

## A Small Monkey, an Elevator, and Beverly Hills

We were young, a normal moderately conservative married couple in the tumultuous 1960's.  
Two business professionals on an upward trajectory.

On our first anniversary, we gave each other a lifetime present. A monkey.  
*What could possibly go wrong???*

Spoiler Alert:

Doesn't everyone experience a small, irrational monkey jumping up and down on one's head in the middle of Beverly Hills during broad daylight?

And we seemed so normal.

I will introduce you to Samantha through an experience I had with her within the first few months of the three of us (newlyweds plus a small monkey) becoming "a family." It was an experience so embarrassing, so out-of-the-box, so hysterical in retrospect, decades later I still label it as "*my all-time most embarrassing lifetime moment.*"

But first ... let me set the scene for you . . .

*Southern California — Summer, 1968.*

It was called the "summer of discontent" throughout the nation; but as much as this was the blossoming era of self-expression and hippies, Beverly Hills was definitely not one of the epicenters. And, as a young woman "on her way up," dressed in professional business attire, it was not the place to be seen with a monkey sitting on one's shoulder while walking down fashionable Wilshire Boulevard.

*Picture this:*

As a newly married young man and woman in an era of extreme individualism, we were on a life track together that only shortly before was accepted as "normal" — the way we were raised.

And yet, we both were artists in our souls. For our first anniversary, we decided to buy a small monkey; easily found then in specialized pet stores. Bill had always wanted a monkey, and I loved all animals, so while living in a studio apartment in the heart of Hollywood, it seemed perfectly normal to bring this small creature into our new family.

We told ourselves that "it was to see if we eventually wanted children." Spoiler alert — we had children anyway. But by then Samantha was an intricate part of our family, and I must say, she did somewhat prepare us for the unpredictable road of parenthood.

But I digress.

The warm Sunday afternoon we purchased our Samantha — fresh from the jungles of Latin American and only six months old — we carefully put her in her new traveling cage, and we were off for a lifetime adventure.

Upon leaving the pet shop, the three of us traveled down Hollywood boulevard in our ancient Austin Healey convertible; slowly. Very slowly. No more than five miles an hour. We didn't want this beautiful little golden-brown animal (about six inches high) with her precious black mask, to be nervous in any way. The fact that she had mastered swinging great distances from large trees in the wild, and had endured a long trip by boat and train to get here, never occurred to us. So, there we were. Sam in her cage on my lap, eagerly looking around at the sights and sounds of Hollywood, while Bill drove (as I mentioned, slowly) to our home nestled at the top of a very tall building. A building with a doorman.

We were oblivious to the look — or its intention — by the doorman as our merry group unwound ourselves from our small convertible. We assumed that everyone would be awed by the adorableness of our new family member. The monkey from hell.

The next few weeks were a learning experience for all of us. Sam learned to trust us as she enjoyed the freedom of our small studio apartment. And we learned that Sam was going to get her way — “most” of the time. However, when she insisted on doing something unacceptable, returning to her cage (now outfitted with a heating pad to keep her warm, since Hollywood didn't have the temperature of the Latin tropics), only dissuaded her for a short while.

She learned that the bookshelves covering one full wall were for climbing, but not acceptable for throwing things off (ha!) — and she used that to her advantage. Having the developed brain of a three-year-old, if she wanted to get our attention for some transgression, she felt she'd suffered, she would head for the nearest object that looked like it could inflict potential damage. A cup on the sink, a book or small object on a shelf, a lipstick on the bathroom sink ... all were potential instruments for her wrath. And while she was executing this masterful mischief, she'd look straight at the person who perpetuated her behavior in the first place. Usually, me.

She adored Bill; females of all species are built to love the opposite sex, and this little monkey was no exception. She tolerated me ... even liked me sometimes. But I was the taskmaster. Even when Bill enforced a rule, she usually turned on me; convinced that I had somehow started it all. As I said, she prepared me for parenthood — especially the teen years with a daughter.

We took Sam with us everywhere in her traveling cage. How cosmopolitan of us. I'm not sure everyone else felt the same way as we arrived with a monkey in toe ... but we were oblivious to that. Of course, at first meeting everyone was fascinated with her — then as time marched on, her presence was accepted as normal. This was the usual pattern with relatives, friends, neighbors, and even acquaintances for the next 25 years. Yep, we were committed from the beginning. Sam was here to stay.

One Sunday we traveled to Palos Verdes to have dinner with my parents. My dad and Samantha were quite fond of each other, my parents had gotten quite used to Sam being out for a while. She loved going up and down the rod-iron banister on their staircase. Also, sitting atop their tall china cabinet while we ate became another place for her to observe her kingdom.

