

# ANIMAL KIND INTERNATIONAL HELPS SUPPORT ANIMAL'S IN THE WORLD'S POOREST PLACES; GLOBAL ACTS OF KINDNESS.

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Hit by a car while living in a taxi park in a slum area of Kampala, Uganda, the homeless dog's chances for survival were slim. With her back legs paralyzed and suffering from a chronic skin condition, the canine's fate seemed sealed.

But the brown dog quickly learned to tuck her back legs up into her body and move from place to place. She survived on bits and scraps from cab drivers and those living in the area. After six months, she ended up in the country's sole shelter, The Haven, which is run by the Uganda Society for the Protection and Care of Animals.

There, the small staff named the dog Hope and considered her future.

"We thought of putting her to sleep," her rescuers said, "but she survived the accident by herself -- she's a real fighter and she's not in pain."

The group reached out to the global community through Animal Kind International, a Jemez Springs-based nonprofit run by New Mexico native Karen Menczer. Once the dog's plight was highlighted on AKI's Web site, supporters stepped in to help.

One Washington state supporter, Sarah Schmidt, contacted Doggon' Wheels, a Montana-based company that offers products for animals with disabilities. The company agreed to donate a wheelchair and Schmidt paid for ground shipping.

This past August, Menczer's husband, Ron Stryker, delivered the wheelchair to the shelter while traveling to the African country on consulting work.

Those living and working near the taxi park recently visited the dog, now strapped to the wheelchair, her mobility much improved. Photos from the shelter show a group of astounded men surrounding the dog.

"They had no idea about what to do with her," Menczer said. "Katia (Ruiz Allard, the executive director) even thought maybe someone would adopt her in the U.S. and deal with her here."

Passionate about the welfare of animals throughout the world, Menczer has devoted her life to improving the condition of all beings. For more than two decades, she and her husband have worked overseas in some of the world's poorest countries. Karen's focus through USAID has been on biodiversity, natural resources and conservation issues, while Ron's career as a Foreign Service officer centered more on agriculture and economic growth.

But while working to improve the lives of humans in developing countries, both could not neglect the lives of animals they saw existing in horrid conditions. The couple's off-duty hours were devoted to helping them.

"I've always volunteered to help animals," Menczer said. "When I was 15, I volunteered at Animal Humane in Albuquerque. When you go to a place and you see there's a need, some people might say, 'Oh, I just can't do it.' I was just never able to say that."

But when Stryker decided it was time to retire and settle in the U.S. permanently, Menczer knew she couldn't abandon the animals, or the people who had touched their lives.

"I always knew I would start this," Menczer said recently about AKI, settling into the comfortable front porch of the couple's Jemez Springs home. "And I knew I couldn't do it overseas -- that I'd need e-mail and Internet connection."

The couple was also looking for a stable home for the companion animals they've rescued through their travels: Lucy, a German shepherd cross who failed as a guard dog in Uganda. Rosie, a border collie from Botswana. Allie, a sassy cat from Jamaica. LP, a cat from Uganda. And Bruni, a white-haired New Mexican stray. Bruni is short for Obruni, what Anglos are called in Ghana.

After working on AKI's nonprofit status and establishing a board, Menczer launched its Web site two years ago and continues to help animals through a growing network of like-minded souls. AKI helps support animal welfare groups in nine countries: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Ghana, Honduras, Jamaica, Namibia, Southern Sudan and Uganda.

The support is quiet, but consistent. And the all-volunteer group has earned accolades and respect. Barbara Castleman, a Santa Fe resident and former staffer with the World Society of the Protection of Animals, said Menczer's work is unique in that she has firsthand knowledge of the groups.

Castleman became familiar with AKI while working with Deborah Binns in Jamaica after Hurricane Dean. Binns, who receives support through AKI, rescues and cares for animals in Kingston's inner city. Menczer herself worked 10 months in Jamaica and helped Binns feed and care for street dogs and cats every Saturday.

Personal attention to animals helps change people's minds, Menczer said. In urban areas of Uganda, where Menczer and Stryker spent much of their time overseas, most dogs are guard animals. They are generally treated poorly to make them vicious, starved and fed red chiles to "keep them angry." The dogs spend most of their daylight hours in a small confined box, let out only at night to protect shops or homes.

Menczer worked with one guard dog, Simba, taking him for daily walks for five years. It surprised the townspeople.

"No one was used to seeing dogs being walked then," Menczer said. "Many don't think dogs have feelings, because dogs can't speak and they think that translates into not being able to feel things. And they don't think dogs have different personalities. But if you treat dogs all the same -- beating them, starving them -- they are all going to be scary and vicious."

But people noticed the attention she was giving to animals. One day a man came to visit her at her office.

"He said, 'Madam, you don't know me, but I see you walking dogs on the road, and I figure if you're nice to dogs, you're nice to people.' "

The couple's gardener also noticed how they treated animals. Ibra didn't know much about dogs, Menczer said, but over the months he grew to understand and love dogs. He became the first community animal welfare worker for Uganda SPCA.

"He's now traveling as a guard or driver in Afghanistan, and he tells me he's trying to teach people there to care for their animals," she said. "There's a lot, I think, to just seeing someone be kind to animals."

Grass-roots work is at the core of the organizations that AKI supports, and all of the groups were created and run by local people or longtime residents. While many animals are mistreated, people do understand the need for better care, she said, noting that free veterinary clinics are always packed, especially in rural areas.

Changing perceptions on how animals should be treated will take education and time, Menczer said. But the kindness shared with one animal is contagious. That's why keeping the groups alive through donations is critical.

"My role is to just get more visibility for these people who are doing amazing things in difficult situations," she said. "It's about linking Americans to these people in other countries that need help."

Menczer, who still does consulting work for USAID, uses her contacts to ensure 100 percent of the donations goes directly to the group's works. AKI also has a tracking system to make sure the money is being spent where it will do the most good, she said. But for many of the groups, a little money goes a long way.

While some may argue that much work needs to be done to better the lives of animals in the U.S. and New Mexico, both Stryker and Menczer take a global view of animal welfare. They also understand that animal welfare organizations in poorer countries are left out in the competition for limited resources.

"We live on a planet," Menczer said, echoing her husband's sentiments. "Sure, you want to support local, but you also want to help elsewhere. Some of these things are so easy to resolve, like getting a digital scale or a new catchpole. There's a chance to make a big difference for these places."

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