

POTCAKES in PARADISE



by: Ellen Kohn

It began in 2002 with a trip to Grand Bahama Island in the Bahamas.

The backdrop was dreamy: turquoise waters, balmy weather and lush tropical beaches with white sand and gorgeous vegetation. To top it off, the quick 30 minute plane ride to Freeport from Florida landed me in a foreign country! Re-

Dogs...Naturally!

mindings of the formal British colony were everywhere, including driving on the left side of the road. What fun it was!

As we drove west from Freeport to West End, a boaters' and fisherman's haven, these beautiful visuals were quickly interrupted by scenes of third world type poverty. Broken down homes, old cars, rub-

bish and a lack of cleanliness were all around. Children dressed in school uniforms ambled about the streets, returning home to sparsely furnished rooms overflowing with many siblings and relatives.

The situation was abysmal for the animals. Roaming the streets searching for

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scraps of food, the street dogs were everywhere. These potcakes, named after the leftover rice cake from the traditional Bahamian peas and rice dish, were starving, sick and abandoned. Litters of puppies lived under the houses, and were left completely on their own.

Never had I seen so many starving, sick and abandoned dogs and cats in my life. Every time I rode a bike or walked into the village, I saw feral strays digging in the trash or cruising dangerously next to the road. Puppies were everywhere, and they also ventured near the cars. Many were killed, only to be left there to rot.

The facts relating to animal control on Grand Bahama are sobering. There is no animal control agency; the only organization that deals with feral potcakes is The Humane Society of Grand Bahama in Freeport. It is difficult to get a van to leave Freeport and drive all the way out to West End to take the dogs to the shelter. Moreover, many feral potcakes are so wild that they can never trust a human, or be rehabilitated.

The last, chilling fact about Grand Bahamas' animals was that the shelter was a high-kill facility, with a 95% euthanasia rate. The advent of the hurricanes aggravated an existing problem; by 2005 more animals than ever were put to sleep.

Deeply moved to do something, I contacted the Manager of the Humane Society of Grand Bahama, Tip Burrows. I explained that I wanted to help, that visiting her country with its animal problems was emotionally draining for me. I felt a sense of urgency to give back to these gentle canines, and ease their plight.

The good news was that I had already started a 501(c) (3) non-profit in Colorado to help West End youth with college funding two years earlier in 2002. That enabled me to wrap the animal welfare efforts into an existing organization: The Kohn Foundation. We called our new offspring BARC for the Bahamian Animal Rescue Committee.

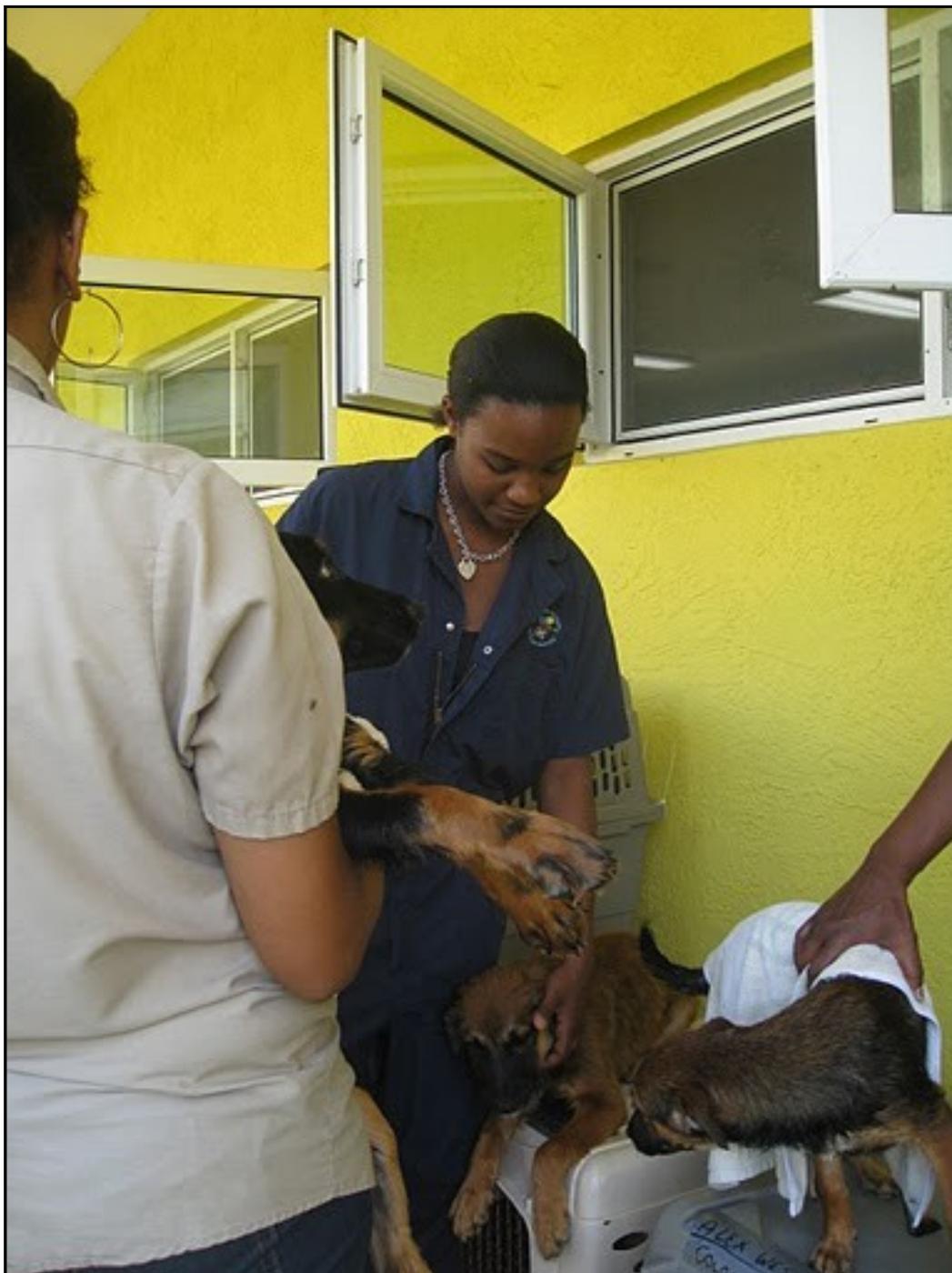
This was the beginning of a very powerful partnership with The Kohn Foundation/BARC and The Humane Society.

