

Going Local

Giving Voice to Animals

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By Sheralyn Tay

As a little girl growing up in England, Amy Corrigan would build little rain shelters for animals and save earthworms from frostbite. Today, as the Director of Education at the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) in Singapore, she has turned her childhood love into a passionate career.

It is no wonder that the girl who loved animals grew up to become an animal rights advocate. “As a child, I watched the Disney cartoon *The Fox and the Hound* – a cartoon about fox hunting – and it confused me why people would want to hunt or hurt animals at all,” recalled Amy Corrigan, 32, Director of Education at the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), who grew up in Britain and worked overseas before moving to Singapore three years ago. “Growing up, I was exposed to the issue of animal welfare; my mother would take me to the store and there would be people giving out flyers outside. After learning about the issues, I got involved in animal rights advocacy starting when I was about eight. One of my first petitions at school was against the Grand National (a steeplechase) in which horses are injured and killed every year.”

When she graduated with a degree in Zoology from the University of Sheffield, Amy sought to gain the experience required to join organisations in the United Kingdom, through volunteer work. “I came across a chance to volunteer with the Wildlife Friends of Thailand in 2002, then a newly launched group that did animal rescues.”

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Six months later, Amy was hired on a full-time basis. It was during her three-year stint in Thailand that she first met Singaporean Louis Ng, founder of ACRES and her future husband. In 2006, Amy decided to join Louis – and ACRES – in Singapore. “I felt it was a good place to start tackling the issues on a more sustainable front,” she explained. “While I was rescuing animals in Thailand, there was really no end to it. But ACRES is focused on campaigning, which addresses the root of the problem.” Moreover, she said, Singapore, being more developed and affluent, could quite literally ‘afford’ to pay attention to the issues, not having to deal with poverty, basic infrastructure and developmental needs.

Today, Amy plans educational material for schools, which range from kindergarten to tertiary and corporate level programmes. Over the years, Amy has seen a lot of progress in the awareness and attitudes of Singaporeans. “People are a lot more receptive. We get a lot of volunteers and support from corporations for our work.”

With the launch of ACRES’ Wildlife Rescue Centre (AWRC) in August this year – a project close to her heart – there is an even greater sense of accomplishment. Tucked away in Chua Chu Kang in the sprawling western region of Singapore, the AWRC – a modest set-up with facilities to house rescued illegal animals, an education hall, an office and a volunteer camp ground – is a green haven, especially for Amy. “I grew up in a quiet street near the sea in Bournemouth and lived for three years in rural Thailand, so when I moved to Singapore, it was hard getting used to living in a city – especially in a flat.”

In fact, Amy is probably more familiar with Singapore’s green spots than Orchard Road. The AWRC is one example. When she comes in to work each day, she is greeted with the sight of flowering wild shrubs and grass, ACRES’ adopted dogs, and some unusual neighbours – lizards, birds, snakes and frogs. “It’s a lovely place to work,” she said smiling. In fact, so busy are Louis and Amy that they have yet to go on their honeymoon.

“We both can’t be away for two weeks at a stretch,” she laughed. This passion for the cause is not just talk. Louis, Amy and nine other full-time ACRES staff earn a small salary – believing in channelling as much funding to helping animals as possible. Together, Louis and Amy earn about \$2,500 a month. “Money is not important,” said Amy, “the only reason I’d want more money is to give it to help more animals.”

Indeed, it takes no less than \$500,000 a year run the organisation, which relies on public donations. Going forward, ACRES aims to expand its animal rescue operations – the confiscation and repatriation of illegally traded and endangered creatures – to the region.

And while she misses her family in England, Amy has never regretted her move to Singapore where she now has a new family of her own – ACRES and the animals that she is able to give both a voice and a home.