



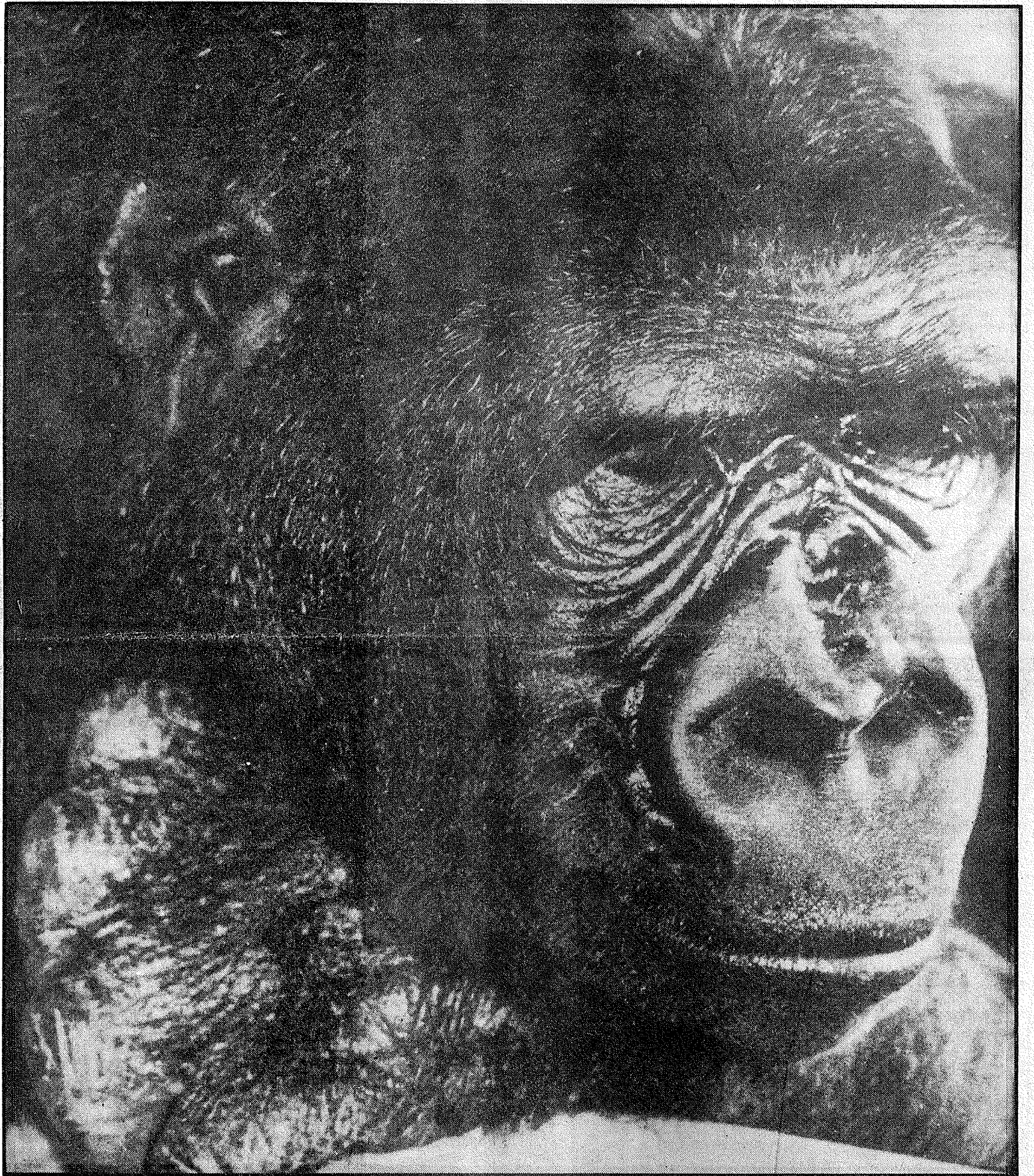
