkey.

Like all wild animals, monkeys should be living in their natural habitats, not in situations where humans attempt to force domestication on them.