



Sanctuary drops abuse allegations against Darwin's 'mom' in IKEA monkey case

Allison Jones

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A small monkey wearing a winter coat and a diaper apparently looks for its owners at an IKEA in Toronto on Sunday Dec. 9, 2012. (Browley Page/The Canadian Press)

A primate sanctuary is no longer alleging that the Ikea monkey was abused by the woman who calls herself his “mom” and wept in court Thursday as she described the bond she shared with her “son.”

Yasmin Nakhuda took her baby monkey, Darwin, everywhere after she paid an exotic pet dealer \$5,000 cash for him last July, she testified. Ms. Nakhuda, a Toronto real estate lawyer, took the animal to work, to the gym, grocery shopping, to a wedding and even in the shower with her, she said.

She took him to an Ikea store in December, double-locked his crate and locked the car, telling him Ikea would not allow him in the store and that she would be right back.

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

But Darwin escaped and caused quite a stir, running around the furniture store parking lot in a little faux-shearling coat. Toronto Animal Services scooped him up and sent him to Story Book Farm Primate Sanctuary in Sunderland, Ont.

She felt like she had lost her son, said the mother of two boys, 12 and 16.

“I think when I had my two children I didn’t have time to mother them – I was more focused on building my practice,” Ms. 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.”

Ms. Nakhuda sued the primate sanctuary to get Darwin back and was the first witness to testify at the start of the trial on Thursday. She alleges animal services tricked her into surrendering the monkey. The case is not a custody battle – as Darwin is not a child – rather, Ms. Nakhuda is suing for recovery of personal property.

She has gone to court twice before in unsuccessful bids to get Darwin back on an interim basis, and at one of those hearings, the sanctuary alleged that she had abused the monkey by “strangling” him and hitting him with a wooden spoon.

At the outset of the trial on Thursday, Kevin Toyne, the lawyer for the primate sanctuary, said it was withdrawing those allegations in the interest of keeping the trial short. It is scheduled to be heard over four days.

Ms. Nakhuda, who vehemently denied the allegations at the time, shook her head in court as Mr. Toyne made the announcement.

She testified that she knew it was illegal in Toronto to own a pet monkey and said that if she gets Darwin back, the family will move to the city of Kawartha Lakes, a municipality that has no such bylaw.

There is a large amount of public interest in the case. Before the trial began, the case had to be moved to a larger courtroom to hold the dozens of members of the media, supporters of both Ms. Nakhuda and the sanctuary and members of the public who are attending.

The trial continues on Friday.