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Our pet chimpanzee ruined my life, claims stepdaughter of French singer

The stepdaughter of the late French singer Léo Ferré claims the family's pet chimpanzee ruined her childhood as it installed a reign of terror at the family chateau, a new autobiography claims.



The late French singer Léo Ferré Photo: Rex Features



By [Henry Samuel](#), Paris

10:29AM BST 22 May 2013

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Some children blame an unhappy childhood on a divorce or a painful family secret.

But for Annie Butor, the source of her chagrin was a chimpanzee named Pépée (Babe), whose position in the family could be summed up by George Orwell's famous phrase from *Animal Farm*: "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others."

Adopted in 1960, the female chimp was treated as her mother and crooner husband's favourite daughter and could do no wrong in their eyes, Miss Butor writes in *How Could I Forget? Madelaine and Léo Ferré, 1950-1973*.

"Pépée had her own bedroom, her toys, she dined with us, took siestas, drove the car on Léo's lap. In the evening, before slipping on her pyjamas, she would politely drink her infusion before hugging us tenderly and very tight," she writes in an extract published by *Libération* newspaper.

Soon, however, with the strength of eight men, Pépée became an uncontrollable tyrant who would strip guests – including once a government prefect and wife – of their clothes and valuables, bite others who failed to accede to its whims and once stole a baby, which it took to the roof despite Leo waving a toy pistol at it and shouting: "Daddy's not happy. Daddy's going to shoot."

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Miss Butor's account of the descent into animal tyranny reads as a cautionary tale into the laissez-faire, peace and love attitude of the 1960s adopted by her anarchist stepfather, who eschewed all types of authority.

This was summed up in a warning from Gin, the monkey trainer who sold Pépée to Mr Ferré and who said: "I divorced three times because of my chimpanzees, be careful! More than any other animal, a chimpanzee must know who is the master otherwise you are heading for disaster."

Despite its increasingly unruly behaviour, the singer would strike off any friend who dared call their "second daughter" an animal. "We will not tolerate anyone calling her a monkey. We are not taming Pépée, we're bringing her up!," he exclaimed.

Covered with bites, the servants eventually fled the 16th chateau, now totally given over to animals, including a 350kg pig called Baba that would watch TV and have its ears waxed with olive oil. "(Pépée) knew she risked nothing by laying down the law; she was allowed to do anything she wanted.

Above all, she wanted power. And she got it," she writes.

Friends refused to call, terrified of being confronted with "a dark form around 1.2m tall that rushed towards you and had no qualms knocking you over, baring its huge canines, ready to bite your if you weren't nice to it." Eventually the daughter moved out to live with her biological father, claiming the chimp made family life and study impossible.

Finally, in 1968, Léo himself could take no more of this "mad life" of his creation, leaving the chateau in the Lot for Paris, where he gained [French](#) fame and fortune.

In his absence, the chimpanzee suffered a fall and refused to be approached. Eventually, Madelaine asked a hunter neighbour to put it out of its misery by shooting the animal. Léo's requiem to the primate would be his song, Pépée.

The singer blamed his wife for the animal's death, and the pair divorced.

But to this day, the daughter said she was not the guilty party. "He exorcised (his grief) by writing this song. But I hold it against him for painting himself as a victim whereas he was nothing but a chicken."