Samantha usually ate her “monkey biscuits.” They were sold in the pet stores in giant barrels, and we always brought them with us when we traveled. They were actually very large nuggets of dog kibble that produced greasy hands for Sam. She hated greasy hands, so we always made sure she had a cloth next to her to wipe her long expressive fingers. From the beginning, we’d also introduced her to fresh vegetables, nuts, and assorted foods (like mashed potatoes) — her favorite being fresh snow peas in the pods. Her least favorite was bananas (who’d of thought?). The only meat she enjoyed was an occasional fresh, live moth ... the larger the better (she caught these on her own — but that’s another chapter).

As we sat down for dinner in my parents’ dining room, Sam was sitting on the china cabinet with her monkey biscuit and a napkin. My mother served a delicious meal of salad, steak ... *and peas*. It only took Sam a few seconds to recognize one of her favorite delicacies.

Taking an artful and most agile dive for my dad’s plate, she landed right next to it on the table. Sam immediately used both hands to grab at the peas. Having no idea what Sam was after, my dad was laughing as he tried to move her hands away. It became a dance. Sam reached in with one hand as my dad swept it away gently with the back of his hand. Immediately, Sam would swoop in with her other hand, as my father would then use the back of his other hand to move Sam’s aggressive fingers away. They were choreographed beautifully. For a good ten seconds, my dad looked like he was conducting an orchestra, and Sam looked like she was practicing martial arts. Sam won. She reached in for the kill, grabbed her pea, and moved quickly to the top of the china cabinet. I think at that moment my dad and Samantha bonded for life.

During this early period of our marriage, Bill was going to school for television engineering at night and working “temp” wherever he could during the day — sometimes doing aerial photography for the state of California. I was doing much the same: acting classes at night and temp during the day. We’d see each other in our car as we’d pick each other up, be dropped off, and then during quick meals; early morning, or late at night. It was a busy time. This brings us to the subject of Beverly Hills.

We were now living in a two-story Spanish duplex in the artistic community of Silverlake — right on the reservoir where we would actually hear a foghorn at night (don’t ask — it was the land of fruit and nuts) — only a few miles west of downtown Los Angeles. Our home was built before World War II, and in the bedroom, there was a large alcove (probably once used for a dressing table and mirror) with a small window in it. All we had to do was screen the opening, put a shelf in (right where Sam could look out the window) for her heating pad, food and water, and *voila* ... Samantha had her own floor to ceiling bedroom suite!

However, as much as she enjoyed the view, we soon found out she didn't like to see birds fly close by. Large birds prey on small, delicious monkeys in the jungle. Every time a sizable bird flew close to her window, Sam quickly left her shelf and dove for the floor of her cage; then would timidly climb up the screen or rope we'd hung, to slowly peer out the window, making sure the coast was clear.

I was working a fairly long temp assignment at a prestigious stock exchange in Beverly Hills and had recanted several stories about our Squirrel monkey to many of the stockbrokers. One finally asked me to bring Samantha in to visit. This was a time — long before personal computers — when the stock exchange was so overwhelmed with trades that it had to close for one day a week, so the paperwork could catch up. That day was Wednesday, and that's the day I decided to bring Sam in.

I knew that traveling by bus from Silverlake to Beverly Hills dress in a skirt, blouse, nylons, short heels, and suit jacket with a Squirrel monkey in a traveling cage on my lap just wasn't going to cut it. So, I got the car and Bill took the bus since he had to be at work early that day.

I also had Samantha's "leash" with me. From the beginning we'd wanted to take Sam out on walks with us, so we had purchased a soft leather cat collar and long braided black plastic leash. We cut the soft collar to fit easily and comfortably around Sam's tiny waist — her midsection. Then attached the leash. And there you have it ... a small golden monkey on a shoulder. A controllable monkey on a shoulder.

The very first time we took her out Bill had her on his shoulder. We went down the elevator, past the doorman, and out into the dark of night. Sam had been cooped up all day, and I thought she could use a walk. I was wrong. Monkeys don't go out at night for a very good reason. They don't see particularly well at night and therefore unable to escape any prey, like owls. But they do hear *very* well. On our very short walk that faithful starry night, Sam's little brown eyes were larger than thought possible. With every noise of the city, she'd dive to hide under various parts of Bill's anatomy — including inside his V-neck sweater. Our mistake was obvious. We realized that she was not a little human who understood that we'd protect her — no matter what we said. Monkeys are not domesticated animals; she had a strong inborn survival instinct, and always would have. For the rest of her life, nighttime for Samantha was for sleeping comfortably on her heating pad.

