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Carol Buckley, *elephant welfare consultant*

62 years. From Oakland, I live where the elephants are, I work hard in Nepal. I have created and directed Elephant Refuge North America (ERNA) in Attapulcus, Georgia. The elephants are my family. We must recognize the value of every living being. I believe in the energy of the earth, its vibration can be felt

IMA SANCHÍS

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No threats

She is an internationally recognized authority in the rescue, rehabilitation and welfare of captive elephants; but what is more important: the elephants want it; she has been living with them since age 19, in a very close way with Tarra, her elephant, who grew up in the garden of her house and when she was too big to live there, both moved to live in zoos until she was able to create a refuge for elephants. Without confrontations, with patience and love she reeducates mahouts in Asian countries, making them understand that collaborating is better than commanding. She has published several books and presented at CosmoCaixa, for FICMA, Unchained, Álex C. Rivera's documentary that explains her work.

How did everything start?

With an elephant baby that passed in front of my window. It was my first year of college, I studied exotic animal training.

Curious

Her owner used the elephant to promote his tires. He offered me to take care of her and from that day we did not separate. I became possessive, ha ha ha. After two years I asked for a loan of \$ 25,000 and I bought her. I called her Tarra.

And what did she do with an elephant?

She lived in my garden. I taught her to skate, and I founded Tarra Productions, for years we acted in circuses of the United States and Canada. Together we change the public's perception of the relationship between the trainer and the elephant.

In what sense?

From domination to collaboration: from the strongman and his dangerous elephants to an elephant and a young girl playing together. When Tarra grew up, we both went to live and work in a zoo. It was the first time she lived with other elephants.

Happy?

No. Tarra did not get used to it. We changed zoos several times until I turned 21 when I could live my dream: buy a little land, 112 acres in Hohenwald,

Tennessee, to create the first elephant refuge in the world, where we hosted sick, old and needy elephants.

At last at home?

It was for fifteen years, but the refuge was growing to a thousand hectares today. The foundation changed hands and I had to leave.

It must have been tough.

It is, because Tarra, which is my life, is still there. We are very much made for each other. She never managed to enter into friendship with other elephants, she was always independent, but became an inseparable friend of another species, Bella the dog.

An elephant and a dog?

Yes, I wrote a book about them. They slept and ate together, and when Bella had a back injury that prevented her from moving, Tarra stayed next to her until she recovered.

What was it for you?

I went to India, Thailand and Nepal, and in all those places I saw that the handling of the elephants was very cruel and I knew that I had to do something.

And founded Elephant Aid International.

She knew she could not fight for the freedom of the elephants because it is a very widespread way of life in those countries, but she could teach them to take care of them and to establish another way of relating to them.

Works with the Nepali government.

It has 68 elephants that it uses to patrol the natural park and control poaching. They treated them in a very cruel way, the habit is first to strike them so that they know who controls and then give them the order, and they live chained.

How to convince them?

I'll tell you how intelligent they are. Most mahouts (elephant drivers) are delighted with this new way of doing it. As soon as they are more friendly and patient, elephants are interested in their mahout, and thus they establish a connection and collaboration.

It should not be that simple.

The problem is that their work is very hard and strenuous. The mahouts also live ill-treated. In India they belong to the lowest caste, they are not allowed to think, they only receive orders. That is why I thought that if I treated the mahouts with respect, they would treat the elephants better.

Was it?

Yes. I also taught them to take care of their feet, something very necessary when they are captive, and we built fences so they can live without chains. The Government of Nepal was the first to commit to having its elephants without chains. We have built 66 corrals, now the problem is that there is no maintenance.

Little by little ...

Yes, there everything is very slow. We are now working on the sustainability of the corrals. I am also speaking to the Government of Sri Lanka to release their 300 elephants living in their orphanage from their chains. And I try to show in these countries that it is more profitable to create refuges so that tourists can observe the elephants freely rather than ride on their backs.

How is such a large animal dominated by such a small animal?

They break them based on physical and psychological cruelty. Mothers have their babies taken away and if they rebel, they chain them with spikes and beat them almost to death. They surrender, you can see it in their eyes, they cease being.

Don't be sad, it gets worse.

During the festival in Kerala, which lasts four months, they exhibit males for their tusks and every day a person or an elephant dies, there are records. The animals are so angry that they catch mahouts with their tusks and throw them.

What have you learned about elephants?

They embody empathy. There is no killer instinct in their nature. They kill when they get mad. There are hundreds videos of elephants helping other animals and humans.

Tell me one of those cases.

During the tsunami in 2004, in Sri Lanka, two chained elephants saw it coming. They went crazy and escaped, they took several children in their trunks who waited for their turn to mount them, put them on their backs and took them up the hill. Then they came back for more. They did not take any adults.