

# Happy New Year.

## Looking back over 2011



Every new year, I have always thought back about the last 12 months and the changes in our lives that the year had brought. It used to be that we had another baby, changed job, moved house, new car, places we had been, friends we had made and friends or family that we had lost. There were a few years when I would think well nothing is different, same job, same house, same daily routine. We can't say that since we moved to Bulgaria in 2007.

Last night was no different. I thought back over the past year and what an emotional roller coaster it has been. This time last year we had raised the funds and bought the building that was to be the future shelter/clinic for RSDR. This was a massive achievement although we had accepted the fact that with all the renovations needed, it would probably be years before we actually had any dogs there.

Well things happen and plans sometimes have to change. When we found Kasumi and her pups in March, we had absolutely nowhere at the house that we could put them. We couldn't leave them on the streets so we had no other option than to bring them to the shelter. At that time, the building was just three large sheds all piled high with rubbish. For the dogs safety we couldn't leave them alone at nights so I said I would move up to the shelter with them.

It wasn't easy. There was no bed, just a lumpy old sofa that had been left there. We still have no hot water and for months I had no internet. I admit there were nights when I thought I had heard something and would be stood behind the door with an axe or kettle of boiling water incase anyone broke down the door. At least with a boiling kettle, I could make myself a cup of tea when I realized it was just my imagination getting the better of me.

In the months that followed work was non stop. The sheds were cleared and more and more pens were built as more dogs needed rescuing. Kerry and Kosta were at the V.T branch but then things started going badly wrong there. Local gypsies would claim that dogs had been out and attacked them when the dogs hadn't been out. Kerry was in the early stages of pregnancy and was scared and stressed through harassment. She had stones thrown at her when she went to the shop, was chased and flashed at and a gang of gypsies told Kosta that if he went out and left Kerry then it was at his own risk. For the sake of the dogs, they put up with it for months but the final straw came when Rambo was shot in the garden.

We put out an emergency appeal so that we could build more pens and get Kerry, Kosta and the dogs back to Rudozem. So many of you donated towards the new pens and transport back of the dogs and Liam and Luke's friends turned up every day of their school holidays to help clear the sheds and build the pens. The lads were brilliant. Whilst all this was going on, we were having no end of problems due to complaints about us using the building as a dog shelter. We would have unannounced visits from police and different officials and some of them were extremely nasty. For months I had to wait to hear if the prosecutor could find anything to charge me with. I had never in my life had so much as a parking fine and here I was being treated as a criminal simply for wanting to save the lives of dogs, whilst the real criminals who had shot them, starved them, abused and dumped them, weren't even given a second thought.

Luckily during that time we had our first volunteer, Carmel. She was a rock and a blessing at the most difficult of times and even offered to stay longer until things were a bit calmer.

Well to cut a long story short, we got all the dogs back to Rudozem although poor Rambo who had been shot, died the day after he arrived. No charges were brought against me and some officials and ministry vets were helpful and supportive and issued us a license for keeping animals which meant that other officials couldn't keep threatening us. Every part of the building

is now taken up with pens and we have over a hundred dogs and cats here. We are still working on the separate exercise yards which means that more dogs can be let out at any one time. The temporary pens built with wood and wire are by no means perfect, but this is home to many dogs now and at least they are safe, fed, loved and cared for.

We don't have the space to take in every dog off the streets and we aren't able to save every one that we do. It is always hard when we lose a pup with an infection or a dog that we have loved and cared for and we have had our fair share of that this year. People sometimes ask me how we can face such cruelty and loss and find the strength to carry on. People have different ways of coping. Recently we lost seven pups after one of them brought in an infection and we also had the terrible news about Zack's death. We were devastated but there was no time for tears or time out as we were so busy fighting to save other sick pups. Of course you can't bottle things up for ever and sometimes it will just all come out when you least expect it. A few days ago Luke rescued Koolie. She had been living in the forests by the landfill for at least four months. Over the past week, hunters had shot all the dogs that she was with and she had somehow escaped, leaving her alone and the subject of their target practice. You would think a dog that had lived wild for so long and been hunted would at the very least be untrusting of people, but no, when she first met me, I knelt down and she came straight into my arms. As I hugged her, that was when the floodgates opened, for the injustice done to her, for her friends that had been killed, for Zack and all the little pups that we had lost.

I used to think we could get through anything and everything as long as we were together as a family but even that has been challenged this year. For the first time in twenty three years, Tony and I ended up being apart at nights. Not through choice but because one of us had to be at the shelter and one of us had to be at the house with the dogs there. Now we are both at the shelter and the boys stay at the house at nights. This was the first Christmas that we haven't all been at home as a family. I would be lying if I said it didn't bother me or get me down. We aren't angels, we are humans who try and rescue the four legged angels and we all have our off days when we swear and moan. At the end of the day though, we know that no matter how tough it gets, as long as there are dogs out there that are scared, hungry or abused, we will carry on.

One of our main plans for 2012 is to buy the next door building and turn it into a sterilization clinic. Hopefully we will get the shelter roof started one section at a time and start on other improvements. In 2011, a hundred and four dogs were adopted and we are hoping that with the change in the UK entry regulations, we can find loving homes for many more dogs this year. We don't know what 2012 will bring and what obstacles we might have to face, but one thing we do know is that we aren't alone. All the highs and lows are shared by our fantastic supporters and team members. Everything that we have achieved, each life that we have saved, has been made possible by you. Apart from financial support you give us emotional support and I feel blessed that through RSDR I have come to know so many compassionate and caring people. We can say "thank you" but somehow that doesn't express the gratitude we feel. On behalf of our family, team members and most importantly all our dogs and cats I would like to thank you for the support you gave us in 2011 and wish each and every one of you, health, love and happiness for 2012.

Blessings, Diane.

RSDR

(Rudozem Street Dog Rescue)

[www.streetdogrescue.com](http://www.streetdogrescue.com)

Koolie was rescued by Luke on the 30th December after the monthly newsletter had been sent out.

Koolie had been living in the forest next to the landfill site for at least four months. Over the past week, hunters had shot all of the dogs near the landfill, killing all of her friends. This lovely girl would no doubt have also been shot if Luke hadn't brought her back to the shelter.

