



Hello and welcome to Global Sanctuary for Elephants' brand new podcast Global Rumblyngs. Global sanctuary for elephants, or GSE for short, is a nonprofit organization with a mission to create vast safe spaces for captive elephants, where they are able to heal physically and emotionally, often from very traumatic pasts. I'm your host, Nadia Mari, and I'll be taking you to the lush jungle of the Mato Grosso region in central Brazil, home of GSE's initial project, Elephant Sanctuary Brazil, currently home to six female Asian elephants lovingly referred to as "the girls."

Nadia:

So here we are again, Scott, Kat. Hello and welcome to the second episode of our brand new podcast, Global Rumblyngs. How are you? What's it like in Brazil? Make us envious again, at least in my part of the world.

Kat: 1:11

It's always perfect (laughing). No, it actually is almost always perfect. And we have a lovely view looking out into the valley where it's raining somewhere off to the south. And you can see for miles. So that's quite nice.

Scott 1:23

It's pretty spectacular. We actually were joking last night with Ingo (laughing) it was 23 degrees and we were all cold. It's just luxury problems of living in paradise. It really is spectacular. We'll try to make you envious every week.

Nadia: 1:42

Okay, well take, knock off 10 degrees from that because it's like 13 here today. Well, it is now in the evening. Okay, so last week, we talked about the elephant sanctuary in Tennessee. And now we're going to, to move on. So 16 years, you've co-founded Global Sanctuary for Elephants in 2013. So you were then actually in Tennessee for 16 years, running the sanctuary there. And on your website, I read that when you founded or co-founded Global Sanctuary for Elephants in 2013, you'd come together with your founding board members to discuss elephants, or captive

elephant health in South America. So how come the shift from America from your sanctuary in Tennessee to South America? What was happening in South America at the time that your focus was shifting?

Scott 2:36

(laughing) So many things.

Nadia: 2:38

A small question again, a small question.

Scott 2:39

To get clarification when we talk about it being paradise, that is not 23 degrees Fahrenheit, that was 23 Celsius. (everyone laughing) An elephant sanctuary at 23 degrees Fahrenheit wouldn't work very well. No, a lot happened. You know, there's so much that happened in the 16 years and life altering things happened in those 16 years in Tennessee and really changed, I think, the world's perspective on what elephants needed. And what was possible. You know, as we talked in last episode, our colleagues said, "Hey, you're crazy for doing this; it's never going to work." And within a few years, we started seeing changes when the elephants that no one ever, no one could have anticipated. And a return to those natural instincts and natural ways that just, again, open up the minds and hearts of people around the world to what is capable with, for these elephants in captivity. You know, we still have people now that will say elephants don't, won't adapt to a wild setting or to a semi-natural setting, they won't know how to, how to graze, they won't know how to socialize that they've been alone for fifty years. None of that's true. And the elephants are really the ones that showed us what was needed.

Kat: 3:52

And that's one of the big things. I think a lot of people think it was this altruistic view of what sanctuary for elephants looked like. And it wasn't, you know. What it started out as thinking 100 acres was enough for elephants turned into having an elephant who supposedly was never gonna run or play going to the back of that 100 acres the first day she had access to it and looking at the property on the other side as if to tell you, "well, where's the rest?" I mean, it, you know, it wasn't a human idea. It started as trying to figure out what would work, but all of the teachings of the elephants is what essentially defined what sanctuary came to be and what we both understood that sanctuary for elephants is when you give them a voice and listen to what it is that they're actually trying to say.

Scott 4:47

And you know, that will I'll get back to your question in a minute (chuckle). I've already got to Brazil, but I think it's important to say because, you know,

Kat: 4:54

Are you sure?

Scott 4:55

I know it's important to say. A big thing for us in those first couple of years, Nadia, was the realization of how deep the damage is to these elephants in captivity. We didn't, we knew it was bad. We knew it's horrific. We had experienced that trauma, experienced the face value of the trauma. But we hadn't seen the depth of which that trauma seeps into their soul. Until we saw the depth of recovery, the amount of transformation, the magnitude of change that happened when these elephants, when you gave them the space that is theirs, when you allow them to be to reconnect to the world around them, when you allowed them to explore what they are, and who they are, and what they should be as elephants. And that really defined for us the importance of carrying this work forward.

