

# Bobo 1951-1968

## ANACORTES' FAVORITE SON

**T**o Bill Mitchell, he was just the “black, hairy kid” from up the block. But to Anacortes, & to a country that discovered him through newsreels & *Life* magazine, Bobo was a sensation.

In 1951, Bill Lowman paid \$4000 to a big-game hunter for a baby gorilla. Lowman had read about apes & was fascinated to learn “there were these animals that close to being human.”

His mother Jean, who took over Bobo’s care, felt likewise. She “poured out all my love & tenderness to make a little human out of him rather than facing the fact he was a gorilla.”

Jean consulted primate experts on how to care for her new charge. She bathed & oiled him daily, kept notes on his behavior & dressed him like a proper boy.

Bobo sat in a high chair where he was fed with a spoon & drank tea from a mug. He broke dishes regularly & raided the cupboard, liking foods better when “snitched,” noted Jean. Tabasco made him “dance a jig on the window ledge after he got a taste.”

The phone had a box over it, the windows were covered with chicken wire & a mousetrap protected the bookshelves. Bill’s brother-in-law Neil Carey once watched Bobo catch the family dog by the tail, topple him & “with no effort slide the unhappy animal across the smooth wood floor.”

Bobo wrestled with Bill & created chaos at his daughters’ tea parties. He daydreamed at the window with his favorite pillow & snapped off the television when he craved attention.



*Bobo & Jean Lowman visit with the Mitchell brothers — colorful character Bill Mitchell is on the right.*

He received so much attention from Anacortes, the Lowmans finally posted a notice in the local paper limiting visits so the gorilla, & the family, could have some peace.

Carey says that when Bill’s father came home after a hard day as a stonemason, he & Bobo would head upstairs to listen to the evening news. “Sometimes later I might find both asleep, Bobo wrapped safely in Dad’s muscular arm.

That may have been the only time my mother-in-law got any rest.”

When he became too big for the house (“Imagine a three-year-old child with the strength of a seventeen-year-old,” said Bill), the traumatic decision was made to place Bobo with the Woodland Park Zoo. The move was especially hard for Jean, who lived at the zoo for three weeks to help with the transition.

A star attraction at the zoo until he died of a blood clot, Bobo’s pelt is now on display at the Museum of History & Industry in Seattle.

