

A Most Blessed Day

Tuesday September 27 2011 was an amazing day. Our entire family was up before the crack of dawn because it was my husband's big day in Findlay Ohio – his meeting and official interview with the church conference that was going to decide if they agreed with the local church board's recommendation that my husband be their new pastor. We allowed plenty of extra time that morning because we weren't sure what bumps we might encounter while rousing 4 kids out of bed while it was still dark outside. But it went perfectly – all the kids were agreeable and all were ready before it was time to leave, unprecedented! No one complained about going to the babysitter's; actually, they seemed excited about it. My husband and I dropped off the kids, and as we turned onto the long country road that would take us most of the way there, I noticed a stunning effect of the sunrise. A beam of orange light was coming down from the clouds – not in the east where the rest of the sunrise was visible, but off to the west. It was really more like a column of soft orange light – an orange rainbow. It was beautiful, unlike anything either of us had ever seen, and we enjoyed it together until it faded into the dawning of the new day.

The almost 2 hour drive was most pleasant; my husband and I always enjoy each other's company. Plus our spirits were buoyed by the kids' great behavior that morning and the blessing of the orange rainbow.

My husband's meeting went well while I explored Findlay by myself a bit. I found an African Grey Parrot (my favorite kind of bird!) at the pet store, so I played with her for a while and checked out some other stores. We ate a wonderful lunch, and then my husband got the call – the conference approved him; he is the new pastor of Union Chapel! Now the waiting is over, and we know for sure the direction that God has been pointing us. We finished out our day in Findlay with

a movie and another peaceful long drive, just the two of us. As we left the town of Findlay and headed out into the Ohio countryside, there was a full-size, full-color rainbow in all its glory. Two rainbows in one day (occurring almost 12 hours and dozens of miles apart)? They seemed to perfectly epitomize God's blessings on this day for us, beginning with the kids being so great, followed by our long drives going safely and smoothly, and finally, the good news about my husband's new calling. Does God speak to people using rainbows? For sure, He used a rainbow to illustrate his promise that He will never destroy the earth with flood again in Genesis 9:11-15:

"11 I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life."

And, God loves it when we notice His works of art in nature and offer praise to Him – there are more than a few examples of this in the Bible as well. My husband and I saw the rainbows as messages to us from God; reassurance to us as we embark on yet another new journey at this stage in our lives, stamps of approval for a very blessed day and extra nods of encouragement from Our Heavenly Father as we might be tempted to be distracted by our uncertainties.

It was a very blessed day spent with my favorite person in the whole world. I am so proud of him for everything that he is, everything he is becoming, and for his being hand-picked by God to take on this incredibly awesome responsibility. And to

say that I am honored to realize that I am the one who gets to experience this life by his side is a gross understatement. For these reasons and others, I thank God every day.



Unfortunately, this isn't either of the rainbows we saw the other day because I didn't have my camera with me to take pictures. But I figured that I needed a picture of a beautiful rainbow on this post! ☐

Talking To The Animals

Do a search on youtube.com for talking animals, and you'll see birds, dogs, and cats that say human words. Not all of them know what they're saying, but some of them do. I came across an article on cnn.com about 4 animals that could REALLY talk – these include a seal, a cat, a parrot, and a chimpanzee.

In 1971, George and Alice Swallow found a baby seal just off the coast of Maine. The little guy appeared to be orphaned, so they took him home and kept him in their bathtub.

For the first few days, they tried to feed him ground mackerel, but he refused to eat. Once he trusted his new

parents, though, he began eating so voraciously they compared him to a Hoover vacuum cleaner and the name stuck.

When he got too big for the tub, Hoover was moved to a small pond behind the Swallows' house. After only a few months, Hoover was eating more fish than his human caretakers were able to provide, so they contacted the New England Aquarium in Boston, hoping the facility had room for him.

When introducing the seal to the aquarium, George mentioned that Hoover could talk. Of course no one believed him at the time. A few years later, though, researchers at the aquarium noticed that Hoover's guttural sounds really did seem to be forming words and phrases. He was often telling people to "Get outta here!" or asking, "How are ya?" He could say his name and a few other phrases, all with a thick Bostonian accent.

