

Deanna Krantz

Q1. BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

My name is Deanna Krantz. I was born and raised in Minnesota, but I spent a good part of my adult life in New York, Washington, D.C., India, and many other places on a map of the world. Helping animals has been my greatest joy and my greatest sorrow—my apotheosis and my nemesis. I cannot remember a time when I was not touched by a suffering creature: I thought this was a normal response that would be shared by all humankind. Without thinking about it (as if there was a choice to help or not to help), I simply acted to alleviate the suffering, the terror, or the fear. I now do this in India.

Q2. BECOMING INVOLVED

I do not consider myself “involved in animal rights issues.” I think that the labeling of one’s innate concern for animals can be sidetracked by this philosophical/intellectual pursuit. We have gone from animal welfare to animal protection to animal rights. The only progress I see is more books and more conferences: trying to redefine ourselves. I feel it is a tremendous waste of time and resources and only points to our insecurity.

Rather than donning some sturdy work clothes and working in-field where the animals need our help, we engage in endless dialogue, trying to determine if animals can even have rights. I prefer working in the jungle with my staff, performing a Caesarian on a cow in the middle of the night by firelight or flashlight, rather than meeting someone for dinner in Washington, D.C., to discuss how we can help animals. My



Deanna Krantz. Photo credit: Dr. M.W. Fox

life with animals has been a seamless journey of awe, embracing the wonder and the mystery of my fellow earth mates, but always with a call to action if anything threatened to harm them. I grew up in a relatively well-to-do, postwar suburb but had my "other life" at the farm, which was the homestead of my grandparents who emigrated from Norway. We plowed, planted, and harvested the fields. We tied a rope on Grandpa so he could make his way to the barn from the farmhouse to care for the animals and not get lost in the blizzard. Grandma would milk the cows and I would watch as her breath in the cold winter air became one with the cow's breath. She would talk to them in the soft, long vowels of her native Norwegian. No matter how hard times were, she would save some milk for the kittens and repeat over and over, "poor things, poor things . . ." (the days before spay/neuter). When Grandma broke her back and was in a cast from the chest down, she still walked to the barn to milk Red Cow, her favorite, and I would listen quietly and partake in the communion of languages I did not understand: marble-smooth Norwegian and the cow answering back. I would fall into a trancelike half sleep with the smell of hay and animals and I understood. I learned a deeper language which has held me in good stead for many years whenever doubts born of fatigue and despair crept under the door in a faraway land with so many suffering, forgotten beings. Whether it is northern snow or four-wheel drive-defying monsoon mud; whether it is a broken back on a farm in Minnesota or bone-break fever in India: you get up, put one foot in front of the other, and help one who is in need. That is joy; that is what Joseph Campbell calls "bliss."

Q3. IMPORTANT ISSUES

Since 1996 I have been working for the welfare of animals in India. It was quite by chance that I went to India with my husband, who was giving the keynote address at a veterinary conference in North India. On our journey, which began in Delhi and took me cross-country through Jaipur, Bangalore, and Cochin in South India, I witnessed animal suffering which literally brought me to my knees.

Even my tough job in New York City did not prepare me for this. As a member of the law enforcement division of the largest animal welfare organization in New York, dealing with animal cruelty cases, I thought I could face anything. I left India with a sorrow that became bolt-upright horror in the middle of the night: a neon light flashing in the darkness. A dog hit by a car, his leg hanging in ragged red by one thread of flesh. A dog on a beach in Bombay with half of his head eaten away by maggots, being stoned by men selling food in little lean-to shacks. Cows, buffaloes, horses, and donkeys mangled by lorries, left on the side of the road to die an agonizing death. They are left there either because it is illegal to kill them, or permission must be obtained from the owner (whom you can never find), or simply because they are not worth the time or the cost of medical treatment. It is cheaper to buy another animal: they are disposable.

For two hours we were unable to bypass a cattle-drive to slaughter. The ones on the road, only the sounds of their hoofs as they are death-marched to slaughter over 250 kilometers of hot, dusty roads with little or no food or water. They are tied three, four, or five together by ropes through their bleeding noses. Beaten mercilessly to keep them moving, hot chili peppers are rubbed in their eyes to get them to stand up when they collapse. Those who cannot get up are thrown into a truck—their legs broken to fit them in. Their final destination, the slaughterhouse, is Dante's hell.

