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Neriuppua - where the hope has a name

A travel report about Eastern Greenland in the summer of 2016

Project „frozen hearts“

Organization for Animal protection Robin Hood

Sorry... the growing workload of Robin Hood is the reason for the considerable delay once again. But now back to Greenland. In the middle of August I was once again back in Tasiilaq in Eastern Greenland, a spot of land, where in the meantime I feel at home. Anyhow...

The dogs... still in chains, because unfortunately that's the law and I'm not prepared to change it. But what I could already change and that becomes apparent - the living conditions for the dogs.

How did it all start? In the summer of 2000 it was the first time I came to Greenland, to Eastern Greenland. And I saw the horror - skeletons, shot dogs, despair, hopelessness, loneliness. I was in a lost position. I knew no one and no one there took note of my concerns. Only the dogs looked at me hopefully.

To be honest, I didn't know what to do. I cried a lot of tears and was despaired. No one believed in me. What do you want to do there? You'll never reach anything...

I wrote to them all, animal protection organizations worldwide, politicians, the queen of Denmark... without success, the pain of the dogs continued and also mine...

The years went by, I stayed persistent, traveled there again and again. I hated this country. Weeks before my trips to Greenland I had stomach ache, fear, despair. In 2012 I met an environmental politician, who had given an answer to me. He believed in me and opened the first door. The project with the doghouses started... long time ago Roar Heini Olsen has left Greenland, but I think of him with gratitude.

Now it's 2016 and in the meantime I love Eastern Greenland, it's nearly like a second homeland for me. There's still a lot of pain, but it's getting better. More than 100 doghouses exist in Tasiilaq. Unfortunately the last Piteraq - a storm in this area with 250km/h - swept some of them away and also some of the laboriously transported water containers were destroyed. But that won't get us down...

Meanwhile I like to go there, today I know a lot of people and I'm somehow more accepted. The summer of 2016 was very dry. In August I was there again. Unfortunately our waterpipe was only built provisional. Therefore I had hard discussions with the responsible construction manager. There's no time, he ment... At the same time he's also responsible for the dogs. That's, what I can't accept... and that's why I tried to find a solution. So one of my ways led to the vice-mayor, who is also represented in the parliament...He will bring up

the subject in the city council. We hope, that someone will be responsible for the dogs there, who takes things more serious.

I talked with the vice-mayor for a long time. We planned to promote a day to collect the waste, because that's also a problem in Eastern Greenland, but on that day I will also give a lecture about the dogs, there should be music and food, a day for all to bring our programme closer to the people.

On the airport in Kulusuk I met Torben, the boss of the airport, he always leaves 100-litres containers to me, but I have to pay the transport and that costs a lot, because it's a long way from Kulusuk to Tasiilaq and it has to be transported by the boat. But that won't get us down...

Royal Arctic, the Greenland shipping line, had transported some of them, but for a lot of money, of course. Now I hired private boat owners, but I've to pay them also. But the dogs have to get the water. And many of them have already got it.

Lars Anker cares for the production of dog food in Denmark, Robin Hood pays the freight costs, therefore the food can be sold for a lower price and the dog owners buy up all of it. And you can see it... the dogs look much better now, together with the white huts, looking like small glimmers of hope in the landscape. But there is still a lot to do...dogs with strangled chains, without water, without dog houses...sick dogs... I've got to do more...

I asked for the animal protection law, the state law and that for the municipality. But the translation in English needs time... I looked for the most important parts, because I've got an idea. I found a translator on-site, who translate it in East Greenlandic at a favourable price. And there is Hjordis, the boss of the „Telepost“... we know each other for a longer time, she has two dogs herself...she takes care for the Inuit-children, a woman with her heart on the right side.... we get well with each other...And she helped to realize my idea, to publish leaflets with the regulations for dog owners, combined with an offer to help. Hjordis organized the production of the copies and spread the flyers to the postboxes, so nearly every household could get the information. One step again! We've already made new plans for the next leaflets.

