

# Mr. Eckerd's House

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

Mr. Eckerd at the end of the street was a different fellow with a different kind of house. He let kids from the neighborhood come see his house, but only if they had written permission from their parents, and if he'd already spoken to the parents before. His was not the sort of house to just let strangers wander into, after all.

What made it so different, you ask? Well, it was full of animals. He shared his home with rescued animals that the county couldn't keep. He had an exotic animals license, which gave him permission to have things like monkeys, large cats, and other strange creatures live on his property.

If you passed his house as you rode down the street in a car or on a bike, you would immediately know which house was his. His was the one with the ivy-covered brick wall around it and the iron gate across the driveway. Even the iron gate had animals prancing and jumping in twists of black metal.

Once you went inside, the hedges lining the driveway were carved into the shapes of animals. There was a dolphin jumping, a kangaroo hopping, a giraffe reaching skyward, and a squirrel holding an acorn. There were other pretty plants on the grounds, too, especially around a giant bird cage, an aviary, which held birds with long feathers all the colors of the rainbow. Those were nice, but not as nice as what you saw when you went inside.

From the outside it just looked like an old brick mansion, but it held a lot of surprises. The double doors with the lion's head doorknockers opened into a large tiled entryway. In the wooden paneled walls all around, there were fish tanks with exotic and colorful fishes. The ceilings were painted with scenes from around the world, all full of plants and rare animals. Rooms opened off from there, but they were just rooms, and not what someone visited to see.

Continuing down the hall, you came to a large courtyard, which had been caged in, partly open to the sky. A pack of tiny monkeys shimmied up and down ornamental trees and swung from vines. You had to walk through a caged tunnel in their domain to cross into other parts of the house. They chattered and called out to whomever walked in, hoping for treats of fruits, nuts, and seeds.

Behind that, the hall continued to a room full of snakes and lizards in heated terrariums. It felt like a desert in that room, so dry and hot. It was not everyone's favorite room, but it certainly was interesting. The final room was actually out back, and definitely not something to miss.

You had to leave the building through the back doors and walk down a covered walkway to a large cage, much like the glass bird cage or a greenhouse, but much larger. It was there you would usually find Mr. Eckerd on a marble bench next to some carvings of jungle animals. He was watching the Bengal tiger that prowled back and forth inside the cage, a growling beast that occasionally showed its fangs, but seemed to have an understanding with its landlord.

Mr. Eckerd's house was the strangest and most unique place in town, a place very well worth seeing, but only if you had your parent's permission!



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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What is different about Mr. Eckerd's house?
  - A. It's big and creepy.
  - B. It's haunted.
  - C. It's full of flowers and gardens.
  - D. It has wild animals inside and outside.
  
2. Where can you NOT find images of animals at Mr. Eckerd's house?
  - A. on the gates
  - B. carved into the hedges
  - C. in tanks and cages
  - D. painted on the ceilings
  
3. What kind of live animal is NOT at Mr. Eckerd's house?
  - A. fish
  - B. snakes and lizards
  - C. monkeys
  - D. elephants
  
4. What exhibit or animal room seems to be the least popular for most people?
  - A. the tiger
  - B. the monkeys
  - C. the birds
  - D. the snakes and reptiles
  
5. According to the story, what seems to be Mr. Eckerd's favorite animal at his house?
  - A. the tiger
  - B. the monkeys
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