

Oliver, who as a child enjoyed a rural middle-class upbringing in Jersey in the Channel Islands surrounded by cats, dogs and ponies, was staying at Asian Kaikan in Akasaka. Her brother, John, who lives in Melbourne, Australia, was also along for the ride, to see a daughter working in the JET program and to advise his sister in what he termed "resource management."

"ARK's an unofficial charity, so it's always difficult to know quite which way to go in terms of financial management and development," she explained. "John's experience in market strategy should help create a business plan."

It is very difficult to gain registered charity status in Japan. Among registered animal groups she could only think of Japan Animal Welfare Society, or JAWS. But as things stand, she believes ARK is better off remaining independent. Registration can work against the best interests of an organization, with any criticism of government being regarded as biting the hand that feeds it. "No wonder so little changes politically," she observed dryly.

After a practical year studying dairy farming on Jersey, Oliver entered Nottingham University to study agriculture, thinking either to teach or take her expertise to a developing country.

In 1965, to satisfy a burning ambition to travel to Mongolia, she set out with others for Moscow. Fortunately for the 200 dogs, 80 cats, goats, rabbit, pig, pony and silver fox currently thriving under ARK's tender loving care, the tour group missed the Trans-Siberian Express to Ulan Bator and had to take the next.

"We ended up in Beijing,"



ELIZABETH OLIVER, founder of Animal Rescue Kansai, hopes to see stronger laws preventing cruelty to animals and strict control of pet shops and breeders. ANGELA JEFFES PHOTO

north to Japan, she remembered a Japanese doctor in London (a rarity in the 1960s) giving her his name card, with an address in Kansai. "The deciding factor was a cargo boat in the harbor on its way to Kobe," she recalled. "He was very surprised when I rang him and said, 'Hello, remember me? I'm here.'"

After a year, she returned to England to study Japanese at London University's School of Oriental and Asian Studies. With SOAS and Sheffield University the only places with Japanese language courses at the time, she was a rare bird indeed — even at SOAS, she was one of only six students to 10 professors.

She arrived back in Kansai in 1968 with a rucksack. Twenty years later, it took 10 days and nine trucks to move all her belongings. Nowadays, she dares not think ... Having saved ¥300,000 from teaching toward a holiday, she used it as a deposit to buy a ramshackle farmhouse in Nose (nicknamed the Tibet of Osaka). "I moved in with a dog and a cat and two horses, but that didn't last long," she said. "I'd worked voluntarily with JAWS, but soon decided to start a rescue center of my own."

Conditions for unwanted pets in Japan can be appalling. While pedigree animals are often sold to unscrupulous breeders, the large majority are euthanized.

At Osaka Prefecture's Kanri Center at Morinomiya, where most unwanted animals in Kansai are killed, Oliver witnessed up to 200 dogs

tress.

It took three years to find a suitable plot of land for Oliver's refuge. Japanese landowners tend to sell only when they need a spare bit of cash, so it was just a matter of waiting. Finally ARK came to rest, on 1,000 "tsubo" of secluded hillside, surrounded by natural forest, with a great view facing south. On the distaff side, there was no road, no electricity, no sewage and no running water.

"I rented a prefab and camped on site for the winter — the toughest six months of my life, but fun in a way!" she recalled. That period of her life in the late '80s, when she was in the process of getting ARK up and running, is documented in a series that she wrote for the magazine Kansai Time Out.

First she built her house, then a barn and finally a kennel block, reducing her teaching to three days a week in order to maintain 20 animals — 30 the absolute maximum! Her aim? To treat them, nurse them back to health, neuter them and find them responsible loving homes.

As news of ARK's work began to spread, a Scotswoman turned up offering help, followed by other volunteers. Slowly the number of animals crept up, from 30 to 50, 70 to 90. "At this point things settled down," Oliver said. "But then came the earthquake."

The Great Hanshin Earthquake of Jan. 17, 1995, was a watershed for the organization. Every night, to avoid getting in the way of rescue teams and demolition squads,

imals in society. Last year she was in Budapest at an international animal welfare conference. With West and East European nations well represented, one so advanced, the other wondering how to catch up fast, it proved the more practical learning experience with regard to Japan.

Following the system of animal welfare in the U.K., ARK has found homes for 700 animals in the seven years since it was established. It has rules, however; no clean, healthy animal — de-fleaed and de-wormed, vaccinated, neutered and resocialized — is handed over until a potential owner meets a strict set of criteria. "Some people think us too strict, but I say we simply put the best interests of the animal at heart."

What she wants to see is an equally strict control of pet shops and individuals and facilities in the business of breeding, and improved laws. The Animal and Protection and Control Law dates from 1973, but since cruelty is not defined, it is nearly impossible to bring about prosecutions.

Also there is no specific government body or department responsible for animal protection. "Stray unwanted or abandoned animals picked up by the 'Hokensho,' the Office of Public Health and Hygiene, are regarded as 'gomi,' or rubbish. As for the police, they label strays 'wasuremono,' or lost objects."

In Japan mongrels are thrown away as worthless. But Elizabeth Oliver considers that cared for with love and respect, they can be among the most beautiful, trusting animals in the world. "A pet's love is a valuable thing, to be rewarded, never betrayed."