

Animal Kind International: A Seed is Planted

By: Karen Menczer



Burbujita, Amigo, and Suyapa, 3 dogs at HHHH's sanctuary, waiting for their new cement pad kennel to be constructed. Previously, the shelter floor was mud and grass. This new surface will be much more hygienic. Fabrizia Velasquez donated the supplies and brought over some of the workers to help Pilar improve the sanctuary. Construction took place over July 4 weekend

In a village in Guatemala, in the Peten, a starving dog approached us—his hunger over-riding his fear. I fed him the bread I had brought for lunch. This visibly angered the group of Americans I was working with (there are hungry people in this village). In Cambodia, I watched a dog die on the side of the road, unable to do anything about it. No one around me seemed concerned. In Haiti, to the taunts of local kids, I grabbed the tiniest kitten out of the road before the next vehicle drove over her. But then what to do with her? Many of us have been in this position--when you are in a country for just a short time, with no home base, with no local animal welfare contacts, what do you do when you see an animal suffering?

So when my husband Ron and I moved to Uganda to work for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), one of the reasons I looked forward to this move was that I would never be in that position again, not while in Uganda. In Uganda, I would al-



Discussing plans for humane education project in Southern Sudan. Credit: Karen Menczer



GSPCA president, David Nyoagbe, holds a puppy during World Animal Day event in Accra. credit: Aluizah Abdul-Yakeen

ways have a place to take an injured animal. I would get to know the local animal welfare people, I'd soon know the vets, I wouldn't have to turn away from a suffering animal because there was no place to take her or no way to transport him. Reality wasn't that simple.

These days, we take for granted that there will be a shelter or a rescue group just about anywhere we go in the U.S., and that if we witness cruelty or find an injured animal, there will be someone we can report it to. Even if there's no local animal welfare organization, we can usually find like-minded people who will help out in bad situations. That wasn't the case in Uganda.

A few months before I arrived in Kampala, the Uganda Society for the Protection and Care of Animals (USPCA) had just registered as a charity. Katia, the one USPCA volunteer, was overwhelmed and could not begin to respond to the suffering around us. There was no USPCA facility, there was no vet or vet tech we could rely on to help us in an

emergency. All we had was a cell phone and our charity registration certificate. Within a month, I was organizing spay/neuter days, which were held at our house in Kampala, while Katia organized spay/neuter days at her house in Entebbe. Now, 12 years later, after many good times and some not so good times, and after many difficult lessons learned, the USPCA has blossomed into a real force for animal welfare in Kampala.

After five years in Uganda, we moved to Jamaica, then to Botswana, and then to Ghana. Of course all of these countries have their own unique animal welfare situations and issues. In part, that's what makes this work so interesting, there's always a new twist, there's always something to learn. Also, these days, most countries have at least one animal welfare organization, some very nascent and in need of significant support—moral, technical, and financial. Often one organization covers an entire country and does it with a few volunteers and a tiny budget. I've been lucky to meet some of these wonderful, dedicated volunteers, and to become their colleagues and friends.

Ten years after we left the US, we returned in late 2006, and made Jemez Springs our home. I hoped that when I left Africa I could continue to help these organizations, but I knew I'd have to help in a different way than when I was living there. So in July 2007, I started Animal Kind International to help raise visibility of the great work these organizations do with so few resources, and to raise funds and get much needed supplies and expertise to them.

I started AKI to support existing organizations in developing countries and to help them do what they feel is most important for animal welfare in their countries. We now support organizations in nine countries. Because I've worked with all of the AKI organizations, I know firsthand that they do the best they can with the little they have.

In 1973, I started volunteering at the Animal Humane Association in Albuquerque. New Mexico has come a long way since then. I only hope that the animal welfare organizations that are part of the AKI network can look back at similar successes, and maybe they won't have to wait so long before they have real and positive impact on animal welfare in their countries.