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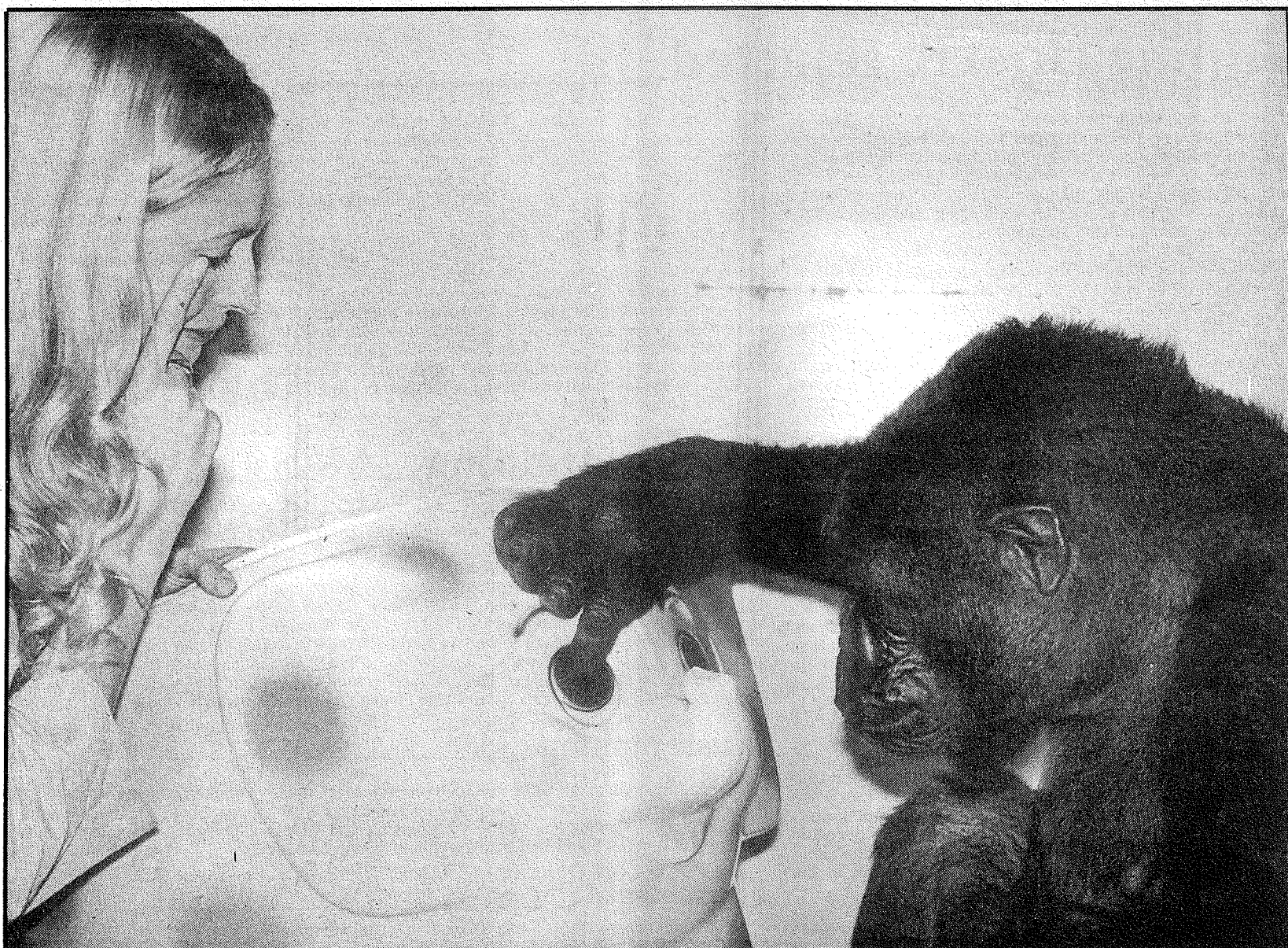


