

Feature

Animal Kind International

by Ann Wymore

What do Uganda, Southern Sudan, Jamaica, Bosnia, Ghana, Honduras, Namibia, Armenia, Tanzania and Malawi have in common with Jemez Springs? The answer is Karen Menczer, a quiet but determined woman who lives in Cañon and has started a non-profit organization to support indigenous animal welfare organizations in other countries. Her organization is Animal Kind International, usually referred to by its initials, AKI, and the groups receiving aid are referred to as AKI's partner organizations.

Karen has spent much of her adult life living in developing countries, working for USAID. Her professional focus has been on biodiversity, natural resources and conservation issues, and alongside that has been a personal focus on animal welfare in the countries she has gotten to know. Along with her husband, Ron Stryker, who also worked for USAID, she has lived for extended periods in Uganda, Botswana, Ghana, Jamaica and Namibia. She has visited the other countries on the AKI list numerous times. The result of this extended travel is that she has personal knowledge of the groups who are receiving funds.

Karen said that there are other international animal welfare organizations, but "there is nowhere near enough money trickling down from them to the actual people caring for animals." AKI has no overhead or administrative costs. She volunteers her time, the fundraising and distribution of the monthly newsletter is all done through the Internet, and her website was created by someone donating their time.

Operating this way, 100% of the funds raised are delivered to the providers of animal welfare. In addition to money, Karen also funnels material contributions such as medicines,

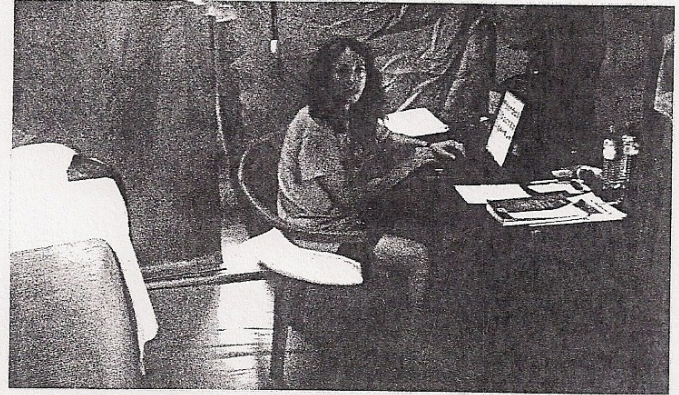
sutures and, in one case, a canine "wheelchair," donated from Doggon' Wheels in Montana, to a crippled dog in Uganda.

Karen, along with the Board of Directors for AKI, has developed a tracking and accountability system to ensure the funds are being used as intended. One African country recently lost its funding from AKI due to insufficient communication from the organization. The Board of AKI could not assess adequately how the funds were being spent, so they were terminated.

Some of her recipient organizations have shelters, as is common in our country. Other countries she is working with lack physical shelters, but have programs and clinics to aid animals. Karen stresses that these are not Americans going into these countries and imposing their structures; rather, these organizations were already in existence, although struggling, and are all staffed by paid or volunteer citizens of that country.

By contrast, she states, many other international animal aid organizations dictate to the receiving countries what kind of services will be provided and how it will be done. Karen says that AKI asks the existing organizations what they need and how AKI can be of help, so they support the indigenous efforts.

Karen does a lot of education about animal welfare when she is abroad. In some countries, she spends time interacting with local school children, demonstrating how to understand and care for animals. In some places, the living conditions for dogs in particular is dire, as they are regarded as useful only as guard animals, and are thus kept severely confined and hungry until it is time to let them out to guard their area. They are shown no human interaction during their hours of confinement, and are



KAREN MENCZER IN SOUTHERN SUDAN.

sometimes further maltreated to "make them angry." In the areas where this is a common practice, Karen does a lot of teaching along with financial support of the existing welfare organizations.

Spaying and neutering are crucial to animal welfare, to end the cycle of misery caused by overpopulation, and Karen does a great deal of education about this concept. Free spay and neuter clinics are recipients of the AKI funds in the sponsored countries.

Karen says she receives two common criticisms of her work. First, people ask her why she worries about animals in other countries when there

are plenty of animals in this country to worry about. She responds that while this is true, there are also lots of well-publicized funding organizations for animal welfare in the U.S.

The second question she is asked is why does she focus on animals, when there are so many humans in those countries who are suffering. To this, she points out that she is not creating new services in these countries, but is supporting existing services that the native people of those countries have initiated.

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