Now our animal welfare efforts had an official title and role in the non-profit. It was a bit daunting to start completely from scratch, but the effort garnered its own momentum.

I asked everyone I knew to send them money. Little by little funds came in and then it began to explode. Our grassroots organization was making progress. We were making a difference in the lives of

Grand Bahamas' potcakes, and it felt great.

In 2007, The Kohn Foundation helped raise money for the first major spay/neuter initiative on Grand Bahama. Over 18 veterinarians and techs paid their way and donated their vacation time to perform surgery. The result was more than 300 sterilizations in a week, with additional amputations and emergency surgeries.





Explaining that dogs need to eat nutritiously to maintain proper health is another surprise to the Bahamians. The youth are open to learning, and many of them have departed from the ways of old, now caring deeply for their pets.

Would I do it again? You bet. It has changed my life forever, introducing me to people who would give their last dollar to save a life. It is worth all of the anguish and sadness that I felt in the beginning to know that one person can make a difference in this world. Most of all, it demonstrates to all of us that we are connected, that each time we give, we receive and that even the smallest effort can blossom into a beautiful outcome.

Ellen Kohn is an Interspecies Communicator, Healing Touch for Animals Certified Practitioner (HTACP), Reiki Master-Teacher, Meridian Practitioner and Spiritual Counselor. She frequently uses Bach Flower and Alaskan Gem essences for her clients. She is also a certified aroma therapist and uses crystal energy for her healing work. She is the founder of The Kohn Foundation, a Colorado 501 (c) (3) non-profit which helps children and animals on Grand Bahama Island, The Bahamas. Visit Ellen on the web: www.EnlightenedAnimals.com.

Since 2007, The Kohn Foundation has helped fund four more spay/neuter clinics. Each time, we have been able to pay for all of the medical and surgical supplies needed to perform these clinics, now being held even in the more rural areas of Grand Bahama. The overpopulation problem has definitely been curbed.

In spite of the tremendous success of these clinics, the overpopulation problem still has a foothold in Bahamian society due to the belief system inherent in their culture. Because they really do not support spay/neuter, education still remains a challenge in our process. But we are determined to continue the work in spite of the roadblocks.

Another huge part of our work on Grand Bahama involves raising money to fund puppy lifts from the Freeport Humane Society shelter to the U.S. In April, 2010, 88 dogs and puppies were airlifted via a cargo flight to Ft. Lauderdale, and then rerouted to other no-kill shelters in Florida, Washington, D.C., Ithaca, New York City, Albuquerque, Denver, and Boston. With the cooperation of Delta Airlines, all of the dogs arrived safely and in great condition. All of them have already found their forever homes across the country.

Looking back at the last seven years, establishing The Kohn Foundation was one of the most exciting adventures I have ever embarked on. In my wildest

dreams, I would not have imagined that rescuing Bahamian potcakes would bring deep satisfaction in my life and nourishment for my soul.

This journey has enabled me to look deeper into another culture. When given the opportunity, I have explained to young people that there is nothing merciful about euthanizing healthy puppies, and that it is preventable!!

