

Sonia's journey

Tuesday morning at 7 a.m. I was in the car on my way to Orly Airport. I had plenty of time in case of.... And that case ofhappened 20 kilometers away from de airport. For some unexplainable reason the TomTom did not lead me via the freeway but via Evry and before I realized it I was stuck in the traffic. Driving at crawling speed the meters and minutes passed by. Six kilometers to go and the last 500 meters took me 5 minutes. One does not need to be a mathematician to work out that I could only do 5 kilometers in 50 minutes and I only had 40 minutes left to check in. I broke out in a sweat. Fortunately once on the turn off to the airport I was able to drive faster.

The evening before I had reserved a parking spot via internet on the Premium deck with the idée in mind that I that I wouldn't have to walk far with Sonia. Unfortunately this didn't work out for the Premium deck was closed. It was terribly busy and I ended up parking the car on the 3rd level of a car park far away. It was a quarter of an hour walking to the check in counter where I arrived 10 minutes before time.

At customs my backpack was singled out although I had left my deodorant spray at home, but my hair foam was not allowed on board. Okaay.

The flight left on time and we got a sandwich with warm meat, which I as a vegetarian refused.

On Porto airport, there was no Jackie in sight and her mobile telephone number had been erased from my phone. Between ringing Fred (searching for the number on the pc) and Paola (from Aanifeira), I got Jackie on the phone.

Jackie is a super sweet woman and after meeting up we first went for a sandwich. Porto lies by the see and I was able to inhale wonderful see air which I miss so much in France. I love the beach and the see. The beach looked so attractive and in my thoughts I could see the dogs enjoying it.

We went to a tiny lunchroom where I saw the most delicious things and I was finding Portugal increasingly nicer. We lunched outside and then went on our way to Aanifeira.

I saw some nice houses on the way and of course we talked about all kinds of issues. I also saw a couple of stray dogs and had not expected to see that in this area.

Arriving at Aanifeira I met the crew. Everyone was pleasant and of course I thought it was tremendous to meet the people that the AMCF has been supporting for a couple of years and with whom I have frequent e-mail contact.

During a guided tour I was full of respect and admiration for the amount of work that they had done. In only a couple of years time Aanifeira has changed from an old live stock factory where the dogs all ran around without any provisions, with hard work, rebuilt into a shelter of which one can be proud. The operating rooms are light and modern. They are working hard on new kennels for the dogs where each kennel will have an outlet to the outside. Presently 3-4 dogs share a fairly large kennel and later they will have the outlet to outside added to the kennel. (See photo's). With a donation from the Brigitte Bardot Foundation a row of new beautiful kennels are to be build completely tiled so that they are easy to keep clean. The difference between these and the old kennels is enormous. The dogs will all have a basket and their own bowl.

The contact between staff and volunteers is very good and you notice that they work hard but also laugh a lot. The dogs are all in good condition. I noticed that there were no large dogs but mostly very old and small dogs. Those are the ones with which Aanifeira began as a shelter and they have mostly been there as long as Sonia, who has been in the shelter since 1999. They always sit together with 3 or 4 dogs and although you would wish them a better life, there are millions of dogs in the world that are much worse off.

Of course I meet up with Sonia who has her own place in one of the hallways. Why she lies there no one knows, she just always lay there. Sonia is cute and lets all the attention pass by. She walks around a bit and then goes back to her basket. That morning she had been washed and was ready for the journey.

We finish the tour and go to the newest project: the cattery, in the area where live stock was being sold (a type of coliseum) all different kind of shelters are being build (see photo's) where cats in the future will also be cared for.

Aanifeira has 2 veterinarians in service and the largest of their income is the veterinarian clinic that they run at the shelter. This is a great initiative, people come with their dogs and cats, and let their animals be treated at a reduced price (if they are donators) and in this way the shelter attracts visitors. Really good.

From Victor I received a Goody bag with lots of Aanifeira stuff, and for them I had brought a couple of AMCF t-shirts. In September Sylvie (treasurer AMCF), will go on holidays to Portugal with her husband Mike and they will return the bench that brought Sonia over, which we will fill with donations.

After some chatting and taking of photo's (photo's follow), the time has come to say farewell to Sonia. Everyone had tears in their eyes for Sonia was much loved. Some people especially came to Aanifeira to say goodbye.

With Sonia on the back seat we all go to Jackie's house where I will sleep. At Jackie's home I am welcomed by her dogs, all sweeties. We take the dogs for a walk and bring Sonia. She doesn't know what is happening and she takes small slow steps and sniffles everywhere.

That evening Jackie takes me out to dinner. I feel so spoiled; it seems like a short holiday! Then it is time for bed. I lay Sonia in her basket next to my bed and during the whole night she regularly clutches at my arm with her paws.

At 6 a.m. we get up, let the dogs out and leave for the airport. We put Sonia in the bench with blankets and at the in check counter a big policeman collects the bench. Fortunately Jackie was there because he didn't speak a word of English. She got weighed, taken out of the bench to go through the detector, back into the bench where we had to say goodbye. I shed tears for this is the hardest moment to leave her, whilst she doesn't know what is going to happen.

I pay her trip (100 euro's) and say goodbye to Jackie. Fortunately at the gate I can see the car with her bench on it, I keep looking (see photos) until she goes into the airplane. The journey back goes well except for a few minutes of turbulence and we

arrive on time. I speed to the baggage department and on a special luggage belt for animals she arrives. I am so glad en give her a huge cuddle. Then to the car. It is a long way but after all those kilometers I have done in the last few days, it doesn't matter anymore. Off to home we go!!

Fortunately no car queues and at 4.30 p.m. we arrive home. First of all I say hallo to the dogs. For the first time Isis and Scruffels stayed for a whole night with Fred. Naturally I get bowled down with joy by the dogs, and then it is time for them to meet up with Sonia. She was overwhelmed by all the dogs' noses but our boys and girls are fantastic. You can see them thinking: "oh dear, another dog" The podenco's , that usually find it necessary to show verbal violence now recognize one of their own kind and within 5 minutes they get on with their normal activities. Sonia goes sniffing around, empties her bladder and het bowels and keeps me in her vision.

It is almost immediately clear that she is deaf and has a poor eyesight. When you stand more than a couple of meters away she can't see you. Whenever a dog walks by she gets frightened (just like Lucho) and with climbing the stairs she needs help but only a couple of times for now she can already use the walking plank. Sometimes she falls through her hind legs but that can also be caused by lack of movement. On several places she has little lumps but nothing serious. She is just an old lady.

In the evening she sleeps on a cushion and at night in one of the dog baskets beside my bed. (I sleep downstairs with the dogs). This morning she walked with us over the fields and whilst I am writing this, she is sleeping and dreaming. I wonder what goes on in the head of such an old dog.....

In any case we are very, very glad with her and naturally I want to thank all the lovely people from Aanifeira and compliment them for their work and the care of the animals

Lots of greetings from

Betty and Sonia (the grand old lady)