Sam and I arrived at the stock exchange and everyone "oohed and awed." Samantha performed beautifully. She rubbed herself up to the side of her traveling cage so everyone could scratch her back or tummy. She nearly stood on her head (bending her head over onto her heating pad) to make people look at her. You could see her smiling ... her long tail wrapped around her as her little black mask around her mouth curved upward oh-so-slightly. This was soon to change.

The end of the stock exchange's "official" workday was over at 3 PM. Several of the many employees left, but quite a few stayed for a while. I was encouraged to let Sam out, and I was more than happy to oblige. As soon as I opened her cage door, the sweet Sam was gone, and her

evil twin took possession. She ran across desk after desk (at least 40 across the floor), sliding and spreading papers everywhere. She'd hide and dart, daring someone to chase her. This was her jungle of the 20th century ... over 6000 square feet of desk, papers, objects, and people to terrorize.

All this was going on against a backdrop of the massive floor to ceiling wall; lit with the lights of the countless stock exchange ticker tapes. Everyone seemed to enjoy the show — and I'm sure are still telling the tale today. But I recognized that this was “a child” that was soon going to be totally out of control. Yes, she could get worse. I caught up with her in a corner desk, lowered my voice to a stern whisper, “Enough! you will now calm down.” She listened. I picked her up — my hand fit nicely around her body — turned around to the awaiting audience across the room and smiled. I think Sam, limp but comfortable in my hand, was smiling for her attractors as well. Everyone applauded her as I took her to her cage and put her in. She almost bowed in appreciation.

Within the hour, the place had almost cleared out, and I'd finished picking up the papers of those who had left before our matinee performance. Their desks looked orderly once again, although I can't attest to any of the papers being in a logical order. I'm sure the story was passed on early the next morning, and no one voiced any complaints to me. Sam was the talk of the town for at least a week.

With the stock exchange looking like an actual place of business again, and with everyone now gone, I decided that I wanted a candy bar from the little store in the lobby. And yes, I felt Sam deserved the short trip downstairs with me. Whether I just naive, or subconsciously a glutton for humiliating drama, I'll never know.

I took her out of her cage and fastened her soft collar around her waist. She happily jumped on my shoulder, and off we went. There were a few expected stares on the elevator, and then in the store where I bought my Butterfinger. But these stares were nowhere near as shocking as the ones I received when I had taken Sam out at noon that day. I felt she needed to get out in the fresh air (as long as the sun was up) — and so we took a stroll down Wilshire Blvd. in the very heart of world-famous Beverly Hills. It was crowded with lunchtime people, and I must admit that it was fun shocking some of the women as I walked by. I can still picture their double-takes as their fashionable mouths dropped gently open.

So now, with my delicious candy bar in hand and Sam on my shoulder, we were awaiting our elevator to go back up to the exchange. As I stood in front of the closed doors, I decided to unwrap my candy bar and have a bite.

It all happened very fast.

Did I mention that Sam had a sweet tooth? I often found her digging in my purse for gum. At home, I instantly knew where she was: my large purse would be on its side with a long tail protruding from it.

As I said, it all happened very fast. Just as I finished unwrapping my candy bar and put it to my mouth, Sam jumped to the top of my head. As I was in the process of taking the first bite of the chewy Butterfinger bar, Sam bends over my face; looking upside down into my eyes (which were shut in the expectation of the delicious taste of taffy and peanut butter). As my mouth started to close, I realized instantly (but almost too late) that Sam's right hand and long fingers just grabbed for the bite *in* my barely opened mouth. As my teeth touch down on her tiny wrist, I immediately stop before the final "crunch."

I barely touched her, but there is now one insanely mad monkey sitting on top of my head. And she's hopping mad. Literally. When monkeys get mad, they jump up and down, almost violently. Sam was holding tight with both hands onto fistfuls of my carefully curled hair, jumping up and down repeatedly on the top of my head. And her high-pitched voice was now "squealing" continually.

Standing in front of that elevator, monkey on head with a leash around her waist that was still attached to my hand, Samantha must have looked like a cowboy riding a bull, while screaming wildly .... squeeEEEEEEEEEK, squeeEEEEEEK, squeeEEEEEEK!!!

There I stood . . . with this raging out-of-control, small, squealing jungle animal on my head in front of an elevator in a deserted lobby of an exclusive Beverly Hills office building. It was just at the peak-time when everyone was getting out of work. I was dressed like a professional — not a nut case — and I was praying foolishly that at any second when the elevator doors opened, there would be no one in it.

The seconds' drug on — at least three or four — mercilessly, and the tirade continued. I stood there with perfect posture, holding my head high. With leash still in my hand, and with a ritualistic dance going on at the top of my head, I was prepared to smile as though everything was perfectly normal.

The wide doors opened slowly, and God answered my prayers.

I never took Sam to work again.