Koko. Photo by Ron Cohn.

*Koko comes
to Skyline;
nut lips to you!*

See page 10.

Koko comes to Skyline; nut lips to you!



After Penny pointed to her eye, Koko pointed to the eye of the elephant. Later, Penny asked where Koko's eye was, and as a joke, Koko pointed to her nose. Photos courtesy of the Gorilla Foundation.

"Candy?"
"No candy."
"Nut lips!"

It was not your ordinary interview. At least it wasn't mine; I rarely get fondled—or insulted, even in such picturesque terms as "Nut lips."

But Koko is not an ordinary interviewee. She is a seven-year-old lowland gorilla who is learning to converse in English through sign language. I interviewed her at her new home in the woods of Skyline Boulevard where she recently moved in her special trailer from Stanford with her companion and instructor, Penny Patterson.

Koko has her own way with language. The logic of the insult became clear as explained by Dr. Patterson, who acted as translator. An earlier—and unscheduled—visitor had brought Koko candy, and she asked me for more. Since I came prepared with questions but not candy, I couldn't give her any. So, like many a small child, she called me a bad name.

In this case "lips" is the term she uses for women it is derived from lipstick which she enjoys and associates with women. "Nut" is an insult picked up from the conversation and criticisms of her instructors who often say something is "nuts" or "nutty."

Koko's term for man is "foot," derived from her first boyfriend who would tickle her feet, according to Dr. Patterson.

My first impressions of Koko, once I got used to the fact that this was really a gorilla behind the chain link fence, were an expressive and intelligent face, vivid black and radiating personality, and a tremendous sense of yearning to be close.

Confusion ensued as Koko kept asking Dr. Patterson in sign language for the visitor to "close come"—and to give

her candy. When neither of these happened, Koko acted frustrated. She bounded around the cage and gestured while Dr. Patterson scolded her affectionately in English, like a recalcitrant pre-schooler who is not behaving for guests.

Koko understands English and sign language, but can only speak sign language because a gorilla's vocal equipment does not allow speech.

Koko wanted me to sit on a stool next to her cage. Dr. Patterson said no, because when the earlier visitor had sat there, Koko had torn her pocket. In sign language, Koko said she would "sit polite," but Dr. Patterson commented. "I don't believe you." Koko has lots in common with a young child, Dr. Patterson explained, such as a desire to play jokes, call names and on occasion, to tell a lie.

Not speaking sign language, I was frustrated at not understanding what was going on, but not as frustrated as Koko, who uses her hard learned words and then is not understood.

"She is generally Miss Wonderful, Dr. Patterson explained, but is suffering now both from the unsettling experience of moving and of having too many visitors as new volunteers are interviewed to work with her.

We tried a game of tug-of-war with a blanket, but Koko handed me the blanket and used it as an excuse to get close and feel my hand.

Then she pursed her lips and blew in my face. I blew back. The roast beef sandwich I had just eaten for lunch must have satisfied her, because she kept reaching for my fingers and blowing. Then she wriggled up to the fence and touched her arm pit, asking me to tickle her.

More tickling, blowing and hand holding. "She wanted you close; she wanted to touch you. If the fence were not there she would be in your lap," Dr. Patterson said later. The blowing is another way she can tell more

about the visitor.

The three of us shared some orange-flavored lipstick which Koko applied with a professional touch.

We finally got into the tug-of-war game, which Koko enjoyed thoroughly—with variations. It turned into a "scare" game—when Koko—a sturdy 175 pounds—would yank the blanket away and then jump up and down fiercely. I was expected to cower convincingly as if scared by her fury.

I did. Then we had lunch. Koko, more or less obediently, asked for each item in turn—potato, sweet potato, meat, vegetables. But she added her own little twist. According to Dr. Patterson, she knows the words for parsley, flower, and smell; however, she prefers to call parsley and some other vegetables "stink." So "stink" she asked for and parsley she got.

By this time I was accepted as a friendly, if stupid, presence, and Koko shared her lunch with me. After daintily accepting each piece, she would chew it and carefully take out a piece about the size of a sesame seed and present it to me. I made a gallant, but probably unconvincing, attempt to appear to have eaten these delicacies and ended up with gooey hands.

This was a symbolic feeding, a friendly gesture among gorillas, Dr. Patterson explained.

After lunch, Koko was clearly tired of having her tricks shown off to a visitor who clearly did not understand her. Because she did not cooperate, we all left her. Another volunteer was scheduled to sit with her for the rest of the afternoon until her evening play time with Michael, the younger male gorilla who has quarters in the other end of the trailer.

As we left, Koko was staring pensively out of the window with a faraway look in her eyes.

by Marion Softky

Gorilla Foundation needs help

Koko and Michael, the two young gorillas who have been learning sign language at Stanford, are settling into their new home off Skyline Boulevard and resuming their lessons in sign language.

The move from their familiar quarters at Stanford has been difficult. Both Koko and Michael at first lost their appetite, became quiet and subdued, and were much less conversational than usual, according to their friend and teacher Penny Patterson. For a while Koko was asking for the shades to be drawn and the lights turned off at night time, but now she is better, unless something disturbs her—like a recent power failure.