Once the word got out that the Aquarium had a talking seal, he became a media sensation, making appearances in Reader's Digest, The New Yorker, National Public Radio, and even on Good Morning America.

Sadly, Hoover died of natural causes in July 1985 at the ripe old age of 14. He was so admired that he received his own obituary in the Boston Globe. He left behind several offspring, but none possessed his unique gift for gab.

I did a google search for Hoover the Seal, and I did find one piece of audio, but my husband says the words are not Hoover's. I'm not sure what to think – my husband has a point: if there was a talking seal, and he died in 1985, why aren't there more video clips of him out there? I can be kind of gullible, but then again, thousands of people claim to have seen this seal talk, so I don't know. Here is the youtube video I found which is audio only. What do you think? If anyone has visited Hoover and seen him talk, I'd love to hear from you!

Then there was Blackie, the talking cat.

When Carl Miles of Augusta, Georgia, trained his cat Blackie to say, "I love you" and "I want my mama," they took their act on the road. Throughout the early 1980s, Blackie made paid appearances on local TV and radio programs, and even hit the big time with a spot on the network TV show That's Incredible.

However, as the novelty wore off, Carl and Blackie ended up performing on street corners, asking for donations from passersby. After some complaints from locals, police informed Carl that he would need to get a business license in order to keep up Blackie's street show. Carl paid the \$50 fee for a license, but something about it rubbed him the wrong way.

So Carl sued the city of Augusta, under the pretense that the city's business license code mentions many types of occupations that require a license, but a talking cat show was not one of them. But that wasn't the only issue Carl had—he also claimed the city was infringing on Blackie's First Amendment Right to Free Speech.

Carl lost his case, but he appealed the ruling until it came before a federal court. The argument was finally closed when three presiding judges declared that the business license ordinance allowed for other, unspecified types of businesses to require a license, which would encompass a talking cat performer.

As for the First Amendment violation, the courts said the law did not apply because Blackie was not human, and therefore not protected under the Bill of Rights. Furthermore, there seemed no good cause for Carl Miles to be the one to bring the suit in the first place. If Blackie felt his rights were being violated, as a talking cat, he should have been the one to say something.

Next comes Alex the African Grey parrot. I've always wanted an African Grey parrot (ever since as a kid I enjoyed the book *Harry's Mad* by Dick King-Smith), and so I took special notice of Alex when he would make media appearances. He died suddenly and unexpectedly in 2007, most likely from some sort of heart problem, but not before his accomplishments amazed millions.

According to Dr. Pepperberg's research, this avian Einstein could identify 50 different objects, knew seven colors and shapes, and many different kinds of materials like wool, paper, and wood. For example, hold up a blue block of wood and Alex could tell you the shape, the color, and even what it was made of.

However, he also grasped more complex concepts that required a higher level of thought and understanding. Put a handful of red and yellow blocks on a tray and ask him how many were yellow, he could tell you the correct answer. If you then asked him how many of those same blocks were green, he would say "none."

Furthermore, hold up two blocks of different colors and different sizes and he could tell you which was bigger.

And finally, Lucy, the chimpanzee who was raised like a child by humans:

When she was only two days old, Lucy, a chimpanzee, was purchased by the University of Oklahoma and sent to live with Dr. Maurice Temerlin, a noted psychologist, who, along with his wife, raised the little chimp as if she were their own human child.

Lucy was taught how to eat normal meals at the table using silverware. She could dress herself, often choosing to wear skirts just like her "mother" did. She could even make tea for her "parents" and the team of researchers who trained and

cared for her.

Dr. Robert Fouts, one of the groundbreaking psychologists who taught American Sign Language (ASL) to Washoe the chimp in 1967, helped Lucy learn to communicate using around 250 ASL signs. Lucy could not only give the signs for objects like airplane, ball, and food, but she could also express her emotions with her hands, often “saying” when she was hungry, happy, or sad.

Lucy had become so close to human in most every way that she only found human men, not male chimpanzees, sexually attractive. It was pretty clear that, in her mind anyway, she was the same as her parents.

