

One Volunteer's Perspective

Jeff Bryant

I still have nightmares about that pitiful little dog. His big brown eyes, cute pointy ears, and the sheer look of terror as he tried to fight off the three bigger dogs that were literally tearing him apart. He was on the second floor of the main building in the Kameoka compound. It was the third week of December and ARK staff had been coming every day for almost two weeks. I had been three previous times helping with cleaning, feeding, and taking the worst cases to be euthanized. Although the dogs had been eating regularly for almost fourteen consecutive days, there was still a wild frenzy whenever we arrived.

As we entered the compound that day, I could hear shrieking coming from the upstairs room that had over 40 dogs in it. I ran up the stairs and quickly moved back the plywood which we used to block the entrance, and there he was fighting for his life. I ran in screaming and stomping my feet as loud as I could, but not until I was right upon the other dogs did they back off. The little dog had deep gashes in his neck and hind legs where the others had tried to rip him in half. No longer able to walk, he

tried with all his might to pull himself into a corner. He was afraid of me as much as he was of his attackers. As he slid across the floor, other dogs snapped and bit at him sensing his weakness and impending demise. Using a blanket, I picked him up and put him in a cage with the poor dog feebly resisting.

That night he, along with five other dogs, was humanely put down. It was the only possible alternative. It was the most humane alternative. After all the neglect, all the disease, all the fear and dread that these animals had been through, euthanasia was the kindest and most dignified option. Had the hokensho gone in and trapped and gassed these dogs, that would have been the final insult from a society that had so miserably failed them. I stood next to and stroked the little dog that night as the vet put him to sleep, and as I drove home later I cried. Not for the little dog, I knew he was at peace. No, I cried for the affluent, modern, high tech society that takes pride in being a G-7 nation, but as far as animal protection is concerned, is in the Dark Ages.

ARK Staff's View

Yuki Yoshimoto

On the morning of Sunday December 8th, police officers came to ARK and asked us "Do you know Mrs. X, we heard she was a volunteer at your organization."

We had last seen her when she came to ARK a couple months ago to get surplus dog food from us. But early this morning, when she had parked her car on the edge of the road to get some sleep, a truck slammed into back of her car and she is still comatose. (In the newspaper article, they wrote "on the way back from an NPO". But this was untrue). The police officer had heard about ARK through Mrs. X's neighbours. He said that he had no way to contact her family, and the dogs running all over that place, had barked him out. Until this moment, we had no idea how many dogs and cats she kept, we only knew was she was keeping many animals. Learning of the situation, we could not just leave the animals without basic care, so we went there carrying as much food as we could.

The "House ?" (it was hard to call it a 'HOUSE'). The guard-rail around the place blocking the entrance created a strange atmosphere. We broke the barricade to enter and what we saw were uncountable dogs barking and screaming everywhere. The ground was like a swamp, very slippery and dangerous to walk on. Dogs' excrement, urine, waste water mixed up with decaying trash, created a bad smell. The vogue word "Trash House", as recently shown on TV, is exactly how we could describe this place. With piles of trash and various kind of junk, it was a "hell hole". And she also collected dogs and cats with this junk.

Looking for material that should be handed to the police officers, we entered the part considered as her living space, a place hardly fit for human habitation. After finding some mail and handing it to the police officers, we braced ourselves to enter the prefab. What we saw there were eyes of fear in a dark room without sunshine. Some dogs in panic hurled themselves at the walls, others aggressively attacked the weak, and the weak huddled in corners trembling with fear. All dogs were stressed and starving.

"I want to help stray dogs" This kind of thinking might have made her move to this place. But looking at those dogs, we were overcome with anger and sadness. In the name of animal rescue, how could she treat animals so miserably ? We suppressed our anger and started cleaning the kennels (No excrement was remaining on the floor, the dogs in their hunger had eaten even that.) We gave them lots of food. There were also some young puppies. Didn't she know that leaving puppies in that situation, by not separating them would simply mean that the puppies would become food for the adult dogs ?

We saved five puppies.

In the back, dogs under the prefab were attacking one dog. We heard unusual screams, and saw a group of dogs attacking one weak dog which was dying. We immediately rescued the dog, but the wounds were so severe that the vet at the hospital where we took it for treatment recommended euthanasia.

There are several reasons why we had to euthanize a lot of dogs at this time. Firstly, the owner's family gave up caring for all the animals except for a few dogs they liked, and gave us the rights over their animals. Since the dogs had been kept in such bad conditions, most of them suffered from acarasis. Except for few dogs, most of them were afraid of humans and in a panic. The biggest problem was that the owner didn't separate males and females, which lead to in-breeding. Many dogs looked the same and some had malformations as a result.

After this case appeared in the newspaper, we had many calls and letters of protest. One of them said "Why didn't you work with other organizations to save more animals?". But other animal welfare organizations are already overflowing with animals they've rescued, so it's impossible for them to take in, treat and rehome all these animals. In previous cases like this, organizations and volunteers, all with different views gather and start endless discussions. In the end the animals are forgotten. To avoid this nonsense, we made the decision with the cooperation of some vets. We asked the daughter to accompany us to meet the vet. There were also several reasons involving the privacy of the family and the land owner which made us wait before exposing this case. We hope everyone understands this.

We know many people have criticised our actions and some think we made the decision too hastily. But if we waited longer, I think the result would have been the same. However, we don't want you to judge our actions by just reading newspaper articles which report only the final result. This is why we published the circumstances on our website. We believe the decision we took in this case was right.

The owner is still unconscious, we hear she is brain dead. If we could talk to her, we would like to ask "Do you really think the animals collected by you were happy?"

Numbers of animals at the hell-hole :93 dogs 8 cats
Number of animals euthanized: 69 dogs, 2 cats
Number of animals rescued and brought to ARK 24 dogs, 6 cats