

His bone thin tail whacked across my chubby baby face as I ventured beneath his long legs, trying to crawl my way to his lovable face. The stings from his tail no longer hurt as his flopping tongue licked them clean. As an innocent baby you don't realize the sort of dangers you are in; your parents are in charge of the worrying. Ellory could have been a viscous, revenge thirsty dog, but he wasn't. Instead, he was the exact opposite, living his life with the purpose of eating, sleeping, running, and loving. Love was the most important; without it he wouldn't have been the dog he was.

If you ever happen to visit a greyhound racetrack in your lifetime, you will probably witness pristine buildings with alert, happy looking greyhounds. The trainers and owners won't want you to see anything but the best that they have to offer for their dogs. Dig a little deeper though, and you will probably uncover the dirty part of the sport. The part that is covered up and kept secret by the racing industry, because they are only in the business for the profit; not the dogs' wellbeing.

Greyhound racing should be put to rest, because the dogs' living conditions are often inhumane, live lures are still in use by many trainers, and thousands of greyhounds are injured and/or killed through culling or when they retire from the racetrack.

A prime example of cruel living situations can be found at the O'Donnell-Pike Kennel Compound in Massachusetts where the dogs spend most of their time in 3 x 3 x 4 feet metal crates stacked upon each other in tight spaces. They are let out three to four times a day for only fifteen minutes.

[T]he dogs are typically muzzled throughout the day, with the exception of feeding time, a practice that deprives the animals of scratching an itch

or engaging in natural grooming instincts. When greyhounds are not muzzled, boredom from sitting in a cage all day often drives them to stereotypic gnawing, which erodes tooth enamel (Jackson Online).

To make matters even worse, “a total of 123 dogs have burned to death in these kennels in three different fires, largely because [the buildings lack] basic fire safety features, such as an alarm and sprinklers.” The owners of the buildings are only renting the kennels to dog trainers, and the trainers have no desire to pay extra fees. Once a fire starts in such situations, the bedding on which the greyhounds sleep create fuel, and the dogs within the building have no way to escape their locked cages (Jackson Online).

Connie Theil, an animal welfare advocate in Oregon, remembers witnessing six dead dogs being found in the back of a transport rental truck, because “they had not been allowed out of their cages the entire trip, had to stand in their own waste and were only given water once. Yet, the Oregon Racing Commission merely gave the trainer [...] a small fine” (“Racing to Shut Down Greyhound Tracks” Online). Adoption societies report that many greyhounds they receive after their racing career “exhibit crate and muzzle sores and suffer from infestations of internal and external parasites” (“Greyhound Racing: Death in the Fast Lane” Online). Greyhounds are fed grade 4D meat or “livestock that was dead, dying, diseased, or down to slaughter (and typically pumped full of drugs before dying in an effort to salvage the animal for food).” This poor diet leads to tooth and gum disease as well as “dry, brittle coats and bald patches” (Jackson Online). These may be examples of extreme conditions, but they shouldn't happen in the first place. There are far more horrific incidences in the racing industry than the good aspects, if there are any, can make up for.

In live-lure training, greyhounds are encouraged to chase and kill live rabbits who are hung from horizontal poles so that the dogs will also chase the inanimate lures used during actual races. Officially, the industry now frowns upon the once-sanctioned practice of using live rabbits, guinea pigs, and cats for live-lure training, but this method continues to be used (“Greyhound Racing: Death in the Fast Lane” Online).

Examples of those trainers who do use such tactics can be found at nearly any greyhound racetrack. A man who did so in his Massachusetts backyard stated “Gotta let 'em be killers: gotta let 'em hunt.” “In 1993, '[h]umane officials estimate[d] that more than 100,000 small animals die each year' in the course of greyhound training” and one such official remembers “seeing a discarded jackrabbit with 'major lacerations and its intestines hanging out—and was still breathing.” It's through instinct that the dogs chase such live bait, and even though trainers are not forcing these dogs to run after the animals, they are misusing natural impulse. The idea that greyhounds want to race “completely disregards the role of live bait and mechanical lures [...]. Like forced animals fights, staged greyhound racing cannot be characterized as a behavior in which greyhounds engage without provocation” (Jackson Online).