It's a sad fact that once a captive chimp has reached about four or five years old, their immense strength can become a danger to their human caretakers. Often they need to be placed in a zoo, a lab, or some other facility better equipped to handle primates. In this case, the Temerlins raised Lucy as their daughter until 1977, when she was almost 12 years old, before they finally felt like they had to find her a new home.

After much deliberation, they decided upon a nature preserve in Gambia on the west coast of Africa. They, along with research assistant Janis Carter, flew with Lucy to her new home to help ease the chimp into the wild. However, it was not going to be as simple as they'd hoped.

At the preserve, Lucy was put in a cage at night to protect her from predators. She had only ever slept in a bed inside a nice, quiet, suburban home, so the jungle was a completely new and frightening environment for her.

She was also scared of the other chimps, strange creatures she had only encountered a few times before in her life, preferring to stay close to her parents and Janis whenever she could.

She wasn't eating because her food had always been delivered to her on a plate; she didn't even understand the concept of foraging.

When her parents suddenly became distant and weren't providing her with the life she had always known, Lucy became confused and sad. She would often use the sign for "hurt." And she lost much of her hair due to the stress of her new situation.

Realizing that Lucy would never move on if they stayed, her parents left her behind after three weeks. Janis agreed to stay for a few weeks longer, but it was soon clear that Lucy couldn't change who she was. And so, Janis never left.

Janis helped found a chimpanzee sanctuary on an abandoned island in the middle of the Gambia River. She took Lucy and other chimps that had been raised in captivity and lived with them on the island, teaching them skills they would need in the wild, like finding food and climbing trees.

For most, the new lifestyle quickly became second nature. But for nearly eight years, Lucy refused to give up her human ways. She wanted human food, human interaction, and to be loved by, what she considered, one of her own kind. It wasn't until Janis stopped living on the island that Lucy was finally able to accept her new life and joined a troupe of chimps.

Whenever Janis visited the island, Lucy was still affectionate, still used sign language, but thankfully, she always went back with the chimps into the forest.

Sadly, Lucy's decomposed body was discovered in 1987. Her exact cause of death is unknown, though some believe she was killed by poachers. Others say it was probably something less spectacular, like an attack by a dominant male or an illness.

There's one thing that no one who knew her wonders about,

though, and that's the fact that Lucy never really believed she was anything less than human.

Ok, so the part about Lucy being sexually attracted to male humans is a bit disturbing and TMI. Nonetheless, the article provided a fascinating look at animals who act closer to humans than we can imagine. Just a friendly reminder that all animals can be dangerous, however, so as they say, don't try this at home!

And I'm somewhat surprised that [Koko the gorilla](#) who uses sign language was kept off the list – Lucy the chimp could use sign language, so what about Koko?

To read the article in its entirety, [click here](#).

Taylhis' Most Wanted

During visits to the zoo, most kids will fantasize about which animal they would like to take home and have as a pet. There are many reasons why exotic and wild animals should not be kept as pets, but being an animal lover, I guess I never grew out of the mindset of a kid at the zoo – I still think about which ones I would like as pets. Well, actually, I'd like **all** of them as pets, but here are the top 10. Since this is purely fantasy, of course I did not take rational things into consideration like cost or cleaning up after or housing the animals, where's the fun in that? While you're at it, try putting your top few fantasy pets in the comments box below...

□

Taylhis Most Wanted:

African Grey parrot – Ugh, another large bird? Do I really

want more bird screaming to rile up the kids? But this is a fantasy list, so I'm going to build a huge tropical aviary with a little river for my birds, no problem. Members of this particular breed of parrot are incredibly smart, and their ability for exact mimicry is hilarious! I once posted a video of a little African Grey character named Silvia who did an awesome impression of Desi Arnaz (*Lucy, you got some 'splainin to do!*) as well as sarcastically (and hilariously) delivering the line, "*Well luddy-frickin'-dah!*"

Manatee – My favorite animal; manatees are gentle and intelligent. I find the manatee's graceful movements relaxing and therapeutic. Watching my manatee swim would be a great way to unwind after a stressful day!

Gorilla – Humans have much in common with these intelligent primates. It'd be incredible to get to know one on a personal basis.

Sea Horse – Well, these guys mate for life, so I'd like a pair of seahorses, which would then turn into hundreds ☺ But many of their behaviors are truly fascinating to watch!



