

Baklava

By Gus Dick Andros

Growing up in the 1930s, I was influenced by the movie Tarzan (Johnny Wiesmuller) and Cheetah his good friend. I was a lonely child and thought that having a Cheetah in my life would be the answer to my loneliness. Of course I knew my mother would never allow me to have monkey for a pet or friend. It would take 42 years before I could fulfill my fantasies of having a monkey for a friend. I know there are those, and they are right, that having a wild animal for a pet is cruel.

I saw an ad in a magazine advertising a monkey for \$16.00. I figured if it didn't work out I wouldn't have been out a large sum of money. I sent off a check in about two weeks I received a letter telling me, "I will arrive in less than a month by UPS." The monkey wrote the letter, or that is what they wanted me to believe that made it all the more real to me.

I had my students come up with a name. One of my Greek students thought I should call the monkey Baklava, because the pastry was so sweet and she knew the monkey would also be sweet, but he was not sweet to everyone.

The UPS man fell in love with the new arrival and hated to give him up. The monkey had the cutest face you had ever seen. The monkey arrived in a wired cage and he was holding the wire like a prisoner might hold the bars of a jail cell. I don't think I knew what to expect, but the second I opened the cage the monkey was in the highest place in the room. He was on a leash that was about three feet long. I was told to approach him with thick workman's glove, and it was a good thing, because he clamped his teeth around my finger. He didn't get through the glove, but I could feel the pressure. The directions on how to tame the monkey said while I was feeding him I should talk to him. Once I was talking to him, thinking I was alone, an adult student entered without me being aware. She listened to me for some time and couldn't believe how intent I was in a one-sided conversation with a monkey. I never gave up, and it looked like I was not succeeding.

I even bought a large cage for Baklava but he never spent one minute in it so I made a planter out of it. I did have a carrying case for him. I took him home with me every night. We were never separated for any length of time. Baklava had free run of my apartment. His usual route was to travel above the drapes and atop of the bookcase. In the beginning he would have nothing to do with me, but I never tired of watching him. He was like a small child that had a mind on its own. One day I heard a noise in the kitchen and then saw Baklava carrying a large apple, almost as big as he was, across the room and proceeded to eat it in my present.

I became so entranced by his actions that I stopped going to movies and other forms of entertainment. Nothing could be as charming as watching Baklava and his antics.

It took about a month before we connected. I remember it was a Saturday afternoon. I had returned home from teaching class stripped down to my underwear and fell on the bed to nap. I suddenly felt the presence of my little friend. I laid very still to see what he was going to do. For the first time he crawled on my bare chest and proceeded to lie down with his head just below my chin. I

cautiously put my hand around his little stomach and he in turn he put his arm over my hand. From that moment on I never had trouble handling him. Baklava would follow me from room to room and sit on a self in the bathroom while I would bath.

Baklava also became friends with my friend Marvin and they would play for hours. Marvin never had a pet before; he fell in love with the monkey, although we never thought of him as a wild animal. Marvin was the only one I could trust with Baklava. If Baklava didn't like you he could easily do damage to you. He also took to Gloria, my secretary, as his mother. He wouldn't let Gloria's daughter come near her. I would have to remove him so Ellyn could speak to her mother.

As time went by Baklava would situate himself between my neck and shirt collar. I would walk down Flatbush Avenue with my friend on my back. I became known in the neighborhood as the Monkey man.

We soon learned to communicate with each other. He was a very fussy eater. His diet was to have protein, but he would not eat the protein that I would prepare. I learned that he would eat the protein drink that weightlifters would use to build muscle. There was just one problem; I had to feed him with an eyedropper. You are right I spoiled him rotten. When he was hungry he would bring me the eyedropper, and if he wanted water he would drop something on the floor. Baklava would only drink from the faucet. When I left him alone I would let the faucet drip.

I took him to class and the children knew not to get too close, but they also learned to love him. During class his leash was secured to his cage. He had very good eye and ear for what he saw and heard. Some music would irritate him and he would let it be known he didn't like it. He, like most dance critics, would tell you if he disliked the movement.