“During a three-year span, almost 500 greyhounds were injured while racing on Massachusetts tracks” and this was in one state alone. Such injuries include broken bones that are often caused by the mechanical lure. Dogs have become entangled in the contraption or even electrocuted by its wires. At the end of each race, “dogs can be seen 'tumb[ing] head over heels' and 'limp[ing] over the finish line last” due to the high

speeds and close contact with other dogs they endure. “Many greyhounds rescued by adoption groups are riddled with fleas, ticks, worms, and other parasites. They suffer from sores on their slender bodies, and its is not unheard of for part of an ear to be missing.” When a former racedog is adopted, the veterinarian will sometimes recommend x-rays to see the sort of injuries the dogs had been through and whether the injury had fully healed (Jackson Online).

“Most dogs who slow down and become unprofitable are either killed immediately or sold to research laboratories” and the killing can even happen as early as when they are puppies through 'selective breeding' (“Greyhound Racing: Death in the Fast Lane” Online). In 2007, three greyhounds were found dead at a Daytona Beach Kennel, but they weren't the same dogs that had been tested positive for cocaine a week earlier, owned by the same trainer (Citizens Against Greyhound Racing Online). “[I]n 2002 the remains of approximately 3,000 greyhounds from Florida racetracks were discovered on the Alabama property of a former racetrack security guard who had been 'retiring' unwanted greyhounds with a .22 rifle for more than 40 years” (“Greyhound Racing: Death in the Fast Lane” Online). Such ghastly examples make you wonder what is happening at other tracks, and how many unwitnessed and uncalculated deaths have occurred in the past and are occurring at this very moment. If greyhounds weren't bred in such high numbers, there wouldn't be a need for owners to kill those they can't afford and for adoption societies to euthanize those they aren't able to find a home. “In 2000, an estimated 19,000 greyhounds were killed. This includes 7,600 greyhound puppies who were farm culls and another 11,400 'retirees' who were not rescued” (“The Facts About Greyhound Racing” Online).

Looking at the facts laid out before you, it is easy to see the inhumane situations greyhounds have had in the history of racing. The problem, however, is that greyhound racing isn't history yet. It is far from it, but tracks are slowly losing the interest of the public. Attendance is plummeting lower and lower, and people would rather go to casinos than bet on greyhounds. There's no time like the present to put an end to an entertainment that many states call illegal. The few tracks that are left standing are either facing bankruptcy or close to it. Statistically, "state revenue generated by dog tracks amounts, on average, to far less than one percent of a state's annual income, and has been declining markedly in recent years" (The Facts About Greyhound Racing Online). As Carla Wilson, a representative for the Greyhound Protection League put it, "The public is fed up with this so-called sport. The time to shut it down is long over due" (Citizens Against Greyhound Racing Online).

My parents adopted Ellory through a greyhound track not long before I was born, and he was my childhood buddy. In rural New England, the track had ran into bankruptcy, and was desperate to get as many dogs off of its hands as possible. Ellory came with baggage however, because his trainers had been teaching him to fulfill the duties of a racer, not caring what the effects of their tactics would leave on a perfectly sound dog.

Until the day he peacefully died, Ellory was skinny, and the scars from his long tail thumping across a metal, jail-like cage, never fully healed, the skin dead and unable to grow hair. His nickname "Stinky Breath" told a tale of rotten teeth which were a result of the horrid food provided to race dogs. A bar code could be found tattooed in his ear,

the bright blue ink never fully fading. The thing about a greyhound's body is that it shows every bone, every muscle, and every nerve, no matter how much is feed into it because such dogs are destined to run. When they choose to, they seem to glide effortlessly through air, jumping from a built-in springboard, and it is this grace that is broken from the effects of racing.

Ellory lived to the ripe old age of fifteen. On his deathbed, the veterinarian was willing to put him down in our own backyard where he was comfortable. There wasn't any pain; only heartbreak and a slow, steady drift to sleep. His memory lives on in my family's hearts. If you pass the racetrack he was trained at today, you may get a glimpse of the past. Only a glimpse though; greenery has taken over the grounds, it was ran straight into the ground. Nature won. In the end, nature will always win.

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