

A dog's life



With thousands of stray and abused dogs needing help on the island, animal lovers have their work cut out for them. *Christina Fernandes* meets some of those doing their bit

From being mutilated on the streets of Bahrain to living like a princess in Germany is the incredible story of how one dog's life has changed. But getting there wasn't easy.

In the deserted cargo lot at the Bahrain International Airport, three dogs sat looking nervous as volunteers flitted around filling out last-minute paper work and making sure they had plenty of water for their six-and-a-half-hour journey to Germany. But if they could have been made to understand just how lucky they were, perhaps they wouldn't have looked so so scared and somewhat disgruntled. Because unlike most of their peers, they were off to a whole new life in real homes with loving families instead of sharing cramped pens at the sanctuary.

There was quite a lot in the press a little while ago about plans to ship 20 dogs destined to be put down to the US in collaboration with the US Navy – and a lot of debate. Some thought it was a pointless waste of time to put this level of effort into

saving dogs' lives, while others thought it cruel to send dogs on such a long journey and, for whatever reason, the project never came off. The apparent success of this

smaller project, however, might cause pause for thought. For the three subjects are now very happily settled in their new home thanks to no small amount of effort by several volunteers of the Bahrain Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BSPCA).

The move was initiated by volunteer Thessa Plate when the BSPCA made the decision to euthanise some of their population because of severe overcrowding. 'It's hard for us volunteers to give up on dogs who've been in the sanctuary for a while because we've got to know them, and many of them have wonderful



personalities,' she tells us, 'but most people are looking for puppies or pedigrees, so there are a lot of dogs that don't find homes. We wanted to help at least a few of them.'

Plate's uncle, Rainer Eberle, runs a rescue mission for dogs, Tierschutzverein Hunde aus dem Süden (Animal Protection Club Dogs from the South), in Germany, and hearing about the BSPCA's trouble, he agreed to take three of the dogs.

'Bailey, Nutmeg and Molly were not chosen for specific criteria,' says Margie Hamel, another BSPCA volunteer. 'They just somehow ended up being the three lucky ones.'

To get the dogs ready for their trip, plenty of preparation was needed. BSPCA volunteer Joan Waterworth took care of the necessary vaccinations and micro-chipping; volunteer Linda Pitt and her daughters, Nadia and Yasmine Al Awadhi, sponsored the airfare; and BSPCA manager Rachel Kirsopp donated two of the kennels for transportation.

Almost one month on, Bailey and Nutmeg, two former strays, are being fostered by Eberle and his family until they find permanent homes, which he's sure they will, while Molly has enjoyed a bit of a *Pretty Woman*-style life transformation.

Having been abused and had her ears cut off by kids on a street in Bahrain, Molly was not quick to trust people and had little self-confidence when she arrived. 'She initially hid upstairs when potential adoptive "parents" came to see her,' says Eberle, 'but then a couple came, whom she evidently thought would make a good family because she came downstairs and put her paws on

their laps. Molly picked out a family for herself.' She now lives with the law professor and his painter wife in a villa with a large garden near Munich, and has been renamed Layla, Princess of Bahrain. Quite a step up for a dog from the island streets.

Coming from a crowded shelter meant that Bailey, Nutmeg and Molly initially found it difficult to integrate,

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and this is where animal-loving readers can help. Another pair of hands is always needed to take dogs for walks, teach them manners and socialise them so that they will find their way into family life after being adopted. So get out there, make a four-legged friend and make a difference. *Bahrain Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (17 591 231). More info at www.bspca.info, or email info@bspca.info*



Pet passion

Luckily for the island's abandoned animals, there are many dedicated people and organisations working for their welfare

BSPCA (www.bspca.info, 17 592 231) in Saar is home to 125 dogs and 20 cats.

Tony 'The Dogfather' Waters (39 629 889) currently cares for about 90 dogs, 70 cats and several birds. He is being evicted from his compound in Karannah this month to make way for a business complex and is seeking homes for his charges and a new place to move with his furry family. 'Anyone who adopts a cat or dog from me before the summer will receive free boarding if they are going on

holiday,' says Tony.

The Cat Society of Bahrain and Pet Animals (www.csba.com, 17 695 848) works for animal welfare in the kingdom.

Delmon Boarding Kennels & Cattery (www.delmonkennels.com, 17 694 066) run by Tim and Pauline Richards regularly dedicates space, time and training to dogs needing rehabilitation and seeking new homes. They too have been instrumental in a couple of successful relocation stories (to Miami and Texas).