He had a drinking problem, alcohol that is. Not only did I have to watch him but my friends who thought it was cute. At a New Year's Eve party, unbeknownst to me people would sneak him drinks. When the party was over I couldn't find him. I was scared he had gotten out, but I found him past out and limp as a wet rag. My first thought was he was dead. I put him in his bed, a box padded with fur. The only way I got to sleep that night was I also drank more than I should. When I woke up on New Years Day, I immediately went to check on him. If I hadn't been so relieved I could have laughed out loud. He was in his box hanging on for dear life, as if to say, "Don't rock the boat." Anyone who has ever had a hangover knows what it is like. Baklava recovered his headache and never had another drink.

At night we would watch television together and when the light were turned off he would find his way to his bed. My morning routine was to have my coffee as I watched the news on the TV with Baklava sitting on my shoulder. And when I was ready to leave he would get his leash and get into his carrying case. At the time I had a car and once we were secure in the car he would sit on the dashboard with his hand on the stirring wheel. It looked like he was driving the car. I took him to ballet class and my teacher Richard Thomas loved to watch Baklava and never once asked me not to bring him. During class Baklava would satisfy himself by licking on a Certs mint. I will say in Richards class he was all behaved.

I was getting confident that he didn't need me to hang on to his leash but / wrong I was. One day walking down Church Avenue he jumped off my shoulder and took off into the Catholic Church with me in close pursuit. Fortunately because he had the leash on I caught him as he ran down the aisle. Every eye was on me as I carried him outside. From that time on his leash was always attached to my hand.

Baklava like all of us would get sick from time to time. In the beginning there was a Vet in the neighborhood that would treat him. Nothing is forever and the Vet moved to Roosevelt Field Shopping Center, which was a good hour drive, but when he was not well I would take him by car to the Vet. Baklava loved to ride in the car. It is a wonder he didn't cause an accident for every car that would pass would look in at him. One day one of my students Jose Lewis came to my apartment to visit. Jose sat in a chair with another chair between us. Baklava sat on the back of the unused chair, but one of my good sweaters was on the seat. I asked Jose to move the sweater and as he did the monkey went straight to his throat. I was there before harm could be done. Baklava was also jealous of the telephone and would get between me, and the mouthpiece. It is funny I always felt safe with Baklava on my shoulder. If anyone would want to hurt me he could do them more harm than they could to him.

I went on two vacations with him one to Bar Harbor, Maine and another to Virginia Beach and Williamsburg. I would always call for reservation and tell them in advance that I traveled with a monkey. Everyplace we stayed Baklava was welcome. I learned his eating habits. Thirty minutes after eating he would poop where ever he was. So to make sure he didn't make a mess, I would be there to clean up the poop.

When Marvin and I went to Bar Harbor, we rented a cabin in a wooded area. One day Baklava went crazy jumping from wall to wall. I investigated to see what was up. Looking out the window I saw a squirrel in the tree. I have to tell you that Baklava was a squirrel monkey. What he saw was something that looked like him. Once I knew what the fuss was about I relaxed and enjoy his antics. Where ever I went my friend went with me.

I knew having a wild animal for a pet was illegal. I never had a problem until walking up Church Avenue with Baklava in his usual place on the back of my neck a police car pulled us over. My thought I was in trouble, but Baklava ran up the policeman arm and kiss him on the cheek {what a smart move}. The cop was so touched he let us go with out a word.

I enjoyed watching my friend so much I stopped going to movies. My life centered around Baklava.

Times were not going well at the school and I had to look for another position. I ran an ad in Dance Magazine for a position wanted. I got a number of responses. The only one that appealed to me was to be Ballet Master in Israel. I went to Israel to audition I was gone for two weeks. Marvin took Baklava and kept him for me. I got the job and this meant I would have to move to Israel. I couldn't take Baklava. Gloria, Baklava's second mother found a place that would take exotic animals.

It broke my heart to give him up, but my future depended on me to find work in the dance world. When they came to get Baklava I had to hand him over to Marvin. My friend of seven years grabbed my shirt and wouldn't let go. I am not

ere I will ever get over the guilt I feel giving up, for letting him go. On my
urn from Israel my career has had a second life.