



“Life is about compassion.
Everything else is just dust in the wind”

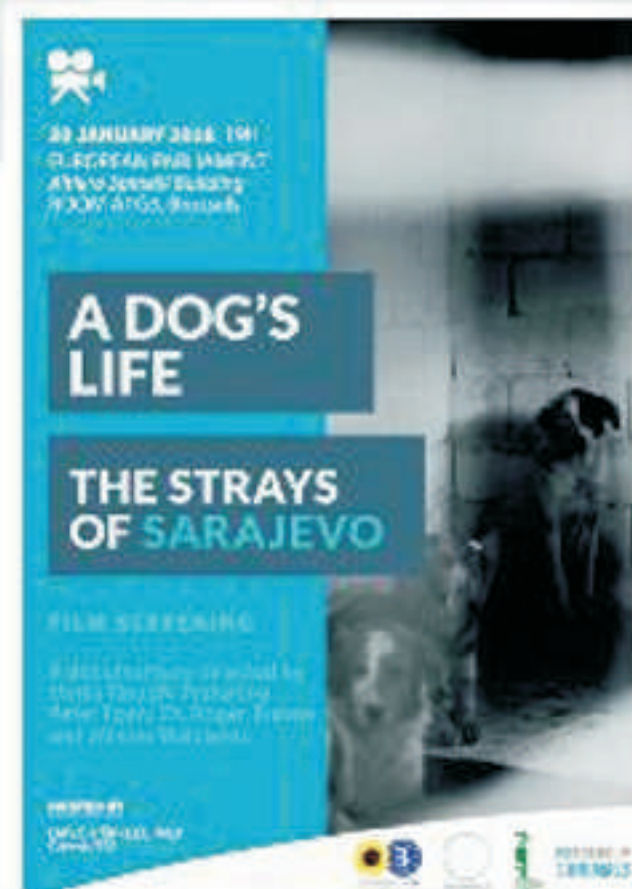
Maria Slough reports on the screening of ‘A Dog’s Life’ at the European Parliament in Brussels

It is still dark outside as actor Peter Egan, Veterinary surgeon Dr Roger Bralow, and I begin our journey to Brussels. It has been three months since I travelled to Sarajevo to make a film about the street dog crisis in Bosnia and the work of lone rescuer Milena Malesevic. Tonight we are meeting Milena and her ‘Saving Suffering Strays Sarajevo’ team in Brussels to premiere our film ‘A Dog’s Life’ at the European Parliament.

As we arrive at our hotel for the press conference there is a whirl of activity and Milena is on the phone to a friend back in Bosnia; she fears for a puppy back home who is battling parvo virus. Over the next two hours we talk to the international

press about what we hope the film will achieve. Milena talks with passion about the dogs that she has rescued: “I know I cannot solve this problem alone. I know that 50 of me cannot solve this problem. But I will fight daily for the safety of the dogs of Bosnia.”

Late in 2017, Peter Egan met Reineke Hameleers from EuroGroup for Animals, the leading animal welfare group in the EU. As the only two vegans at an event in London it seemed that fate played its part and a week later Peter travelled to Brussels to meet Reineke once again. Shortly after, we were invited by EuroGroup and MEP Davor Skrllec to premiere the film at the European Parliament.



So now on a Tuesday evening in Brussels we are gathered in one of the largest meeting rooms in the EU to share our film. MEP Skrllec and Reineke are hosting the panel on which RSPCA’s Alexandra Hammond-Seamen, Milena, Peter, Roger and myself sit. From the panel we watch the room as the film plays out. A mixture of pain and shock flickers across the faces



in support as several other vegan advocates make themselves known. Sue Olsen of Olsen Animal Trust makes a closing statement from the floor for change to come through collaboration amongst charitable institutions and NGO’s alike.

As the evening draws to a close the MEP’s sign a pledge for change. We all stand alongside one another for the photo call.

Reineke Hameleers explains: “Members of the European Parliament are calling on the European Commission to formulate guidance on responsible and comprehensive humane stray pet population management guidelines and encourage EU and neighbouring countries to consider and implement them. “We know that stray pet population issues occur across Europe and the EU is in the perfect position to bring all the existing knowledge and best practices together as a way to enlighten and support

in the room as they witness our findings of abject cruelty. Then, Milena makes her plea for change and the atmosphere is charged. Keith Taylor MEP for the Green party makes an emphatic plea for supporting our call for change, Stefan Eck MEP makes an impassioned statement about the plight of dogs across eastern Europe: “We should be ready to fight. We have to change this bad system. We have to look at animals getting another status in our society. We should have awareness of all animals.”

He calls for politics to make the change that is so badly needed. Then he tells the panel that he is vegan. The room erupts

countries. This would be wholeheartedly welcomed by EU citizens. The screening of ‘A Dog’s Life’ is part of a broadly supported European movement to act for stray animals and we will continue our campaigning work till the issues have been satisfactorily addressed.”

Leaving the European Parliament building that night I am overwhelmed by the will for change that I witnessed in that room.

The following morning it is dark once again as I say my goodbyes to Milena. Her phone is to her ear. She disconnects the call. “The puppy lives,” she says. “It just needed a chance”. The car lights fade into the distance and Milena is on her way home to her dogs. We are all tired but hopeful. We are inspired to continue to be the voice for the voiceless as Milena’s own words hang in the air: “Life is about compassion. Everything else is just dust in the wind.” ■



Follow Maria Slough on Twitter and Instagram for even more behind-the-scenes content.

@mariasloughpics
@mariasloughphotography