Kat: 5:45

I think it also showed why it's so important to share the details of their journeys with others. Because we know for ourselves that comprehension only came through seeing what they went through. And while it's easy to be puppies and rainbows, and post cute photos of elephants all the time and talk about life at sanctuary, as if the second they step off of the trailer, everything's healed and life is wonderful. But it's not the reality. And it doesn't allow people to understand the depth of trauma that they've suffered, and how embedded that becomes in their life and how healing isn't linear, and it's not perfect, and they have struggles and only with understanding that do you really, I think that people are able to relate to the depths of how affected they are by some of the things that they, that have happened in their life. Like someone who's in an abusive relationship, you know, your next partner could be wonderful and could be the most beautiful person but it doesn't mean that you are in an emotional place to be able to open up and trust and have the life that you know, could come from something like that. So it is part of why with Global Sanctuary for Elephants and Elephant Sanctuary Brazil, we do try to be so transparent and share the bad with the good because only through that do we feel like people can actually understand not only the elephants as individuals, but what their life prior to sanctuary has actually done to them on every level.

Nadia: 7:24

Is trauma or healing from trauma from, with elephants, similar to humans overcoming trauma? I read once somebody said, I don't know who it is, I have to check that - "Elephants are the better humans." I mean, they're the sentient they're, they live in big family structures, they mourn their dead, their intelligence, all these wonderful traits that we love elephants for and yet we treat them so badly. That this trauma, getting over their past, is that something that can be compared with how humans get over a trauma? And thus making a bridge and making people understand that visiting elephants in zoos, is not good. It's not, you know, conservation,

Kat: 8:07

I think there's definitely a level of understanding that comes with it now. We have, one of the really nice things is our supporters, our sanctuary family, as we call them, are very open. And along with being very loving and respectful towards the elephants, they also share a lot. They share a lot publicly on social media. And you do have people that say, you know, I was in a

relationship for 15 years with an abusive partner. And I got out of it. And since then, I haven't been able to be with anyone because of all of the baggage that I bring into a relationship and all of the fears that I have. And watching Lady and how strong she is, even with everything she's gone through has given me a different perspective on things and has encouraged me to try and to realize how strong you can be even when these horrible things have happened to you. So what are you looking at? (With an insecure laugh - talking to Scott who is looking at Kat in an emotional way)

Nadia: 9:16

Just for the visitors or the listeners who don't know, Lady is one of the elephants at the sanctuary in Brazil,

Kat: 9:21

...that there is definitely that emotional connection that I think people are able to make, and allows for a deeper understanding. You know, it's not about anthropomorphizing what they go through, you know, to think that the emotions that we have are just ours, you know, and you can't, no other species can experience that. You know, for us. That's not anthropomorphism that's just being stupid. You know, they, science shows the size of their brains and different parts of their brains. They have deeper feelings than we do, you know, their emotions. They're, the part of their brain that processes emotions is larger than ours, you know, it's not just seeing them and thinking they're these, you know, big emotional beings. It's backed by science. And I think that being able to make that connection makes a difference for a lot of people. Go ahead back there. (Everyone laughing)

Scott 10:20

You know, this is what happens in elephant conversations, you know, there's, there's so many pieces to it. And, and...

Nadia: 10:27

I know, I feel like I'm herding fleas. (more laughing)

Scott 10:33

This is episode two Nadia, we have a lot of episodes to go, there's so much to talk about. And there's so much to dive into. And, it isn't linear as we're talking about with recovery. Also, the journey to sanctuary isn't linear, the journey to South America wasn't linear, and the journey, the what is needed for the recovery is profound. And each one is so vastly different than the next. And, you know, we've had this front row seat to be able to see the difference that sanctuary can make. And that's what drove us to carry forward into Brazil. And to be again, going on the side of transparency, in 2011, when we left the sanctuary in Tennessee, I told Kat, no more elephants, at least not now. You know, because they're, you invest every ounce of your being into this life.

Kat: 11:25

It's exhausting.

Scott 11:27

And there's no way to turn it off. People say hey, go and go away from vacation, well, that doesn't work. You know, you can't turn off from that responsibility. It is your responsibility, financial responsibilities and financial safety of the staff, it's the financial to protect it, the individual elephants. The messaging, I mean, this goes on and on and on. And you just, you can't turn off from it. And because we grew so fast, and we are breaking, you know, breaking the mold over and over and over again, starting with 110 acres and changing and growing to almost 2700 acres, you know, from us possibly helping four elephants, to receiving 24 elephants, you know, and the different elements, there's so much that happened in that time. It was really hard to honestly, it was hard to see what was happening before us. And I admittedly lost a little bit of who I was, and a little more important because of that responsibility. And, and didn't know how to rein myself back in to get good sound footing for my, for myself. And when we stepped away from the sanctuary in Tennessee, I said, you know, we wanted a little bit of a quiet life for a short time. And of course, within two months, we got a call, saying, hey, there's an elephant in, remember an elephant in Chile, we actually had talked to the folks about this elephant before. The sanctuary in Tennessee had supported a veterinarian going and visiting her in the circus. And there was a lawsuit to remove her from the circus. She had actually been confiscated, legally confiscated, but they didn't have a way anywhere to take her to. So she...