And with Dines Mikaelson, an Inuit with dogs, I've found a project partner. His name is written as a contact person on the leaflet. He transports water containers with his boat, I pay him for fuel and for the resulting expenses. And it works. Dines participates with enthusiasm. And it makes sense, because that comes from the country itself. I've to take more persons on board: Anna, the translator, Dines, Justus, the vice-mayor.

After all the water flows and many dogs can be supplied with it. But we want to connect it with the local water pipeline and to set up a cottage, where the water tap is protected and can be turned off, because the water shouldn't run for nothing. All that wouldn't be such a big problem, but in Greenland everything is hard to achieve. I've learned to be more patient, but to be honest, that's not easy for me.

There has to come a new load of dog food, because many of the dog owners already buy the good food. As Robin Hood is paying the freight costs (this load in November costs nearly 8200 Euro for 32 palettes), the food can be sold for a lower price. And not only in Tasiilaq, more and more it's also bought in the villages. Without any doubt you can realize, that at the moment the dogs are better nourished. Because it's not always possible, to feed them seals and fish.

Unfortunately many of the dogs, that have been here in March, can't be seen anymore. Many were shot. Some of them, because they weren't wanted anymore, some of them, because they were sick. There's no veterinarian anymore for the sleddog district, the last veterinarian is pregnant and to my knowledge she wasn't substituted until now. A veterinarian would be very welcome in Tasiilaq, there are also cats and many of their owners want to have them castrated, also some dog owners would like to have the dogs castrated. It's very important to have informations about the right way to deal with deworming and about parvovirus, because this disease has occurred. Rabies vaccination is described by law, but unfortunately there's not always enough serum.

Robin Hood wants to bring a veterinarian on-site, initially for one week, because at the moment it's not possible to pay for more, but maybe, we will find a longer-term solution.

Many dogs are shot for incomprehensible reasons, because of small injuries, that by all means could be cured. But without a veterinarian, without medicaments many owners don't see another solution but the death.

On the cliffs to the Arctic Ocean I discovered the dogs again, I've already seen last year and they were in a miserable condition. A female dog, heavily pregnant, with purulent eyes, completely dehydrated. These dogs belong to the worst kept animals. They belong to a cook, who doesn't care about them. The dogs yelped, moaned, leapt up on me, the chains rattled... They were despaired of thirst. Exposed to storm and rain, without doghouses, without protection. They were feed from time to time, but I never saw water. I brought along a canister with water... the dogs drank like crazy. I unraveled the chains, bought new necklaces, the old ones hurt them in the flesh. Greenlandic dogs are for usually chained in pairs. It was a challenge to supply the dogs with new necklaces. The male dogs were very strong and nearly throwed me down. It was only possible in twos. While I held the female dog, we cut the necklace of the male dog, but he had also to be held. If one of them would run away, there's the threat a dog catcher would shoot him. .. But we've made it.

Every day I returned with water. I visited the local hospital, where you can get medicaments. And I told the story about a friend of mine with an eye inflammation. From a danish doctor I got an eye ointment for free...and I should return, if my friend wouldn't feel better.

The poor female dog got the eye ointment. Every day I cleaned her eyes and supplied her with the medicament. In the meantime she had born nine puppies, that were whining and

thronging to her. I bought food, to bring back her strength. This dog was sick for at least a year. It raised my anger. I walked to the police to file a complaint. But the police station was still closed. So I asked myself, if it would be the right decision. In consequence of my complaint the dogs could be probably shot. But what kind of life they have to live? I struggled with myself. Maybe, it was fate, that the police-station was closed. I talked to Denis, who had become a friend in the meantime. He promised me to care for the dogs, especially for the sick female dog. We bought penicillin, because there's nothing else, and gave it to her.

(Dines has meanwhile looked after her and she's doing better.)

I really didn't have an idea, what to do with that dogs in the future. Report it? And to be responsible, when they would be shot? Perhaps I could meet with the owner... I've always heard, that he was already admonished and called for attention, but none of this made any difference... but I was ready to try my luck.