The six-acre property offers a more natural and peaceful environment for the gorillas than the Stanford campus. On good days they can romp outside on the grass and take walks through the redwoods and fruit trees. They always walk separately because when they go together their leashes become tangled as they play.

Much still needs to be done to convert the hilltop site into a secure and comfortable home for adult gorillas. The Gorilla

Foundation, the non-profit organization which is sponsoring the studies of the intellectual development of the young lowland gorillas, needs volunteers to help with a host of activities and money to build a permanent building and outdoor enclosure, large and strong enough to house the gorillas when they are grown.

"One of the things we need is help," Dr. Patterson said. "I think a lot of people would like to help if they knew."

Among the types of help needed are volunteer carpenters and electricians and people who can help with correspondence and sorting data.

To work with Koko, the foundation needs "native signers," people who grew up in homes where sign language was used.

Volunteers who have learned sign language as adults are also needed to work with Michael, whose vocabulary is not as advanced; but Koko needs more experienced teachers. "With many new people, she knows more than they do. It is frustrating for her and the other person," Dr. Patterson said.

The gorillas have people with them from 8:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m., and the job is a rigorous one. "It's a hard job to work with a gorilla the whole day. You have to be on your toes every minute," Dr. Patterson said. She should know, since she has been working with Koko much of the time since the gorilla came to Stanford from the San Francisco zoo as a one-year-old baby in 1972. Michael, two years younger, came several years later and is also progressing well with his studies.

Koko's vocabulary is somewhere between 300 and 800 words, Dr. Patterson estimated. The lower figure is determined by tests which involve constant reiteration to the point it makes the gorilla impatient to keep up the drill. The higher limit is the number of words she has used, but may not have assimilated into her vocabulary.

Koko and Michael do more than just talk. They have developed human ways of using language—to rhyme, to joke, to pun and even to lie, Dr. Patterson says. And they can look

forward to events in the future or discuss events in the past.

Gorillas are shy, placid and unaggressive; they do not represent any kind of hazard to the community, Dr. Patterson emphasizes. What people don't understand is that they are not bloodthirsty; they are not King Kongs," she said. "The important thing is they don't want to leave. They want to be with us. Instinctively they want to be with their family because in the wild if they lose their group, they die."

In addition, Dr. Patterson said, the trailer in which the gorillas live is very secure with double locks and alarms to prevent escape.

One of the highest priorities is to build more space for the gorillas, both indoors and outdoors, including an enclosure of about a quarter acre which is large enough for them to exercise in and strong enough to hold them when they reach full size. When they are grown, Koko will grow from her present weight of 175 to about 200 pounds, while Michael could reach 300 pounds or more.

For the long term, Dr. Patterson and her associates hope that Koko and Michael will eventually mate and establish a semi-free-living group of gorillas that may use sign language among themselves.

She explained the long-term goal of the research: "We want to follow the development of the adults to see if they will teach their offspring language. If they do not teach it, what gestures will be handed down from generation to generation? What kinds of concepts can an adult gorilla maintain?"

As a beginning, Dr. Patterson says she has observed Koko and Michael using sign language to each other. Michael even understands Koko, but Koko is so used to being spoken to aloud as well as by signs, she does not always notice that Michael is using language to her.

Will Koko and Michael breed when the time comes several years hence?

Dr. Patterson replied, "It's up to them. We'll give them every opportunity."

by Marion Softky

Gorilla information

The Gorilla Foundation may be reached by writing P. O. Box 3002, Stanford, Ca., 94305. People interested in volunteering may call 851-2853. Members receive a semi-annual newsletter featuring information on the development of Koko and Michael and spectacular pictures of the gorillas by Dr. Ronald Cohn. Memberships run from \$10 a year for regular members to \$1000 for patrons.

Koko will be cover girl for 'National Geographic'

BY MARION SOFTKY

When the January "National Geographic" appears in mailboxes in the next week or so, local readers will recognize the cover picture as Koko, Woodside's educated gorilla, cuddling her new kitten.

The title of the cover story is "Koko's Kitten." Four pages of pictures show Koko playing with the little Manx (no tail) kitten given her by Karen Galinetti of Woodside Delicatessen.