Neither I nor my staff of fifteen local villagers and tribal peoples have ever thought about counting the issues that we address. We do not know from one month to the next which issues we will spend the most time on. The first issue was, of course, to have a shelter for the animals, so we built Hill View Farm Animal Refuge. Next a hospital for surgery, then a jeep/ambulance for an in-field 24 hour mobile clinic, then dealing with a massive outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease. All the while we were helping every animal that crossed our path: from the cattle stacked like cordwood in lorries to the hundreds of dogs rounded up for horrific mass killings, where they are half-strangled by tongs, and some are even plucked from their own doorsteps. The lucky

ones die by a painful injection into the heart; the not so lucky die slowly while tied with wire to the bodies of dead dogs in a garbage truck. These will be sold back to their owners for five times what the killers can get from the municipality, if dead. These, and dozens more, are some of the issues we deal with regarding domestic animals.

For the last few years we have, through necessity, become increasingly involved with wildlife and forest issues because our refuge and project-site is in the Nilgiris: a "biodiversity hot-spot" with the largest remaining Asian elephant population in India. Elephants, tigers, panthers, Langur monkeys, Sambar, Malabar squirrels, Thar, Guar, and hundreds of species of birds are all being threatened through the loss of their habitats. Time is short. All of the wild adult-male tusker elephants in our area have been killed in the few years since I have lived there. My staff had names for each one. We would carefully greet them because most had become killers after years of being shot, electrocuted, having their mouths blown apart with homemade bombs put in Jackfruit, poisoned, or hacked with machetes by cash-crop owners who rape the forests. But the worst fate of all is to be captured. Such elephants live in chains, beaten into submission to carry tourists on their backs, or to promote the dubious venture called "breeding stock" for scientific research on conservation. Does torture in captivity, hidden from the public, justify our wish to conserve them? Are we doing it for their sake or ours? We have no less than fifty stories of the most barbaric, unconscionable, deliberate acts of cruelty to these wild and captive creatures, but all our efforts have met a wall of denial by powerful vested interests who do not wish to change the status quo.

Q4. GOALS & STRATEGIES

Our strategies for achieving our goals change, intensify, or modify according to the lay of the land. My project, the India Project for Animals and Nature (IPAN), is affected by the political, cultural, religious, and most profoundly by the long-standing organizational and institutional bodies which were set up to address the issues of animal cruelty and conservation. After working within these established entities to no avail, we had no choice but to expose the failure to alleviate the suffering or conserve the last of the wild. Our Web site at www.gcci.org (click on IPAN) details some of the issues. IPAN continues to address the situation through a holistic approach: We help the valued domestic animals, and have a project to reduce the cattle population to preserve the forests. We seek to stop cruelty to cattle during their transport to slaughter, but do not promote "saving the cows" unless there is

proper sanctuary. We have witnessed and documented how lack of space, food, and veterinary care only extends the suffering of these animals. We do not preach vegetarianism because it does not address the issue of overpopulation of cattle, roaming the streets and eating plastic because they are hungry. It does not address the issue of competition with wildlife for grazing, nor the demise of the forests from overgrazing, nor disease transmission to wildlife. And it does not address the most essential issue: so long as milk and milk products are used as human food these animals will continue to suffer. The cow may take on reverential status, but concern for her fate should not take precedence over all the other animals who suffer in the streets and on the road to slaughter: goats, sheep, buffalo, burned-out bullocks, and male calves. Our Hill View Farm Animal Refuge is vegan and "no-kill," but we look for alternatives to the nonviable sound-bite solution, "save the cow." We travel to the most remote tribal settlements to spay/neuter and vaccinate dogs, and treat cattle, so the communicable diseases do not spread to the wildlife. We bring cruelty to the attention of the police and engage in enforcement of anticruelty laws in the courts. We rescue, provide veterinary services, and give permanent sanctuary to those who have been so physically or emotionally traumatized as to be deserving of a lifetime at our peaceable kingdom.

We document and report the covered-up killing and torture of wildlife and the destruction of the forests. We assist and treat many wild animals. We stop land-encroachment into the forest, the illegal cutting of trees and collection of forest products.