Helping Hands for Hounds of Honduras: Pilar Thorn



2008 Veterinary Clinic sponsored by and held at the Missionary Center of the Episcopal Church in la Colonia Cruz Roja, a community built for victims of Hurricane Mitch. Helping Hands for Hounds of Honduras works closely with Malcolm Alexander, a local missionary, who says that his "secondary ministry is rescuing distressed dogs and cats." During the Veterinary Clinics, sponsored by Malcolm, kids get to hang out with the rescued dogs. Credit: Malcolm Alexander

Pilar Thorn started and runs the Nereida Montes de Oca Stray Dog Refuge (named in memory of her niece, who had been her constant companion in animal rescue). About 40 years ago, Pilar moved to Honduras as a Peace Corps Volunteer, and never left. Until recently, before she retired, she was a professor of ornithology—and she used this position to help spread the message of kindness to animals. She enlisted her students to help rescue and care for animals, and many are now animal welfare advocates in their own right. I met Pilar and visited her refuge about six years ago, when I was in Honduras as a biodiversity consultant for USAID.

Life for dogs on the streets of Tegucigalpa is difficult. Many of the dogs Pilar has rescued have been hit by cars as they wander the

streets looking for food and for their homes. Blind dogs are also fairly common among her rescues. Typical of Pilar's rescue dogs is Blackie, a 10 or 11 year old mixed breed, who is blind in one eye. Pilar found him in a trash can at the university about nine years ago. He was very thin and covered with ticks, and Pilar and three of her students worked on him for about 2 hours to pull off the ticks. He is still living with Pilar, and has become one of the permanent residents of the refuge. One way Pilar helps to ensure sustainability of her efforts and to build a new generation of animal welfare volunteers is by teaching others how to care for animals. She has given two courses on first aid for dogs for students at the university, and hopes to continue these courses in the future.

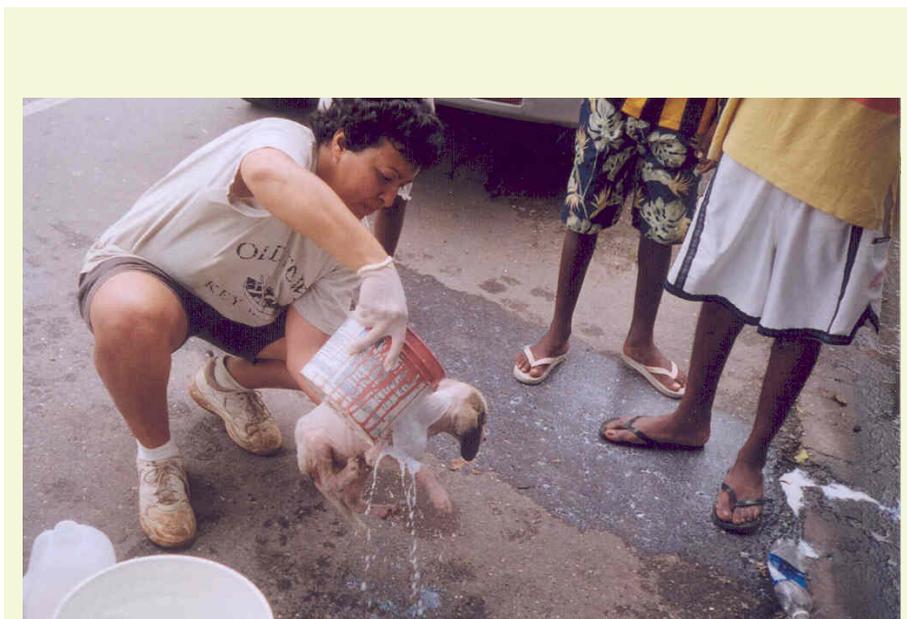
Community Animal Welfare, Kingston, Jamaica: *Deborah Binns*

Although she works full time as an economist, Deborah spends almost all her spare time in Kingston's poorer communities, feeding dogs and talking to people about being kind to animals, about providing adequate food, water, and shelter, and getting dogs and cats spayed and neutered. Because she has spent so much time working with street dogs and cats and the people who live around them, she is welcomed into Kingston communities that are often leery of outsiders.

Kingston has an animal shelter, but their staff mainly works inside the shelter walls. Deborah is the only person who does actual community animal welfare in Kingston.

Every Saturday while I lived in Jamaica, I went with Deborah on her rounds to the communities, and saw how the people and dogs come running over to her when she arrives. She gets phone calls, from people in these poor communities, at all hours, about injured or mistreated dogs and cats in need of help. Best of all, she has given local people the knowledge and tools to care for their animals on their own.

