

MARCEL

Some months ago, my two daughters Caroline aged 22 and Amanda aged 19, were having a quiet Sunday afternoon at home when the phone rang. Reluctantly I picked up the receiver, 'Hello' I said thinking 'why do people always phone on a Sunday afternoon, ever heard of an afternoon nap!'

As it turned out, that phone call was about to turn our lives upside down. It's pretty upside down anyway with numerous dogs, cats, birds, rabbits etc., but this was going to be different.

'Hi Lana', it's Judy. Do you know how to look after a monkey?' Total silence from my end of the phone. 'Lana, are you there?'. 'Yes Judy', short of putting the phone down, what else could I say! 'Uummmm, what kind of monkey is it?' I heard Judy take a long breath and then out it all came. 'I don't know but it is only a baby. My cousin has just bought it into town to me. The troop was shot during a monkey crop raid and this baby was found next to it's dead mother the following morning. I don't know what to do with it and you know all about animals so I thought that perhaps.....'

The long and short of it - half an hour later baby Marcel arrived, wrapped in a blanket - the driver of the car dumped the bundle into my arms and couldn't get out of the drive way quick enough - I guess incase I changed my mind!

As my youngest daughter used to say as a little tot 'Caroline is an animal person and I am a sweetie person', given Amanda's love of all confectionery!

So Caroline, the animal person, became mother to a baby vervet, who we named Marcel, and very quickly learned how demanding motherhood is. I became a grandmother overnight and helped out when I could to give Caroline a break.

Bottle feeding: baby formula then on to Cerelac, then onto fruits and veggies and the occasional 'treat' from Amanda - the sweetie person!' And so the weeks flew by as Caroline devoted heart and soul into bringing Marcel up and teaching him to be a monkey. Learning the warning calls of vervets, using the hose pipe as a snake accompanied by the vervet warning of danger...I could write a book!

Marcel was never restricted in a cage, so those sections of the house that he was given access to became temporary disaster zones as he learned to climb, jump, race around after the cats (who for the most part thoroughly enjoyed themselves too) and generally 'finding his feet'.

The bond between Caroline and Marcel was enormous, but monkeys are wild animals, not pets, and the time came when we knew he had to go off to Chipangali in Bulawayo where he would be rehabilitated with other young vervets and slowly become integrated into a troop and made ready for release into the bush where he belongs.

This was a heart wrenching time for both Caroline and Marcel as they spend there last hour or so in the baby vervet enclosure at Chipangali - Caroline waiting to ensure that Marcel at least left her side sometimes to play with the others.

When Caroline left the enclosure, Marcel screamed blue murder and tugged at the wire while Caroline wept buckets.

Her consolation being that she had saved Marcel from death, was now giving him another chance at being the wild animal that he is, with a monkey family of his own and the incredible knowledge, feelings and memories that Marcel had allowed her to experience in the months that they were together.