



‘I treated him like my son,’ former Ikea monkey owner testifies

CTVNews.ca Staff

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The former owner of Toronto’s “Ikea monkey” gave emotional testimony in court Thursday as she fights to regain possession of an animal she said she treated like a son.

Yasmin Nakhuda has been fighting Story Book Farm Primate Sanctuary for custody of Darwin, the monkey who garnered international attention late last year after he was spotted in an Ikea parking lot wearing a miniature shearling coat and a diaper.

The monkey was confiscated by Toronto Animal Services after he was found wandering around the Ikea parking lot. It is illegal to keep monkeys as pets in Toronto.

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PHOTOS



Yasmin Nakhuda is seen testifying in this court sketch on Thursday, May 30, 2013. (John Mantha for CTV News)



The battle for Darwin, a monkey that garnered international attention after he was spotted in an Ikea parking lot, begins in Oshawa, Ont. on May 30, 2013. The monkey is shown in this image from the Darling Darwin Monkey page on Facebook.



Yasmin Nakhuda leaves Ontario Superior Court in Oshawa, Ont., Friday, Feb. 1, 2013. (Chris Young / THE CANADIAN PRESS)



A small monkey wearing a winter coat and a diaper apparently looks for its owners in an IKEA parking lot as customers take photos in Toronto on Sunday Dec. 9, 2012. (HO / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

Nakhuda, a real estate lawyer, was the first person to testify as a trial got underway in an Oshawa, Ont., courtroom that will determine who should care for Darwin.

On the stand, she cried as she likened her relationship to Darwin to that of a mother and son.

"I think when I had my two children I didn't have time to mother them -- I was more focused on building my practice," Nakhuda said through tears. "Having Darwin ... was like the chance to experience motherhood again."

"I treated him like my son. It sounds bizarre to some people, but that's how we treated him."

Nakhuda said she brought Darwin everywhere, including to work and the gym.

When she went to an Ikea store in North York in December, she kept the monkey in a double-locked crate, telling him he was not permitted into the furniture store.

“I explained that to Darwin,” Nakhuda testified. “He understands when you have a conversation with him.”

After the monkey escaped, he was seized by authorities and placed at the sanctuary.

Nakhuda testified that she knew it was illegal to keep a pet monkey in Toronto, but argued she was tricked by Animal Services into signing over ownership.

As the trial got underway Thursday, a lawyer for the sanctuary said it was dropping allegations that Nakhuda abused the monkey.

The lawyer said the allegations were withdrawn in interest of keeping the four-day trial short.

Nakhuda has been unsuccessful in two court bids to get Darwin back on an interim basis.

In April, she released a children’s book series, called Adventures of Darling Darwin, with sales of the book going toward legal fees in her fight for the monkey.

She also set up a Facebook page that features [numerous photos Darwin and videos of the monkey](#) taking a bath and snuggling with Nakhuda’s family.

The page has also been home to vicious debates between Nakhuda and her supporters, and those who believe Darwin should remain at the sanctuary.

Animal Services officers are expected to take the witness stand Friday.

Before entering court Thursday, her lawyer Ted Charney said he was “looking forward” to opportunity to examine the animal service officials who were involved in the case.

The trial will also take place June 10 and 11.

The judge who has heard the interim motions has stressed that the case is not a custody battle, since Darwin is not a child. Rather Nakhuda is asking for an order to recover possession of personal property.

With a report from CTV’s Austin Delaney and with files from The Canadian Press