

**S**ARA COWARD'S silky voice is as familiar as family to the five million fans who follow her adventures as aristocratic Caroline Sterling in BBC Radio 4 soap *The Archers*. But that world-famous voice is full of anger when she recounts the night she first met her rescue dog Sati and saw the wounds and injuries inflicted by years of mistreatment.

"It just breaks my heart when people use dogs as objects and not as living beings."

"He'd been thrown away like litter. I was red hot with anger that anybody could treat an animal like that," says Sara, 66.

Now, the actress has revealed the remarkable story of how she saved the loveable lurcher in her book *Dialogues With My Dog*.

Sati was probably a traveller's dog that had been used for hare coursing in Ireland then abandoned when he was too sick and injured to be useful.

The tragic animal that met her eyes is a sight Sara will never forget. She'd returned from visiting *The Archers* one evening just before Christmas 2009 when the doorbell rang at her home in Eastbourne.

It was her friend Lynn Spooner from the charity Evesham Greyhound and Lurcher Rescue, which fosters rescue dogs until they are rehomed.

"Lynn had asked me to help so I opened the door and this dog walked in very gently and very quietly," Sara says. "His coat was all matted. He was very, very thin and had horrible wounds all over him. He smelled disgusting and he had a damaged back foot."

All she'd been told about Sati was that he'd been abandoned in a

# This poor dog was thrown away like a piece of litter

The Archers' **SARA COWARD** nursed an abandoned lurcher back to health and was horrified at how he'd been treated. She is determined that all rescue pups have a happy ending

Picture: BOB WILSON

**BEST FRIENDS:** Sara and Sati, the adopted pet she saved from almost certain death



**'He finally looked up at me and my heart went out to him'**

pound in Ireland and would have been put down if the charity hadn't rescued him and shipped him over to England.

"So he limped in, this thin old thing, stinking to heaven, with all his wounds and he just stood there," says Sara.

"It was like, 'OK, here I am.' He just waited to see what would happen next."

Sara dropped to her knees to take a closer look at him and was horrified to see evidence suggesting years of neglect.

"I just thought, 'You need some help,'" she says.

"When I touched him he finally looked up at me and my heart went out to him."

So Sara agreed to foster Sati and on that first night she settled him in the crate Lynn had given her.

"I said, 'OK darling I'll see you in the morning' and went to bed. Two minutes later I heard whimpering and I couldn't bear it," Sara says.

"I told him he could come upstairs but just for one night. Of course he's slept there ever since. I'm a soft touch."

Sati responded to Sara's tender care, revelling in the affection he'd been so starved of, and his wounds slowly healed. "I was worried about his mangled

foot, though," says Sara. "He would sometimes carry it and whimper."

At the vet's she made a heartbreaking discovery. X-rays revealed the toes on his left hind paw were badly broken, possibly from being stamped on and never attended to.

"The vet said he needed his middle toe amputated and though I was worried, I trusted his advice," she says. "When I went to get him

afterwards he walked straight towards me on all four feet. Now he runs around like a maniac."

Sara adopted Sati and four years later he is the picture of health. She says: "I just love him. He's like my best friend and he makes me laugh."

Sara longed for a dog when she was a child growing up in Eitham, south-east London, but her house-proud parents said no. So

she channelled the yearning into her first performances.

"I used to have toy dogs and make personalities and voices for them as I acted out little scenarios in the garden," she says.

Sara dreamed of owning a mongrel like the loveable hero of *Lady And The Tramp*, the first film she saw as a little girl.

She says: "I thought Lady was quite sweet but I related to Tramp."

That was my kind of dog. I thought he was fabulous.

"Sati's just like Tramp, he has personality and had a rough life." Owning a dog still had to wait when Sara left home and embarked on a career in repertory theatre.

BBC producer Vanessa Whitburn saw her perform and offered her the part of Caroline in *The Archers*.

"I was playing Lady Macbeth. I was a classical actress," says Sara. "I remember saying, 'I'm sorry. I don't want to be in a soap opera about sheep.'"

Vanessa wouldn't take no for an answer. She promised it would be for an absolute maximum of three months. That was 34 years ago.

**T**HE only drawback is that her character is an enthusiastic hunt fan and wanted to master the hunt—

"I'm completely anti-hunting," says Sara, who is passionate about animal rights. "So I just say the words. I don't sound enthusiastic until they kick me gently."

Despite starring in the world's longest-running radio soap and having legions of fans across the world, Sara is still free to walk Sati without resorting to dark glasses. "The nice thing about being on radio is you don't get recognised in the street," says Sara.

"I'm happy to do talks or shows for an evening but I'd hate being followed every day of my life."

Sara also has a stage show called *Wicked Women* with her friend Sunny Ormonde, who plays feisty Lilian Bellamy in *The Archers*.

The musical show celebrates outrageous women from history.

Right now though, she is concentrating on spreading the word about the other abandoned dogs who have a happy ending like the one she's given Sati.

"My book is for rescue dogs everywhere," she says. "It's to tell everyone how adorable they are."

● *Dialogues With My Dog* by Sara Coward (Swift Publishing, £7.99) is available on amazon.co.uk

Interview by **SHARON WRIGHT**

## Spotlight on... WINTER BLOOMS



Cushion, £38, Indigo and Rose (indigo.androse.co.uk)



Scarf, £18, Handmade By Hayley (handmadebyhayley.co.uk)



Floral tea cosy, £26, Posh Pinnies (posh.pinnies.com)



Quilted hot water bottle, £30, Emily Burningham (emilyburningham.com)



Folk florals blue and red notebook, £8, Natalie Singh (not.onthehigh.street.com)

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