Sea Lion – Like an aquatic dog, sea lions are intelligent, trainable, and beautiful swimmers. And so cute!

Goat – I've always loved goats; now that we live nearby many farms, this might be a possibility some day!

Huge Dog – Dogs are the greatest, and sometimes it seems like the larger the dog, the friendlier. So for a dog-lover without limitations on house size, wouldn't it be great to have a beautiful 150lb+ lap dog? I was thinking St. Bernard, Great Dane or Mastiff type dogs.

Octopus – A somewhat mysterious animal, though to be intelligent based in part upon its ability to manipulate items like jars and toys for food rewards.

Alligator – Huge reptiles with a bad rap; I would love the time to hand-raise and train a gator.

Tortoise – I really like tortoises, and it'd be really neat to create an exhibit to house one of those super-huge tortoises.

Honorable mention:

Marmoset – a cute furry little primate. Cute as he is, smaller primates are known for being temperamental, so this guy is a runner-up.



So there you have it. My husband commented on my list's lack of felines. True, I always blog about how much I would like a cat, but in the real world, all that's stopping me from getting a cat or two or ten is my cat allergy, so that's not

really the point of the list – it's more about forbidden animals. Big cats would be too scary to play with – I had a little cat who passed away, but after watching how suddenly and completely her moods could change, I gained a whole new respect for big cats, so no thanks!

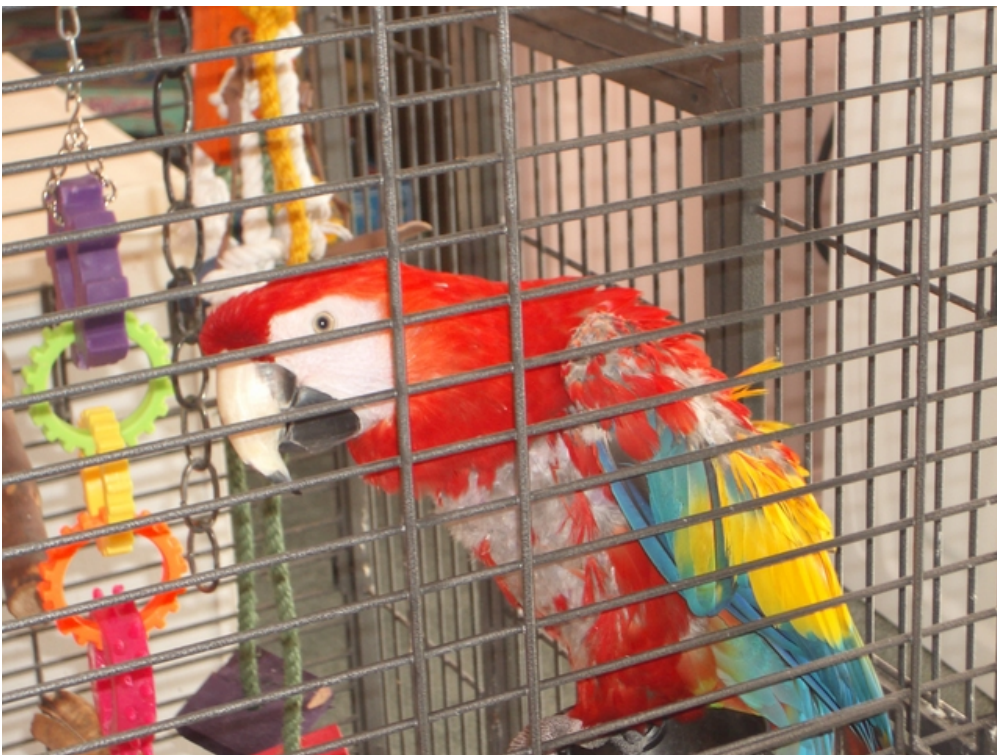
Supressing My Whim For Another Parrot...