But many of the dogs and cats Deborah cares for have no homes. Boy lives in an abandoned office building near downtown. He has an injured eye and a torn ear, and every time Deborah goes there to feed him, she puts drops in his eye and sprays his ear, making sure no maggots are on the injury. Deborah knew Boy's mother, who she tells us ranked among the most difficult dogs to catch and spay. According to Deborah, "I tried at least 10 times on my own to catch Boy's mom, actually got my hands on her once but she got away. So I had to pay four men from the area to help me catch her one morning. The only reason they caught her is that she gave up before the four men."



Visit to Hanover Street, Downtown Kingston. The residents begged me to help them with the terrible mange problem plaguing their dogs. So I told them to spread the word that I will be there at a certain time and date. Over 50 people were there waiting! I was so tired after I just sat on the curb for half and hour. In appreciation, I was offered a marijuana spliff and hot guinness while I sat there, both of which I graciously declined!

Photo credit: Deborah Binns

Namibia Rural SPCAs: Erika von Gierszenski

I worked in Namibia for five months in 2008, and met Erika at the SPCA in Windhoek, where we were both walking dogs on the weekends. Born and raised in Namibia and an animal lover at an early age, Erika was a wealth of information about the animal welfare situation in her country. Talking with Erika, I learned about the SPCA branches outside of Windhoek—much less visible than the SPCA in the capital, and in such desperate need of funds.

Rundu SPCA is run by Mrs. Queiroz, who, with the assistance of her husband, built kennels at her house. Unlike in Windhoek, hardly anyone in Rundu is interested in becoming a board member of the SPCA, and so they are unable to get full SPCA status. There is so much poverty that most people don't have time or food to spare on pets. As Erika put it, "Mrs. Queiroz is the angel of the pets in Rundu." Mrs. Queiroz tries to get

donations of food and other supplies to help poor people provide for their pets. Mrs. Gessner manages the Otjiwarongo SPCA. Although she is 79 years old—she was born in 1930—she still goes out regularly on cruelty calls and makes cases against those who abuse animals. To help in a cruelty investigation, she even drove to Grootfontein last year for a case in which a woman on a farm kept a lion in a camper.

Then there are the coastal SPCAs in Luderitz and Walvis Bay and in southern Namibia, in Keetmanshoop. All have the same problems: to get funds for maintenance of the kennels, to feed

and treat animals, to buy blankets and pay staff, and the biggest problem, raising funds for sterilization of pets. The rural SPCAs get no support from government. Erika and I decided that AKI support could best be put towards helping these struggling rural SPCAs.



Otjiwarongo SPCA, one of the rural Namibia SPCAs that AKI is supporting. Credit: Edith Gessner, Manager

Uganda Society for the Protection and Care of Animals

Over a period of 12 years, the Uganda SPCA went from a couple of volunteers with a cell phone and USPCA-dedicated phone number to a shelter and clinic (capacity of over 50 dogs and about 20 cats), a part-time vet, humane education officer, shelter caretaker, two vet assistants, and a field officer. Along the way, the USPCA had spay/neuter days in many poor communities in Kampala and Entebbe (sterilizing about 1000 dogs and cats), supported a community animal welfare program in poor communities, built a humane education center in a very poor slum area of Kampala, and worked to improve livestock transport and slaughter.

Ugandans commonly have dogs for guarding, sometimes for hunting, and much less typically, as pets. Guard dogs are usually kept in small containers for up to 18 hours a day. They may be beaten, starved, and taunted, all in an effort to make them vicious. But more and more frequently, the Uganda SPCA is seeing Ugandans coming into the shelter to adopt a pet dog. They attribute this to the many articles in the local newspapers about pets, the growing middle class, and increased access to television programs and computer news about animals. Uganda SPCA's humane education programs have also had a big impact.

Back in the 1990s, at our spay/neuter field days in poor communities, we could get over 50 children gathered around to watch the surgery, and some had never met a vet before or knew that anyone could or would perform surgery on dogs and cats. Now, there are many Ugandan children who know about kindness to animals...and many who also proudly proclaim that they want to become veterinarians.



