

SIETSKE MEERLOO

THE INDIAN HORSE RIDING CHALLENGE

“Horse, you are truly a creature without equal, for you fly without wings and conquer without sword.”
Arabian Proverb

I MOVED FROM DUBAI TO JORDAN IN THE SUMMER OF 2010; FROM THE UAE'S SCORCHING SUMMER HEAT TO THE PLEASANT TEMPERATURES OF THE LEVANT. DUBAI HAD TREATED ME WELL WHILE I LIVED THERE; IT HAD BEEN GOOD FOR MY CAREER AND ENABLED ME TO LIVE A COMFORTABLE LIFE.

I am not sure whether it was the financial crisis that hit the Emirate or if it was just time to go, but one day I realised I wanted more in life than a well-paid job and a hectic social life. It was time for me to start to think of realising the dreams I had always had – but that hadn't come true. Because, what do we live for if we can't make our dreams come true, if we feel we are unable to step out of our comfort zone, if we cannot make a change in our own lives (let alone someone else's)?

There were always excuses not to leave the life I was leading, whether financial or social. Since I was a child, I dreamt of having my own equine friend but it took many, many years for this dream to come true. It wasn't until 2010, when I met a wonderful man who gave me strength, courage and love that it felt like it was my year for change. I found a way to realise my dream of having my own horse, who would be a partner, buddy and



friend.

Abha Ra'ad, a six year old grey Arabian trotted into my life in late 2010. While he hadn't been abused by his previous owners, he had hardly been handled. He had few manners and knew little about how to behave towards humans. So I

started to work with him, applying - what are popularly called natural horsemanship methods. We made good progress in the months that followed, building a partnership together based on trust and respect for each other that grows with every passing day.



to my heart, whether by playing and training with them, or riding them. They are well looked after because I have the means to do so.

There are many horse owners in the world, though, who do not have the means to do so. They have neither the finances, nor the tools nor the wealth of information that we have or can find on the Internet, through vets and experts. Nevertheless, these people need their horses to survive, to make a living, and to take care of their families. People and animals in the poorest countries of the world suffer tremendously. And I believe you and I can help.

I decided to combine my dream, my love for horses and my resources by participating in the 'Indian Horse Riding Challenge', a 10-day horse ride on Marwari horses through Rajasthan in India from 23 February to 4 March 2012 to raise funds for the Brooke Hospital for Animals. It is a wonderful combination of discovering a country on horseback while raising money for a good cause. Each participant, including me, seeks to raise funds through donations.

Brooke is an international animal welfare organisation committed to improving the lives of working horses, donkeys, mules and their owners in third world countries. The Brooke currently provides veterinary treatment and community programmes across Africa, Asia and Latin America.


Through free veterinary care Brooke helps half a million horses and donkeys in the world's poorest communities. These equine animals provide an income for these people and their families, but many of their

owners are so busy surviving and making sure there is food and water for their families, and that the horses and donkeys are the last ones to be thought of. Brooke's aim is to work in partnership with locals to ensure that working horses, donkeys, mules and their owners live a better life. Besides running clinics, Brooke also cooperates with local animal protection organisations, educates local vets and shares good practices and solutions with them.

The Brooke's goal is to increase the number of working animals it helps to two million a year by 2016. I know the horses and donkeys in the countries that Brooke operates in will never have the lives that my horses or others may have. But as horse lovers, the wellbeing of other equines is close to our hearts.

I am supporting Brooke through the "Indian Horse Riding Challenge" and would like to ask you to do the same by helping this cause with a financial donation. Please visit my webpage on: www.justgiving.com/Siets where you can make a donation by credit card or PayPal, or visit www.thebrooke.org.

In the words of Gail Sheehy, a well-known journalist and lecturer: "If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living."

Please help to support this very worthy cause. 

www.justgiving.com/siets

Photos by Tariq Dajani



In early 2011, Abha Ra'ad was joined by a bay mare called Abha Karachi who came from the same stables I originally purchased him from. They live a good life together in their new home. I try to give them all they need to be healthy and happy, mentally and physically. In return they bring a smile to my face and warmth