Believe me, I am definitely not expressing that parrots are pets to get on a whim, not that any pets should be obtained on a whim. But I wouldn't really even recommend parrots, the loud and moody (however beautiful and insanely smart) creatures as pets, except to the perfect parrot owner – which might just be as rare as the gorgeous birds themselves. Due to a set of circumstances that transcribed long ago, we've found ourselves adapting to a be a parrot family. Years ago we adopted Squawky, as a needy unwanted baby, a Scarlet Macaw, who is now somewhere just older than 8 years old. He is finally starting to calm down just a tad, but he still makes me think of putting him in a more unused room of the house on an almost daily basis. That being said, it's time to share with you the video of a bird who re-kindled my childhood desire (not that I ever really lost it, but 4 kids and little sleep will certainly give one pause about adding any new pet to the family) to raise an African Grey Parrot – the type of parrot known more for their uncanny impressions and ability to reason than for their beautiful feathers. As a kid, I read a book that made me want the parrot in the first place. It is called *Harry's Mad* by Dick King-Smith (this author also wrote the story that the movie [The Water Horse](#)'s screenplay (good movie!!) is based upon), and it's a great read for young

adults (and maybe regular adults too? Might be basic, but fun – haven't tried it as an adult). And as for the video that made me again want an African Grey, despite the daily blows to my eardrums from the Scarlet Macaw? See for yourself; her name is Sylvia, and I especially love her Rhett Butler and Desi Arnaz impressions!

Trading Parrots

I've always wanted an African Grey parrot; it all started when I was a kid and I read the wonderful book [“Harry’s Mad” by Dick King-Smith](#), the guy who wrote the book-turned-movie, [The Water Horse](#). African Greys are not nearly as “beautiful” (colorful) as other parrots, but they sure can talk and even use logic to demonstrate an intelligence level equivalent to that of a 4-year-old human child. We did end up with a parrot, but we got the eye-candy version instead, a Scarlet Macaw. Here is a picture of Squawky – he was molting at the time, which is why his chest is gray:



At the time we got him, it was an opportunity we couldn't pass up: he was a previously owned bird who was still very young and inexpensive, and gorgeous, of course. We've had him for 6 years now, and he is part of the family. He has quite a personality, and I get a kick out of most of the things he does. He's in my laundry room, so it's an especially nice

break in my daily routine when I open the door and he bursts forth with a very enthusiastic "HI!". But there are days when I still long for my African Grey, mostly because Squawky is my husband's bird, which means that no one else is allowed to touch him since birds tend to bond to one person. I think Squawky loves me and the kids, but we are not allowed to touch him under any circumstances. We can talk to him, and he'll even talk back. He can be quite entertaining with his vocabulary of about 20 words, more if you count the human and animal sounds he likes to imitate. He especially likes to laugh. He likes to pick up toys and drop them, then he'll laugh. But sometimes, and it's especially horrible when he's molting, sometimes he screams so horribly loud, you cannot hear yourself talk or even think. I've had to threaten numerous times that my laundry duties will be forfeited to the owner of the parrot if I keep getting screamed at in the laundry room, but somehow, he always stops before it comes to that. So anyway, there was a recent article in the news about an amazing African Grey parrot named Yosuke Nakamura – he lives in Japan – who got lost and then found. He aided in his own rescue, even though he wouldn't talk to the police! Read the article here:

TOKYO, Japan (AP) – When Yosuke the parrot flew out of his cage and got lost, he did exactly what he had been taught – recite his name and address to a stranger willing to help.

Lost in Tokyo, Yosuke the parrot was able to give his name and address to get taken home.

Police rescued the African grey parrot two weeks ago from a neighbor's roof in the city of Nagareyama, near Tokyo. After spending a night at the station, he was transferred to a nearby veterinary hospital while police searched for clues, local policeman Shinjiro Uemura said.

He kept mum with the cops, but began chatting after a few days

with the vet.

"I'm Mr. Yosuke Nakamura," the bird told the veterinarian, according to Uemura. The parrot also provided his full home address, down to the street number, and even entertained the hospital staff by singing songs.

"We checked the address, and what do you know, a Nakamura family really lived there. So we told them we've found Yosuke," Uemura said.

The Nakamura family told police they had been teaching the bird its name and address for about two years.

But Yosuke apparently wasn't keen on opening up to police officials.

"I tried to be friendly and talked to him, but he completely ignored me," Uemura said.

If it weren't for the expense and especially the screaming, I would definitely have my African Grey by now!