Q5. DEFINING SUCCESS

Our goal is to bring world attention to the plight of this rich and precious bioregion known as the Nilgiris, or Blue Mountains. It has recently been designated by UNESCO as a Global Biosphere Reserve. We fear it may be too little, too late. Research for conservation should take a backseat to an all-out, well-staffed, massive, and immediate enforcement of the laws protecting wildlife and forests, or we will only have people and cows eating their way to mono-cultural suicide. We need a consortium of international players to work hand in hand, without fear of stepping on somebody's well-heeled shoes. We need an in-field, unbiased oversight team to ensure that the programs are properly run. The only hope, the only way we will succeed, is to get beyond the cultural, religious, philosophical, and self-serving differences and simply focus on helping the animals and allowing them to live in their

natural environments free of these human constraints. Impossible? No. We can stop the encroachment of people into the forests. We can encourage other means of sustainable living that does not cause pain, terror, death, or indefensibly cruel captivity.

After my years living and working with the villagers and tribals, I have found a sensitive and wise people who support this notion. They have not had a voice: IPAN has worked closely with the indigenous peoples to give them a voice. The tribals lived respectfully and sustainably for thousands of years before the area was discovered by those who wished to exploit and control the lands, the people, and Nature. We would we wise to look at our own history in this regard, in the United States, and beware lest we live to repeat it in the Nilgiris.

Q6. GROUPS & ORGANIZATIONS

IPAN's parent organization is New York-based Global Communications for Conservation, Inc. They provide our 501(c)3 charity status, handle administrative duties, and give us a Web site. All this is free of charge so that all donated monies can go to our project for the animals and the environment. Laura Utley is the founder and chairperson of this organization, and her tireless work in conservation has been an inspiration to all of us.

Q7. "THE OPPOSITION"

The "opposition" is all those people, institutions, organizations, and governmental bodies that cause deliberate harm through greed or misplaced sense of progress, without considering the soul of Nature. Nature's perfectly sensible rules do not place man in the center of the universe. Opponents are also those, who despite their good intentions, cause more harm because they do not pause before they act. I try to remember, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." I have learned that when I listen to the trees and the tribals I am blessed with a humility that gives me wisdom and strength to fight the battle for the animals.

Q8. HEROES

I have been influenced and inspired by many writers, poets, painters, and musicians, who have themselves been inspired by the sounds, sights, and tactile wonders of animals and Nature. I cannot begin to list them all. They have no doubt sustained me.

The foundation, the grist for the mill in my early, formative years, was a gift from my family. My mother and grandmother showed me that compassion for animals was a natural thing, and, more importantly, that women could be strong if someone violated this gentle domain. When my grandfather was a little rough with a cow, my grandmother had him up against the wall with a pitchfork. When my mother saw the neighbor children torturing a bird they had tied by a string on the leg to a tree, she stood alone in protest and was slapped in the face and ostracized by the community. Her glasses went flying, but she stood fast by her convictions. My brother and I were allowed to bring in every conceivable creature we had rescued—we played hide-and-seek with a chicken running through the house. My father taught me the most important lesson, know that your compassion is not without risk and sacrifice. He taught me, through his mantralike repetition: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." He taught me through example that we are responsible not only for our own actions but also those of others when blatant moral indifference causes harm to others.

When he allowed me to come along on a fishing and hunting trip, he was the recipient of my inconsolable anger and hurt. He never did it again; he got rid of the gun and the fishing rod. My brother was blinded when he was eighteen and when I asked him years later if he would support medical experimentation on animals if it meant he could see again, he told me that if one animal had to suffer for this, he wouldn't want to see again.

So, my advice is to follow your dream, listen to your instincts, and draw from that deep well of courage, which can make heroes of everyone who dares to take the risk. These days, many people think that heroes are only in history books. I have been fortunate to have known so many: Nigel, Mani, Madhyga, Elsi, Mary and her family, Nagaraj, Vighya, and so many others who have entered and enriched my life. Those who inspire me now are my Indian staff and friends. They are everyday proof of what I wanted to believe was possible, but dared not to believe, for fear of disappointment against the hard realities of poverty, corruption and indifference born of hopelessness. They are the most dedicated, devoted, kind, hardworking, and joyous people I have ever had the honor to work with. If there is one animal who needs our help, my staff jump in the back of the jeep, forgo food and rest, and put in a seventeen-hour day without complaint. My staff tells me that we must go up the mountain again, after two failed attempts, to rescue a severely injured old dog. It is late, we are all tired and hungry,

but we succeed and now Pero lives with us and has been petted and fed and given a comfortable bed for the first time in her life. At the end of the day we feel good.

