



The street dogs of Sarajevo

Animal advocate Maria Slough reports for Vegan Life from Bosnia and Herzegovina

Over the next few months Maria will be reporting from behind the camera with an access all areas insight into a series of issues. This month she will be talking about the street dogs of Sarajevo.

It's 10pm in the isolated airport of Sarajevo and half our luggage has been lost in transit. I am here with actor and fellow vegan, Peter Egan, veterinary surgeon Roger Bralow and cameraman Tom Ross.

We are here with Peter to film the street dogs of Sarajevo; we are here to meet their saviour, a lady called Milena Malesevic. A flurry of activity and Milena

is here, eyes full of tears looking out from under a halo of red hair. She has news of a puppy that is fitting and we must go immediately. I feel instant warmth towards this lone crusader of the dogs.

By 11pm we are inside Milena's home, 12 storeys up. A cry of puppies greets us. There is noise and warmth and laughter as we navigate our way inside, cameras rolling. Two terrified dogs are under a table in the main room, one with little fur and protruding bones, pulled from a death shelter only days before, reminding us why we are here. Milena's home is their sanctuary, a safe place to be.

With no equipment to hand and only the clothes he is standing in Roger tends to the puppy. He listens to her chest by holding her tiny body to his ear and feels for discomfort in her neck. With Milena close by watching over her pup, he sets up an IV line and diagnoses possible meningitis and distemper. We are filming everything as it happens.

Over the next few days we witness strong healthy dogs on the streets, smart enough to have avoided the dog catchers. From the window of the hotel we watch two dogs master the bins, one on lookout while the other ate. The unlucky ones exist in death shelters, places where dogs are discarded and



left to die. They live in dark, cold conditions, their paws enlarged with hardened faeces several months old. Food is intermittent; all kindness gone. As Peter walks away from these dogs, he is unable to speak.

Milena rescued her first dog in 1988, a girl called Bobi who was with her for 18 years. Four years later war struck and hundreds of animals were misplaced from their owners as years of conflict tore the country apart. Since then, against the odds, Milena has continued to care for dogs without homes. We visited some of her 250 rescued dogs who are placed in well run, clean kennels paid for by funds raised by a loyal unit of supporters from across the globe. She has a small team working

with her locally who share her love of animals and a micro team in the UK who head up the charity Saving The Strays of Sarajevo, of which Peter is chairman. The reality of the physical and emotional scars that these dogs carry was painfully evident as we filmed. Some were desperate for interaction and human contact, while others hung back in the shadows, the darkness of their story so evident.

In the last 18 years, Milena has saved hundreds of dogs. Every waking minute she has is dedicated to their rescue and care and while supported by her amazing small team, in her moments of solitude she is haunted by the faces of the dogs she cannot save. With heavy hearts we prepared to say our goodbyes knowing we are destined to return again and again until the dogs of Sarajevo are safe. Peter asks what her one wish is for the animals. "I have a vision, a vision for a mountaintop sanctuary for the dogs and a day when the death shelters are no longer needed." The air in the room is thick and heavy with emotion. Her voice breaks and pain flickers across her face, "My wish in this world is that no animal be hurt, that they are safe from harm and fear. That is my wish."

Please visit:
www.savingsufferingstrays.com to support Milena with her work.

