

[WOOF]

LINDA BULLER IS A DOG'S BEST FRIEND. FOR MANY YEARS SHE HAS BEEN FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO BALI DOGS' PLIGHT.

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LINDA Buller is a woman who has worn many hats – tram driver, acupuncturist, artist – but her current hat is fearless crusader for Bali dogs.

As the founder and top dog of the non-profit Bali Dog Adoption and Rehabilitation Centre (BARC), she and her tireless team have rescued and rehabilitated thousands of dogs that otherwise would have been left suffering and starving on the streets of Bali.

No easy feat for a woman who started with nothing more than passion and a prayer.

“I first came to Bali in 1985, and that’s when I saw the animals suffering,” Linda says.

“Things were so much worse 20 to 30 years ago. Absolutely shocking. There were no vets, no clinics, no vaccines, no help for the animals.

“I used to see dogs walking along with their legs ripped off, and dogs that were covered in maggots with holes all over them. I remember one time I was feeding a dog on the street, a blind dog, and this guy came up in steel-toed boots and just kicked the dog in the head. This was the type of stuff that was going then.”

Linda left Bali with a general sense of unease and the feeling that she needed to do something for the animals. It took her 12 years to return but when she did, the ball started rolling.

“I didn’t physically go out looking for dogs,” she says. “It was like they were in front of me everywhere – they would place themselves in front of my motorbike or house. Almost as if they were saying ‘hey, here I am, take me home’.

“There was this one dog in front of Casa Luna, a poor emaciated sick little animal who would curl up on the pavement and crawl under the tables, but nobody would help her. So my girlfriend and I took her up to Penestanan where I was living and gave her a blanket and fed her properly, and she was so happy. Unfortunately, she died two months later. In retrospect I know now that it was probably a blood parasite. From then on, I just kept collecting dogs.”

As Linda’s house slowly grew into what could only be described as a canine circus, she realised that the space was simply not ample enough for her to house all of the dying and destitute dogs she came across.

“I had an idea in my head that I’d set up a foster home in Penestanan. That image is really clear in my head still, and very different to what we’ve set up now. The dream was that the dog refuge would be in the spot where all the villas are now. Thank god we never set up there. It never would have worked with all the building that’s happened since, she says”

While Linda searched for the perfect locale for a dog rehabilitation centre, she began working with a local foundation on a voluntary basis and going out on the streets to help the dogs. However, she had issues with the way the dogs were being treated even by the people who were supposed to be helping them.

“It was like they thought the dogs had no feelings,” she says. “They were just netting them and leaving them in the sun or keeping them locked up in cages. They were trying to do the best they could, but I really wanted to set something up the way I wanted to do it.”

In 2006, Linda found a prime spot for the dog refuge – an abandoned gallery on Jalan Raya Lodtunduh. Using her own money, she built various pens and spaces where she could foster the dogs, attend to their illnesses and injuries, and allow the dogs to recover and retire.

“I had contracted the space for six years, so I knew that I only had six years to make whatever work. And in that time, we made it work. Ebony came over and we set up a programme to sponsor dogs. We got just enough money to do that, but we knew that if we kept going slow and steady, we’d get to where we needed to be,” she says.

“I also set it up so that anyone who wanted to work with me had to learn to love the dogs and treat the dogs with respect. That’s why BARC is different to any other place. We’re not going to take a dog in unless we can help their life and help them be happy.”

Things progressed slowly but surely, and over the years BARC has expanded to include vaccination and sterilisation services, a street programme to help mistreated dogs, education programmes in the local community, an adoption campaign, online sponsorship options and the Charity Shop that raises money for BARC and selected children’s charities in Bali.

In 2012, BARC moved to new digs on Jalan Raya Pengosekan and began working with Good Karma, a pet shop that helps with medical care, shelter and financial donations. Today the BARC Good Karma Rehab Centre houses over 200 rescued dogs, puppies, cats, kittens, monkeys, iguanas, an albino hedgehog and Wally the pig.

“It’s a real miracle that BARC has survived and gotten to be what it is,” Linda says. “But we know we’re going to be big and achieve big things because BARC is going to be all over Indonesia, maybe all over Asia, and we’ve got the notice of a lot of people all over the world now. They know and love us because they know that we love the dogs individually. And we have integrity.”

One such person happens to be Brigitte Bardot, who recently donated €10,000 to sponsor and feed the BARC menagerie. Other donors from around the world have also chipped in to help build BARC’s new Warrior’s Legacy Dog Sanctuary north of Ubud, and locals and expats have been quick to foster animals and attend the weekend Adoption Days that take place around the island.

“We’re really excited about the dog sanctuary,” Linda says. “It’s on one hectare of land, and it’s the perfect home for our unadoptable dogs with health or mental conditions. They can live out their retirement there along with dogs awaiting adoption. It will also be an information centre and a place where people can come and stay, knowing that the money will go towards helping the dogs.

“Our education programme is also growing, and that’s really important. If we can get in touch with the younger generation, we can prevent future problems. One of the ways I want to do that is by hosting puppet shows for kids that highlight the issue of cruelty to animals.

“There is also a new law now in Indonesia that says that it’s illegal to be cruel to animals. I want to get that written up, printed and spread around. I want people to know that cruelty to animals is keeping a dog in a cage for their whole life. Dogs feel like you do. So we need to push it, use it, let people know, and put it on public forums.”

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