Uganda SPCA caretaker plays with Haven dogs Credit: Karen Menzner



Uganda SPCA's community animal welfare program. Teaching children about kindness to animals. Credit: Karen Menzner

Armenia: Save the Animals and ProPaws Charity

Nuneh Mehrabyan's two loves are the piano and dogs. She is a piano teacher in her spare time, and during the rest of her time, she oversees the only animal shelter in Yerevan, Armenia. Nuneh's Save the Animals' shelter cares for over 200 dogs and puppies, animals that would otherwise be living on the streets—where many freeze and starve to death. I worked in Armenia in November and December 2008, not the coldest of winters, I was told, but every day, I watched street dogs trying to find dry ground, safe shelter, and food.

Nuneh told me that most Armenians are only interested in pedigree dogs, and so the dogs in her shelter, mainly mixed breeds, are unlikely to get adopted. Meanwhile, she tries to care for them the best she can. She has a full time veterinarian-manager, and a few cleaners, cooks, and security guards. Every day, all dogs get time out of their kennel to play in the yard. I recently received a message from Nuneh that her shelter desperately needs an operating table, a lamp, and an autoclave, and her vet and his assistants would like to have surgical uniforms—all things that are usually taken for granted by US shelters, but that are difficult to come by when you are counting ever dram.



Working on the community end, Elsik Ghezlashori is trying to start a trap/neuter/release program for the dogs of Yerevan. Elsik is coordinating all aspects of this—the politicians, the business community, veterinary groups (from outside of Armenia), and community members. She is also including schoolchildren in these efforts. She would like to get a commitment from government for a four year program, with vets coming in two or three times a year to do spaying and neutering. Once she gets the approvals, she will need volunteers—some of whom she hopes will come from overseas, and bring their expertise, to help coordinate all parties, to advertise the program, and to ensure regular communication about these efforts.

Animal Kind International can use your help to aid in the many projects necessary for these countries to get adequate food and supplies for the dogs. You can make a donation either online or by mailing a check or money order to Animal Kind International P.O. Box 300 Jemez Springs, NM 87025. By making your donation in the form of a check or money order would allow you to choose which country that you would like to help the most. Online donations are also accepted but donations would go to the country that needs assistance the most. Keep in mind that 100% of your donation goes directly to the partner organizations. Please visit www.animal-kind.org to find out more.



Pilar, Marvin, Fernando, and Gerardo after a long day of work, laying down cement at the HHHH sanctuary. Photo credit Fabrizia Velasquez



At 15, Karen started volunteering at the Animal Humane Association in Albuquerque, and hasn't stopped since. From 1991 till the present, she has worked in biodiversity/natural resources conservation in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe. From 1997-2006, she lived in Uganda, Jamaica, Botswana, and Ghana, where she helped start and run local animal welfare organizations. In 2006, she moved back to New Mexico with her husband, 3 African dogs, 1 African cat, and 1 cat from Jamaica, and she started Animal Kind International to continue to help animal welfare organizations in developing countries raise funds, and receive donations of supplies and equipment.

S O S - Sarajevo

I recently received an email from an SOS Sarajevo volunteer that said, "I am sending something wonderful to you: The new law on animal welfare from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I found the adoption of this law so encouraging that I had it translated into English." SOS-Sarajevo volunteers should be excited about this new law, passed in April 2009, since, for ten years, they so strongly lobbied for it.

But while animal welfare activists are excited about the law, and it's expected to help them improve the lives of Bosnia Herzegovina's (BiH) animals, reality for BiH's dogs and cats is often less wonderful. Poison, shooting, and clubbing have been used to kill animals as a form of population control.

SOS-Sarajevo combats this cruelty through spay/neuter campaigns, community education, and humane education for children. Their children's humane education programs are exceptionally strong and have had far-reaching impact. In light of the new law, SOS-Sarajevo is re-evaluating their strategy, and as they state on their website, "we are aware that the legislative developments in the above sense must accompany an appropriate change of social consciousness." If any group is capable of making this happen, SOS-Sarajevo is. When I was working in BiH, I heard so many accounts of SOS-sponsored birthday parties and school visits, all designed to encourage children to be kind to animals.

Also included in AKI's network of organizations is the Ghana Society for the Protection and Care of Animals, Botswana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Southern Sudan humane educators. See www.animal-kind.org for information on all AKI network organizations. Karen Mencer is an international biodiversity consultant, and frequently travels to Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe for consulting jobs. Wherever she goes, she tries to meet local animal welfare advocates to learn about their work, challenges, and successes.



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