

Star PAW-tential!

When I rescued my pup Felicity, I knew she was destined for big things. By Julia De Cadenet, 49

Hoisting my backpack over my shoulders, I looked at my three friends.

'Ready?' I said.

'Ready!' they replied, as

I led us in through the back door.

We were in China, sneaking into a slaughterhouse.

For the past decade, I'd dedicated my time to rescuing dogs from meat markets in Asia.

As well as saving dogs, I'd also created the NoToDogMeat campaign and worked on a film that we showed at the Cannes Film Festival.

But rescuing the dogs was always the most rewarding – and heartbreaking – part of what I did.

As we crept into the room, we were devastated to find 17 dogs hung up and painfully quiet.

One dog, a white Samoyed, particularly caught my eye.

Although she didn't make a peep, I could see the pain in her eyes.

She knew she was going to be slaughtered.

When the butcher returned, I rushed over to him.

'Let us take care of these dogs,' I pleaded.

After some convincing, he

agreed and set them free.

Arriving back at our rescue shelter after a long drive, the white Samoyed jumped out of the building, and I could already see her spirit returning.

'You look like a Felicity,' I said to her.

I've always believed that dogs should have human names because each animal has its purpose in life – just like we do.

Covered in thick white fur, she had huge paws but was a gentle giant. She couldn't help but lick anyone and everyone she met!

As I left for the UK, she remained at the shelter to continue her recovery.

'I'll miss you, Felicity,' I said, giving her one last cuddle.

A year on, I flew to France where some of the dogs we'd rescued and were ready to be rehomed had arrived.

As I entered the rescue centre there, a mass of spinning white fur caught my eye. It was Felicity!

'How did you sneak in?' I said, giving her some fuss.

We'd planned for Felicity to remain in Beijing but she must have sneaked into the van with the other dogs.

Although she was beautiful with a great personality, finding her a forever home was proving difficult.

The temptation to take her myself felt overwhelming. Back home in London, I already had six dogs. I didn't really have room for another, but Felicity was special and I couldn't leave her behind.

I told myself it was just



Me and Felicity on the red carpet



Us together

'How did you sneak in?'

until I found her a forever home in the UK. But three months later, I still hadn't found anyone to take her.

Then one of my other dogs, Anastasia, who was also a Samoyed, passed away from cancer, leaving me devastated.

One evening, as I struggled with my grief, I watched as Felicity curled up next to Anastasia's empty bed and I knew in that moment that I had to keep her.

Losing Anastasia was one of the hardest things I'd been through, but Felicity gave me hope and I realised I needed her just as much as she needed me.

When I was invited back to the Cannes Film Festival a year later, I decided to take Felicity with me.

'You'd be the paw-fect plus one!' I told her.

She was amazingly well-behaved and was the talk of the town, which allowed me to discuss the charity with lots of people.

The following year, she was invited back – and this time she was allowed on the red carpet.

My friend Michelle Parker,

who also volunteered for the charity, tailored her a stunning red outfit for the occasion.

On the day, Felicity strutted her stuff like the natural she is, sharing the red carpet with the likes of Meryl Streep, Naomi Campbell, Bella Hadid and Uma Thurman.

Felicity has proved to be the perfect poster girl for the work of our charity. It's like she's found the role she was born to perform and I'm so proud of her.

On her third visit to Cannes, Michelle made her a gold outfit and she shone like the star she is.

Felicity's image now appears on the tote bags we sell to raise funds for rescuing and rehoming dogs like her.

She also loves coming to the airport with me to pick up the new dogs – and helps them settle right in.

She's a joy and I can't believe how much she's enriched my life. I couldn't imagine being without her.

I'll never stop campaigning against the cruel meat market trade – and I'll do it with Felicity by my side.

● To find out more about the work Julia does, visit notodogmeat.com



Felicity