The article is being run as an update of an earlier article on Koko in 1978. The occasion was a test roll of pictures taken by Ron Cohn, secretary and treasurer of the Gorilla Foundation, which he sent to the Geographic Society. Although the society no longer sponsors the research on gorilla speech, it still provides the foundation with photographic materials.

Actually Koko was offered her choice of three kittens from a litter abandoned by their mother and nursed by a dog, says Dr. Penny Patterson, president of the Gorilla Foundation and Koko's chief mentor. Koko selected the cutest and liveliest kitten and named him "All Ball," possibly because he looked so much like a ball without a tail.

Koko still likes to play with All Ball, even though he has grown spoiled and feisty and learned to bite. Once he bit Koko on the stomach and she dropped him like a hot potato. Even so, "She's incredibly nice to that cat. They still play together," Dr. Patterson comments.

Despite their publicity, Koko and her younger companion, Michael, lead a quiet life in the woods above Woodside. They do their lessons in American Sign Language each day, and still have time to play with their

human family and each other.

Koko and Mike are progressing nicely with their program to learn sign language and communicate in speech with humans, Dr. Patterson reports.

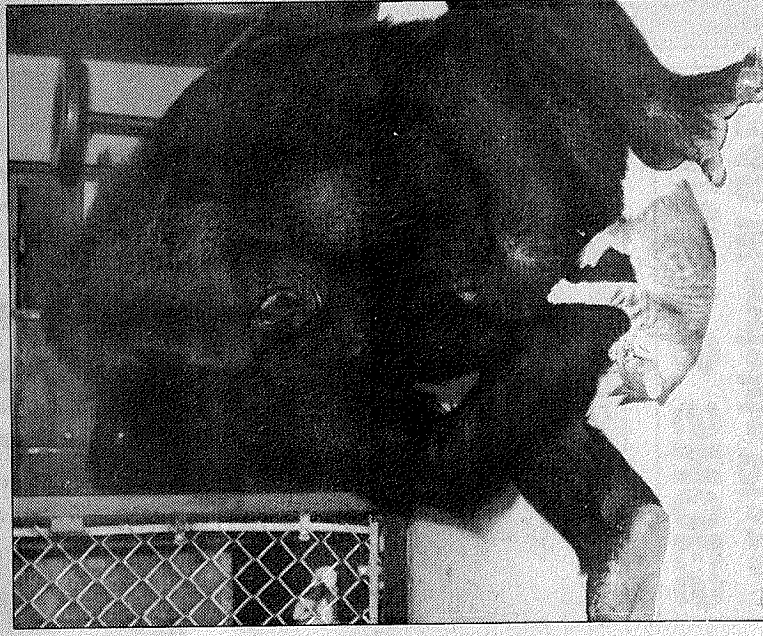
For the long term Dr. Patterson and the Gorilla Foundation are looking for a new home, possibly in Hawaii. Dr. Patterson is looking at several places in Hawaii where the climate is much closer to the tropical rain forests which are the gorillas' native habitat, than the chilly hills of Skyline where they must stay inside much of the time.

Also Dr. Patterson hopes that when they have space to roam and to be apart or together as the mood hits that they will be more likely to mate. "We feel if and when the environment changes, that will help," she says.

Dr. Patterson does not expect to be ready to move for another year or so. "We are laying the groundwork now," she says. When they find new quarters, "all we need to do is raise the money to develop them."

People interested in participating in the education of the gorillas and conservation of the species are invited to join the Gorilla Foundation, 17820 Skyline Blvd., Woodside, CA 94062. Memberships start at \$25 for regular and \$10 for students and seniors. For a \$1000 donation you get a copy of "The Education of Koko" autographed by Dr. Patterson and Koko. A \$5000 donation brings a work of art by one of the gorillas.

Meanwhile, like everyone else, the gorillas and their human family are preparing for Christmas. Koko will be getting a jack-in-the-box which she picked out of a catalog and she will be decorating a tree with toys and beads. Because she has a "love-hate relationship" with alligators, she will also get a surprise present—a big stuffed alligator bag filled with goodies.



KOKO'S NEWEST PLAYMATE is the kitten "All Ball." The playful pair will be featured on the cover of the January issue of the National Geographic magazine with a four-page picture spread inside. Photo by Ron Cohn.