

The Story of Hope...

When the TV news is especially grim, or the computer breaks down, or any of the other small frustrations of daily life begin to get me down, I go for a walk in the woods with our dog. She is an adopted racing greyhound, one of those discarded by the track when she stopped winning money. She is incredibly beautiful, as delicate and graceful as a fawn.

The walk is the highlight of her day. She pokes her nose into every bush and pile of leaves, checking for messages other dogs and wild creatures have left behind. This is her time to be all dog, to connect with everything that has happened in this place since she last passed through. I wait until she has quite finished her research. It lifts my spirits to be able to give her the natural life of a dog, a life she never experienced until she was four years old.

Greyhound racing is an anachronism left over from the 1920s and 30s. Humane standards have evolved during those seven or eight decades, especially in recent years. But greyhound racing continues, backed by powerful gambling interests and hidden from public view by an entrenched culture of secrecy and lies. Some greyhound owners and trainers think of greyhounds as business property, like office furniture. For over seventy years, state laws have supported them in this view, allowing the racing industry to treat dogs as objects.

A greyhound track requires a population of about 1,000 dogs to function. Space is money, so greyhounds are kept in warehouse conditions, confined in stacked tiers of small cages. They spend 20 hours or more a day in the cages, lying on shredded newspaper. A few times a day they are turned out in groups to relieve themselves. Occasionally they are given a practice run. Each dog races a few times a month. Otherwise it's life in the cage, for months or years on end, until they become too old to race or can no longer earn their keep, whichever comes first.



The standard cage size, usual throughout the industry, is 32 inches wide, 42 inches deep and 34 inches high. A large greyhound, standing 30 inches at the shoulder, cannot fully raise his head if he stands in his cage.

The risk of injury is high. Racing in a pack around tight turns at speeds of 40 mph or more, greyhounds collide, fall, and break their fragile legs. In Massachusetts, where state law requires the tracks to report injuries, greyhounds suffered over 800 injuries from 2002 to 2008. Over 80 percent were fractures. Other injuries include broken neck, crushed skull, seizure, paralysis, and cardiac arrest. Nationwide, several dogs have been electrocuted when they were thrown onto the live rail that

powers the lure.

This is cruelty on an industrial scale, embedded in a system that was ignored by the larger society for decades: a system that says it's fine to keep dogs in cages and force them to run around in circles and risk injury and death so that people can bet on them.

Greyhounds are not office furniture. They are not things to be used and thrown away. They are sensitive, gentle dogs, no different from other dogs who are loved and protected by millions of American families. When the facts of greyhound racing are brought to light, public opposition can force a change, as it has in my home state of Massachusetts.

Our greyhound's name is Hope. We did not give her that name, she came with it. In my more fanciful moments I take that for a sign. Meanwhile, in the real world, and with Hope at my side, I work to bring about the day when no American greyhound will be forced to run for the money.

Your support of GREY2K USA will help realize this wonderful goal.

*Paula Blanchard
Lexington, Mass.*