When an elephant was terribly injured during capture, my staff demanded that I become involved. We got up at five o'clock every morning to cut and collect and load sorghum, palm leaves, bananas, and cabbages into our jeep. We fed and treated him for four hours every day. We named him Loki, the messenger. We still struggle with the fact that he, and the others at the elephant camp, continue to suffer. To see the videotape, to hear Loki's howls of pain, should make one question why we bother to "save" them if it means a life of torture in captivity. Will we give up working for his liberation? No. When we feel we are losing all hope, the tribals build a fire in the donkey enclosure at our refuge and pound drums, dancing and calling out Loki's name. The young boys sing a song they wrote for him.

Q9. RELIGION/SPIRITUALITY

When confronted with what we see every day in our work, I suppose it is natural to question one's religion and spirituality. Religion is something I shy away from; live and let live. If religion is used to justify injury to others or Nature, I have no problem throwing the tea into the face of the hostess. Spirituality is a word that has been terribly over-used and misused. I embrace the spirit that I see and feel in my human crusaders and nonhuman companions. I see spirit in rocks and trees and rivers. I feel it in the wind. It is part of my work and therefore cannot motivate me as something distinctively separate. Spirituality is part of it all; it does not have a category or special place in my soul. It is part of the whole that fills my soul.

Q10. FUNNY/STRANGE EXPERIENCES

Most days, humor sustains us more than religion or spirituality. It is a M*A*S*H* kind of humor born of a triage, foxhole experience. Sometimes it is subtle, just a look shared when we find ourselves in anatomically impossible positions trying to hold a several-ton buffalo with horns wider than most people's kitchens. Other times it is stomachs heaving and eyes filling with tears from a practical joke played on one of the staff. It relieves tension and helps to keep the balance during a particularly difficult day. There are times of almost unbearable grief when we have lost one that we love, or find that our rescue was too late, or that the suffering is too big to take in. Those are times

of profound silence. We dig a grave and sit with the dogs and the donkeys, who put their heads on our shoulders and nibble our ears. The next day, life goes on and when the laughter returns it is healing. We get our greatest bonding from giggles as our new volunteers from abroad learn to adapt. During lunch, the staff uses the time to discuss various animals and plan the rest of the day. We talk about the condition of the stools of various patients, whether another treatment for lice is in order, or if we need to further treat a dog's jaw eaten away by maggots. When we look up, the new volunteer has often turned some shade of green. We laugh later. Hardly a day passes without something happening, from the mildly irritating to the dangerous, that transforms horror into humor. I announce at lunchtime that I awoke in the middle of the night with a rat in my bed, pulling out my hair for nesting material. I get no sympathy, just peals of laughter from the staff. Another time I'm walking through the dining room absorbed in thought, when I glance down and see a five-foot cobra in full attack position only a few inches from my leg. Somehow I jump straight up and flip myself over the dining room table. More laughter. Of course, one cannot live surrounded by two hundred animals and not delight in their antics. I walk into the kitchen and there is a water buffalo. I bathe with any number of creatures who are using this area as their recovery room. There is a goat recovering in the living room, one of the staff is curled up sleeping with him. The dogs have run off with the last pair of shoes. One of our cows, whom we named Plastic because we removed thirty pounds of plastic from her stomach (eaten when she was starving), comes gracefully into my tiny bedroom, gives me not the slightest recognition, and proceeds to check out my bathroom. This oddity evokes not even the slightest interest from the ten dogs on my bed! My husband walks into the office and he sees a rat taking his most important paper through the roof crack; he is shouting, and the two engage in a tug of war. The abnormal becomes the normal. The rat wins.

Q11. LESSONS/ADVICE

It is difficult to give advice because every situation has its own unique set of circumstances which is best learned by doing. Almost everyone told me that our projects in the Nilgiris would prove impossible. We were told that no one cares about animals, and we would never find staff among the locals. We met Nigel Otter; he gave us his farm for our refuge and became the deputy director of IPAN. He is the best animal handler and healer we have ever known. Hill View

Farm Animal Refuge is a model shelter for which Nigel and the staff are due full credit. We offer it as a training center for others who wish to set up similar operations elsewhere.

In this avocation, I have been a witness to my own evolution. I still marvel at how I went to India for the sake of the animals, but I stay for the love of the people I live and work with. I do not suggest that one should not be cautious, especially with some individuals and organizations that one might assume share the same vision, simply because we work in the same arena. Not all people come wrapped the same way, so beware of fancy packages. Truth and good works have a way of winning out, however endless the journey seems. There is much to be said about finding something that sustains you no matter what happens. I have 104 rescued donkeys—I love the smell of them, the sound of them, the knowledge of them just outside my bedroom window in my little renovated sheep shed. I call it home.