

## My Year of Living Dangerously

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My name is Lea Artz. I am 11 years old. I live in a house in Utah. It is jam packed full of 23 animals that are from 7 species! This article is about learning to live with our African Grey named Mohali and my struggles trying to be loved by him.

My family lived in Lesotho, Africa for 5 years, where we learned to speak Sesotho. Mohali is a Sesotho name that means Brave warrior. We hoped that this name would help him be brave. It worked because he is sometimes a little too brave like when he used to bite me even when I was gentle and loving!

It all started when my family decided to buy Mohali. I was so looking forward to having a parrot that I could snuggle and play with. We would visit him a lot at the breeders house. They had all of their grey babies in a big aquarium that was in their bathroom. When we were there I would sit on a stool and watch him. I would even hold and pet him. In my eyes he was cuter than all of the other babies. And he seemed to like me too.

Finally the day came to take him home. My Mom drove the car and I held Mohali in a wicker basket on my lap. He growled the entire way home but I gently stroked his head and talked softly to reassure him that we would be good friends. I was hoping he would be my special baby just like in the movies. And for the first little while, he was. I would help my mom bathe him, and then hold him under my shirt while he dried. He would take naps in my lap while I practiced the piano, and we would play with all his toys on the living room floor. We were very close buddies.

Then when he was about 6 months old, things started to change. A little bit at a time he started to get less and less snugly and his nip got harder and harder. For example, he stopped letting me pick him up from the top of his cage. If I tried he would bite me so it would bleed. The worst was when I would lean to his beak for a kiss and he would suddenly bite my lip. It REALLY, REALLY hurt. When he would sit on the back of the couch he would sneak up and peck me on the head hard. The worst part was that he only did this to me and not my Mom, his favorite person, or my Dad or older sister. My skin and my feelings hurt a lot.

Then I got thinking that I shouldn't take it personally. I figured the reason he didn't like me and was biting me all the time was that I was scaring him somehow or making him feel uncomfortable. I started thinking about why he was feeling that way and came up with the ideas that maybe he just didn't like kids. Maybe I was too energetic around him and made him worried. So whenever I would come in from playing outside or had a friend over and was being active I would just tone down my energy before going near him. I was hoping that would make me seem more grownup and calmer. I pretended he was a wild bird that might fly away if I was too loud and boisterous.

Guess what? It didn't work. He kept biting me whenever he could catch me. He especially hated my toes or I guess you could say he love my toes because he would sneak up and bite them. But I didn't give up. I just kept talking to him and trying to keep a low energy level around him.

One day I noticed that he would let me pick him up whenever he flew to ground. We decided that since that was the only thing he would let me do, I would always be the one to pick him up

and give him straight to my Mom. That way he would associate me with getting to Mom, who he loves the most. I was his chauffeur to Mom. I also let him eat off of my plate but I kept my fingers away.

This was all I did for a real long time. Bring him to my Mom and let him nibble my food. Finally, when Mohali was about 1 ½ years old he started to talk. It was the most surprising thing when we realized he was talking in my voice!!! He imitated me calling the dogs to go into the kennel and me yelling for my Mom. He was even copying me shrieking and yelling and laughing like I do when my Mom and Dad tickle me. It was a HUGE compliment. I had been chosen to be his human voice! I was so happy. I don't know why he picked me but it made it worth all the trouble.

And then the big breakthrough happened. Mohali flew off of his perch onto the ground. So for the millionth time I picked him up and held out my hand to my mom for her to take him. But he gripped my hand real tight. He wouldn't budge. Mohali didn't want to leave me!!! So I scarily leaned forward and gave him a kiss on his beak and he didn't bite me! He made kissing noises for more kisses!! Then to reward him I took him up to my room and put him on the back of my desk chair. I sung and talked to him. And every time I leaned to him he would reach toward me for a kiss.

So, that is my story of how never to give up on your bird. Never take it personally when your bird isn't like in the movies because that is not real but your bird is. Try to discover the problem and if that is not the solution think of something else but never stop trying. I also learned that you have to let the bird decide to come to you and while you wait try to find other things to love him for like him using your voice. Be happy just to live near him and someday he will come to you.

I still keep my energy down around Mohali. And I've grown some too. He still gives me kisses whenever I ask and lets me pick him up from his cage. So, that concludes my year of living dangerously. It was really worth that year of bites and sadness because I now have a whole lifetime of love with Momo.