Nadia: 13:07

This is Ramba then?

Scott 13:09

Ramba was an elephant, last circus elephant in Chile. Confiscated several years before, kept in the custody of the circus because they didn't have anywhere to send her to. They wanted to send her to the sanctuary in Tennessee, but there was no way to assess her health. And we got a call just before Christmas of 2011. And they said, hey, you know, the judge is going to, you know, allow you to move, allow us to move this elephant but he's gonna give us one last chance, are you available? And we said sure, and we wrote a proposal for what we needed or what we would need to do. And we said we would need 10 days from start to finish. That was ideal was 10 days from the time we get there. And the day after Christmas, the judge ordered - you have 10 days starting now. We were still in the United States. We got a phone call and they said you know we have a plane leaving Orlando in three hours. Can you get there? I said well we're three hours from Orlando, so probably not. We have nothing packed, we have nothing. So things quickly evolved, things, we moved forward very quickly. And we found ourselves in Chile, and we can do a whole episode just on Ramba's rescue, Ramba's relocation from the circus.

Kat: 14:18

That's quite entertaining.

Scott 14:19

It's quite an ordeal. We will definitely give this the time it deserves.

Nadia: 14:22

Yes, we will definitely be doing each individual elephant as well.

Scott 14:26

But that was you know, less than a couple months after leaving the sanctuary and thrown right back into this world of elephants. And not a lot of people were available to be able to help this elephant leave the circus in the last chance she had. So we never really got away from the elephant world.

Kat: 14:43

We had nine to five jobs for a little while.

Scott 14:44

We did and after we actually, actually left Chile, actually while we were in Chile. We talked to Joyce and Petter.

Nadia: 14:49

They are your co-founding board members. Yep.

Scott 14:53

Dr. Joyce Poole, infamous elephant ethologist and researcher from, has worked a lot with elephants in Africa, and her husband and co-founder of ElephantVoices. They have been instrumental in helping this project in Brazil move forward. So they asked us about the possibility of doing a feasibility study for sanctuary development in Brazil. At that point, again, we were not ready, I was not ready emotionally to jump into that level. We got ourselves grounded, got nine to five jobs, working in a small town in North Carolina. And while we were there, I remember working one day and I loved what I was doing. But as I was working one day and just felt like I was throwing away all the lessons that the elephants had bestowed on us, and had given us, and all the gifts that we had learned and and...

Kat: 15:42

It starts to feel empty and purposeless. I mean, having a nine to five job is nice and being able to go out and you know, sleep in on weekends.

Scott 15:50

What's a weekend?

Kat: 15:50

You know, the reality is that, at some point, you wake up and feel like all that they shared with

you, and all that they taught you is kind of being thrown in the garbage, because there aren't a lot of people that do that kind of work. So then it feels pointless and useless. What you are doing day to day, and you start to have guilt issues. And (chuckles)...

Scott 16:17

Yeah, guilt is a good one. You know, especially when you see how much they have gone through. And again, how much they shared with you and how much time they invested into our learning, you know.

Kat: 16:26

How much patience. (laughing)

Scott 16:28

Yeah, we had a lot to learn and that, it's not, there's not a lot of folks that have had that type of experience and that type of that magnitude, that length of time and the spectrum of experience that those elephants shared with us. Within a couple of years, year and a half, maybe most. We had continued talking to Joyce and Petter, continued working on this idea of doing a feasibility study for sanctuary development in Brazil. We had tried to find funding to do a feasibility study. And that was actually really difficult to procure, which was surprising to us. When we asked for 15 organizations to give us \$1,000 each so we could fund the trip to South America.

Kat: 17:06

15 large nonprofit organizations

Scott 17:08

that we had had before knew about work

Kat: 17:10

And have done elephant campaigns for before.

Nadia: 17:13

So why Brazil if Ramba was in Chile, I didn't quite get that? Ramba was in Chile, she'd been confiscated by, by the government, but the zoo, she was there, was still in their care. So why Chile? Why Brazil?

