

Star of stage, song and home: Nashville Zoo Assistant GM: Jessica Peach



2010



2008



2001



1998



1996



1994



1989



1982

Nashville Zoo's Assistant GM Jessica Peach experienced a self-described "storybook childhood" in the north central town of Charles City, Iowa, where the gasoline powered tractor was invented. While growing up on land classified as a century farm, which means it has been farmed by the same family for more than a 100 years, Jessica developed her work ethic of working hard while having fun. Other than farm chores, her first job was raising livestock for auction. She fondly remembers sitting on a five-gallon bucket singing to her sheep when she was only nine years old. With the proceeds from that animal auction, she opened her first checking account. Over the years, she also raised pigs and cows for competition in county fairs, winning best of show a few times.

After graduating from high school, Jessica attended Iowa State University in its nationally ranked agribusiness program thinking she was going to carry on the family tradition of farming. After two years, she left the university as she discovered school was not what she wanted, and she said she felt she was wasting time and money. Jessica used the skills she learned in accounting, marketing and human resources management classes to start a career in retail. She made the decision to leave America's heartland and move to Nashville, the country music capital.

Jessica chose Nashville because her older sister, Anissa, lived there. While growing up the talented duo had dreams of being the next famous

sister singing act. In 1998, Jessica was the Iowa winner in the National Karaoke finals, and won a trip for four to the Bahamas to compete. Unfortunately, she didn't win, but still has fond memories of her first trip outside of the United States, which included swimming in the ocean in the middle of the night with her best friend and her sister and brother-in-law and meeting an American Gladiator star.

Music is one of her passions. High on her bucket list is to attend the Austin City Limits music Festival, a three-day, eight-stage event with more than 130 bands performing. A favorite singer is Martin Sexton, an American folk singer-songwriter. She shares this fervor with her older brother, Chris. She claims if she wasn't working for SSA, she would want to be a music promoter.

Jessica was working for one of the country's largest music and entertainment retailers when she was wooed away to join the Nashville Zoo retail staff in 2005. The job not only honed her management skills, she met her husband, James, while working at the music store.

Jessica's family

The two have been married a couple of years, but have been together for more than eight years. They have an 18-month-old daughter, Sofia, and are expecting another girl in the spring of 2011. Jessica said she's anxiously waiting for the opportunity to meet her new daughter as well as to enjoy her favorite foods: the pregnancy-denied sushi and beer. Her husband is a house husband while attending school to become a journalism

teacher. Jessica shared she really enjoys being a mom, and when she's not working, she's spending time with her daughter. She quickly points out that she tries to sneak an afternoon nap every few days or so. "It's important for my sanity," she laughingly said. Jessica's not sure why she waited to have children.

The woman, who's never without her tube of chap stick, said she's never done anything crazy that she'd actually want to admit to. In describing herself, Jessica said she was dedicated and loyal, but said that her husband told her to add clumsy. "I can't say that he is wrong as I do have bad days of being clumsy," she said.

A challenge that Jessica has embraced is to become more like Atticus Finch, a character who serves as a moral hero in her favorite book, the Pulitzer winner, *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

Jessica describes herself as a numbers person, but yet she also enjoys training others to perform their jobs more efficiently. A few years ago, she and the rest of Nashville Zoo SSA staff had to step up when Paul Karros, the GM, was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident. Jessica motivated the team to pull together to help make the zoo's annual fundraiser a success. The goal was to make Paul proud and to do the best for the Nashville Zoo.

With work, family and all her other obligations, Jessica has to fit 25 hours into every day. And she does. It may help that the family cancelled their cable television subscription as Jessica said she was ridiculously addicted to the most mindless programs!