Not far from these dogs sat Molly. She was lonely, had no water and food. Dines had supplied her. The owner is hardly ever around. Maybe, I would be allowed to take her with me. I asked Dines and I did something, that for usually I wouldn't do, because it's nonsensical. I asked Dines to ask the owner, if she would give me the dog, for money. When I was back home again, Dines wrote to me, that we've got Molly - for barely 27 Euro. He took her to his other dogs, who now become her friends. I named Molly Neriuppa - it means hope in East Greenlandic.

Finally it started to rain, just when I had the opportunity to take a boat trip with Dines. Unfortunately I'm no seal and I get sick, when I'm in a boat during a storm. But I tried to pull myself together and we whoosh by wind and water.

In Kulusuk it was also raining, I visited the dogs. My overall impression was not as bad as expected, because I'm accustomed to quite a lot and I've learned, that things are different here and it wouldn't be fair to apply the same standards. The dogs were consistently well-fed, but unfortunately there are not so many doghouses. I met a young Inuit, who spoke English. I told him about the doghouse project and that here they also could get the kennels.

I've quickly learned, with every conversation I can make some further progress. That's why I talked with anyone I met and was interested. I went in the bars, in the church, in the few shops. In the meantime the people have established a connection between the project and a face - namely mine. They know me, they greet and appreciate my work. When I think back how it started in 2007 I can see an important progress.

In the port of Kulusuk I found an Orca. Dead. These whales and others are caught, it's usual. Sometimes they are processed for dogfood. Unbelievable for Europeans, but here it's usual. Some dead seals on ropes dangled in the water for refrigeration. They are also dog food. But seals were also eaten by the Inuit. And the skins here are processed, of course. I

take a more differentiated view on this issue. Polar bears are also shot and their skins were drying in the warm summer wind. It's allowed until the end of July to shoot them, 35 for this quote. There are shooting quotes for ice bears, specified whales and other animals. But as everywhere, when human beings go out with weapons, the quotes are disregarded. Unfortunately also in Greenland. And it's hard to control. Nevertheless, as an opponent of hunting, I can't compare this kind of hunting with the seal slaughter in Canada. Here in Greenland there's still more respect for wildlife (unfortunately not for the dogs, but this is also changing). These animals are also utilized and not only used for the fur production. When a whale is caught, a walrus or another wild animal, it's still something special. And all parts are shared here. As I said, as an hunt opponent, I've to accept these things and take a different view, when I compare it with a mob of drunken hunters in Austria, banging on caged animals (what is the case with the canned hunting).

During this time in Greenland some progress had been made. Especially the campaign with the regulations in the postboxes was important. That's an activity, I want to continue. More public education, it cannot work without it.

And we'll continue the construction of the doghouses. We will bring more water tanks. And the water pipeline will be built professionally. And somehow I will bring a veterinarian on-site. Perhaps in the future I can engage one for a longer period and talk with the Ministry. There's still a lot, that have to be changed. But I'm confident. With every visit I met more and more helpfully people. Let's make a step further.

Still I meet dogs, that I've already met years before. And maybe, they also know me. Their wagging tails, their joy... but in fact they all act like this - the sledge dogs in Greenland.

For me they are the toughest animals of the world. In chains they are exposed to storm, rain, ice and snow, day and night. With less or without food, often without a drop of water. They can't run and hunt to keep themselves warm like other wild animals - but they survive. I often wonder myself, how... You deserve our appreciation and respect! For centuries they've led humans through this ice desert...

Today this ice desert is melting away... everywhere the climate change is visible and scary. It's getting increasingly warmer in Greenland. Pizza and cola found their way into Greenland. For many persons the dogs mean nothing more than a tradition. But all that shouldn't stop us to realize a better life for these dogs. Together with the inhabitants of Greenland.

That's what distinguishes Robin Hood. The changes have to come from the country itself, with the people on-site. Anywhere, in Romania, Iraq, Siberia, Armenia and also in Greenland.

Qujanaq, quimmit! Thank you, dogs!