Scott 17:26

So, as we talked about before, there's multiple different layers. (Scott and Kat laughing) This is, all these things are stories all on their own. So we're trying to get through a lot of pieces. So there's definitely a lot of space being cut out of the middle of all of this. So to answer that question, why Brazil, so there actually was initiative in Brazil to help instill a national ban on performing elephants in Brazil. And that was in conjunction with that, Joyce and Petter said, it's not enough just to do the ban, you need a solution. Part of what pushed us forward to develop

Global Sanctuary for Elephants was seeing these initiatives of trying to move elephants out of circuses, trying to establish legislation to prevent them, elephants, from traveling. But without an alternative was only going to create more dire situations. If the elephants aren't making a living on circus, the owners aren't gonna want them. If the owners don't want where they're gonna go, they're gonna get chained up somewhere, they're gonna get caught, they're gonna get forgotten, they're gonna be, they're gonna start rotting away. And so Brazil wanted, in Brazil, they wanted to start this initiative. Of the 50 elephants at that time in South America, 35 of those were in, in Brazil, sorry. 50 elephants in South America, 35 of those were in Brazil. So being centrally located, ideal climate, more politically stable, more financially stable than some neighboring countries. And with the vast majority of elephants they were thinking, you know, what's the feasibility of developing a sanctuary in Brazil that could help receive, that could also receive elephants from throughout South America. So Ramba being one of those. Early on, Ramba was supposed to go to the sanctuary in Tennessee. After she was moved from the circus. She was supposed to go to the sanctuary in Tennessee - that didn't work out. Ramba was still in limbo with no solution. As we started looking for funding and had these 15 organizations that we approached, and only two of them provide, provided a couple of thousand dollars each. One, it was disheartening, and two, we realized if this is going to happen, we're gonna have to find a different, different approach. We're going to have to do it on our own. And we have to, you know, show a stronger initiative on our part to get people, make people realize this is not just a feasibility study; this is a first step of making a dream come true for elephants in South America. So with that, we were not able to get the funding to do the feasibility study, but we started asking more questions started digging deeper into what the scenario was. Realizing there was no other alternative for Ramba. Ramba is stuck in her temporary home. We, getting video after video after video of elephants in South America. Some of the some of the bans had already been put in place in Brazil. Elephants were being removed from the circuses and being isolated or sequestered in rural farms, being stuck on chains, being sent in small zoos that didn't have any expertise at all, had no other, no space really are talking, you know, a couple hundred square meters, you know, 1,000 square feet at the most. And you know, just situations that were completely inappropriate. So the initiative of hey, let's take elephants off circus, great one. But without a solution, these elephants were going to be further compromised. Their fear and the fear that Joyce and Petter had was coming into reality as these initiatives, these local bans were taking place. Now they were talking about the national ban, and with a national ban that was just going to amplify the problem even further. Guys, we have a rainstorm coming in, I don't know how the audio is going to be.

Nadia: 21:00

Okay. So quite an unprecedented law decision in South America saying well in Brazil saying, yes, we want the elephants out of circuses, and then where do you put them? And that's, then we'll catch up next week. And discuss then obviously, how Global Sanctuary for Elephants was then founded to help these elephants, which were being confiscated, but had nowhere to go. You close your windows? Just stop the rain coming in?

Scott 21:26

We don't have windows yet.

Nadia: 21:28

Of course, you've moved.

Scott 21:30

The elephant projects always come first. You know Nadia we want to thank you again. You know, there's, we know that sometimes so many different layers that we talked about in these stories. And, you know, we'll try to put as many of those pieces together as we can. But, you know, as we go through this, if you have more questions, and we have follow up methods, so that we can definitely fill some of that connective tissue, you know, to fill in some of those blanks because each one of those things are really profound. And what it took to make this happen. It was, again, far from linear pathway here, a lot of little bits and pieces to make it all come together.

Nadia: 22:03

Yeah, great. Well, the idea was also to get your supporters, our supporters, and also new listeners. So we will be putting our email in the show notes or Amie will be doing that for us. That is podcast@globalelephants.org. And we'll also be putting in the website which is globalelephants.org. And everything will be in the show notes. So to all our listeners, thank you for listening to our second episode. And we look forward to hearing from you. And if you have any questions that you'd like me to ask Kat and Scott, then yeah, feel free. Drop us a line. And yeah, thank you, Kat. Thank you, Scott. I wouldn't say stay dry, because I remember when I was with you in Brazil in October, the rain comes quickly and very fast. And sometimes you didn't even have time to put on your jacket. But I'm sure it'll be lovely warm rain. So yeah, have a lovely day. And yeah, thank you for taking time out of your very busy schedule. Take care.

Scott 22:57

Thank you. Our pleasure.

Nadia: 23:00

Okay, bye, catch up next week. Take care.