

A Greyhound's Life



In 1998, K.L. Gilley of Gilleys Dancing Greyhounds conducted a seminar for Greyhound Pets of America in Council Bluffs, Iowa. The following is an edited excerpt from her seminar that she has graciously permitted us to use. It will put you in the position of the greyhound and hopefully give you an understanding of the greyhound's point of view.

Of all of the breeds of dogs, the ex-racing Greyhound has never had to be responsible, for anything in his life. His whole existence has been a dog-centered one. This breed has never been asked to do anything for itself, make any decisions or answer any questions. It has been waited on, paw and tail. The only prohibition in a racing Greyhound's life is not to get into a fight—or eat certain stuff in the turn out pen.

Pretend that you are a greyhound. From weaning until you go away for schooling, at probably a year and a half, you eat, grow and run around with your siblings. When you go away to begin your racing career, you get your own “apartment,” in a large housing development. No one is allowed in your bed but you, and when you are in there, no one can touch you, without plenty of warning. Someone hears a vehicle drive up, or the kennel door being unlocked. The light switches are flipped on. The loud mouths in residence (and there always are some) begin to bark or howl. You are wide awake by the time the human opens your door to turn you out. You have never been touched while you are asleep.



You eat when you are fed, usually on a strict schedule. No one asks if you are hungry or what you want to eat. You are never told not to eat any food within your reach. No one ever touches your bowl while you are eating. You are not to be disturbed because it is important you clean your plate.



You are not asked if you have to “go outside.” You are placed in a turn out pen and it isn’t long before you get the idea of what you are supposed to do while you are out there. Unless you really get out of hand, you may chase, rough house and put your feet on everyone and everything else. The only humans you know are the “waiters” who feed you, and the “restroom attendants” who turn you out to go to the bathroom. No one comes into or goes out of your kennel without your knowledge. You are all seeing, all knowing. There are no surprises,

day in and day out. The only thing that is ever hoped you will do is win, place or show, and you don’t have much control over. It is in your blood, it is in your heart, it is in your fate– or it is not.

And when it is not, then suddenly you are expected to be a civilized person in a fur coat. But people don’t realize you may not even speak English. You don’t even know your name because you don’t need to. You were not asked or told to do anything as an individual; you were always part of the “condo” association, the sorority or fraternity, and everyone does everything together as a group or pack. The only time you do anything as an individual is when you schooled or raced, and even then, You Were Not Alone.



Suddenly, you are expected to behave yourself in places you’ve never been taught how to act. You are expected to take responsibility for saying when you need to go outside, to come when you are called, not to get on some or all of the furniture, and to not eat food off counters and tables. You are dropped in a world that is not yours, and totally without warning, at that.

Almost everything you do is wrong. Suddenly you are a minority. Now you are just a pet. You are unemployed, in a place where people expect you to know the rules and the schedule, even when there aren’t any. All the protective barriers are gone. There is no more warning before something happens. There is no more strength in numbers.

You wake up with a monster human face two inches from your nose. Why should you not believe that this “someone,” who has crept up on you, isn’t going to eat you for lunch? (Consider how you would react if someone you barely knew crawled up on you while you were asleep?)

Now you are left alone, for the first time in your life, in a strange place, with no idea of what will happen or how long it will be before someone comes to you again. If you are not crated, you may go through walls, windows or over fences, desperately seeking something familiar, something with which to reconnect your life. If you do get free, you

will find the familiarity inside yourself: the adrenaline high, the wind in your ears, the blood pulsing and racing through your heart once again—until you crash into a car.

Often, the first contact with your new family is punishment, something you've never had before, something you don't understand now, especially in the middle of the rest of the chaos. And worst of all, what are the most common human reactions to misbehavior? We live in a violent society, where the answer to any irritation is a slap, punch, kick, whip, or rub your nose in it. Under these circumstances, any successful adoption is a miracle.

You are, in effect, expected to have all the manners of at least a six-year old child. But, how many people would leave an unfamiliar six-year old human alone and loose in their home for hours at a time and not expect to find who knows what when you got back? Consider that if they did, they could be brought up on charges of child abuse, neglect and endangerment. Yet, people do this to Greyhounds and this is often the reason for a return.



How many dogs have been returned to adoption groups because they did not know how to tell the adopter when they had to go out? How many for jumping on people, getting on furniture, counter surfing, separation anxiety, or defensive actions due to being startled or hurt (aka growling or biting)? So, let's understand: Sometimes it is the dog's "fault" he cannot fit in. He is not equipped with the social skills of a six-year old human. But people can help a greyhound fit in if only they have enough patience and understanding.

We urge you to think hard about what you have just read. Greyhounds have lived a life like no other breed of dog. However, with the right start, they far surpass any other breed of dog (at least to those of us who have and know greyhounds!) when they learn how to be a pet That is why greyhounds have become one of the most popular breed of dogs in recent years!