

# A Lifelong Underdog Finally Goes Home A Winner. —by Cate Bronson

**A**t seven o'clock one dark November evening, I faced my first volunteer shift at a Greyhound rescue kennel. What awaited me overwhelmed me in more ways than I can detail.



Approaching a dull, block building, I heard the shrill cries of sixty wailing animals—a sound that echoes in my memory. I was not prepared for what greeted me as I walked through the door. Lining the walls and running the length of the building, stood wire crates stacked two-high, brimming with wriggling creatures. Expectant eyes peered at me from between metal bars, and excited yips and yaps rose in pitch as I completed my rounds and first kennel turnout (taking the dogs outside).

In the course of my volunteer work, several retired greyhounds came and went. Some moved into foster homes. Some left for medical treatment. Some injured racers were loaned to veterinary clinics as blood donors (saving lives with a universal blood type that all dogs can tolerate), and in most cases, received medical treatment in return. Some greyhounds, a small few, left

the rescue and made a new life with adoptive families. But too many remained, and endured routine caged life for months, even years.

I adored them all but had my darlings, the underdogs, the black males no one wanted. For whatever reason, black dogs are harder to place, their color less desirable to many potential adopters. In empathy, I wanted to adopt them all—an unreasonable option. So, my husband and I did the next best thing. We fostered dogs to get them on the adoption list. One foster dog in particular made a lasting impression.

The first time I saw *Charly* he was curled into a tiny ball in the back corner of his crate. Once a proud racer standing tall, he'd become a shadow of his former self. When he met my gaze with sorrowful eyes, I knew I had to do something. That notion solidified when I learned his tragic story.

At the early age of three, Charly retired from racing. Without a career, purpose, or home, he took up residency in a greyhound rescue. He remained with them for more than a year, but spent half of that time on loan to a college veterinary school, being probed and prodded. Like other loaned out greyhounds, he became a training instrument and test subject for students to learn their craft, in return for medical treatment. Yet, it was not a pleasant experience. Between nerves and neglect, Charly lost significant weight and most of his fur. Saved a second time, he returned to the adoption facility, exhibiting signs of kennel stress while waiting to be fostered.

So, with eyes like saucers, Charly padded through our front door and into our lives. I realized the demanding and difficult task he faced as a first time pet. A greyhound's transition from track to home is rarely seamless. They know only kennel life and nothing about houses or their pitfalls. After a few weeks of fostering, greyhounds learn that glass is solid, swimming pools are not, and stairs are maneuverable. Like puppies, retired racers have so much to absorb, and respond best to exercise, positive-reinforced discipline, and loads of love.

Within 48 hours, he'd learned a great deal and settled comfortably into domestic living. In reward for good behavior, he graduated from his crate to a doggy bed in the hallway, and eventually to the floor at the foot of our bed.

A gentle soul with a big heart, Charly's magnetic appeal was unmistakable. At a pet store "Meet and Greet," he stood proud with athletic stature restored and sleek coat shining like his spirit. He greeted shoppers with a greyhound grin and wagging tail. In response, they showered him with compliments and praise. He lapped it up, and wriggled even more when kids passed within hand-licking reach, making it obvious how much he loved people and adored children.

As much as we came to love him, we were unable to keep Charly. We parted ways with our foster pup, thankful for the chance to know him and put him on a path for adoption.

But the thought of him resuming kennel life (awaiting his forever home) haunted me then, and it haunts me now. I've glimpsed a fraction of what racing dogs endure — enough to ensure sleepless nights. Still, I refuse to retire my fight to save greyhounds, or find a caring home for Charly and others like him.

For thousands of years, Greyhounds were revered amongst ancient Egyptians as honored family members. With time, they made their way into the noble homes of Medieval England, saving the breed from extinction but also transforming them with American colonization into a lucrative sporting commodity. For more than a century, Greyhounds have endured varying degrees of abuse and neglect as disposable products in a risky business venture. Too often they are considered an investment and nothing more. Animal advocacy groups have made great strides to protect dogs, but Greyhound life improved only marginally. Growing concern has led to progress, but the injury and euthanasia rate of racing dogs remains high. It is estimated that at least ten thousand Greyhounds are put down every year. With China now in the race (where adoption is not a consideration) and Australia exporting dogs to support them, the casualty rate can be expected to climb. Obviously, more needs to be done. Until public ignorance, ineffective regulation, and industry overbreeding are corrected, these majestic animals will continue to stand in ruins at the bottom of the underdog world.


Adoption is currently the Greyhound's only hope. It is also a great way to own a pedigreed, purebred for about \$200, and worth every penny. Greyhounds are remarkable dogs and loving pets that deserve better than they've received. I remain hopeful that someday soon, with continued effort and increased awareness, Charly and other Greyhounds will no longer suffer the consequences of a decadent underdog world, but resume their former glory as the pride of a civilized society.

On a cool, January morning in 2013, the sun shone brighter and warmer for a beautiful, retired racer when a family believed he was a dog worth saving. Charly was finally adopted. The playful pup has settled into life in central Florida, where he now romps and snuggles with his Greyhound housemate. I am delighted for Charly, and wish our former foster pup a long and happy life in his new home. 🐾

**April Is Adopt A Greyhound Month** The need to place surplus racing Greyhounds has never been greater. The Greyhound Project is spreading the message to ensure that 100 percent of the retired racers find caring homes. For more information, visit [Adopt-A-Greyhound.org](http://Adopt-A-Greyhound.org). As we were headed to press with this issue of *The New Barker*, the Florida Legislature was scheduled to vote on passing **Greyhound Decoupling and Injury Reporting** at Greyhound racetracks. There are only seven states where Greyhound racing still exists. 12 of the 21 operational Greyhound racetracks are in Florida. This state's dog racing mandate forces racetracks to offer live racing as a loss leader for more viable forms of betting such as the card rooms. Decoupling is not about whether dog racing should be legal, but whether the state should force a business to conduct one activity so that it may offer another. For more information, visit [Grey2KUSA.org](http://Grey2KUSA.org) A Central Florida organization, **Sebastian Haul Fund**, helps Greyhound rescue groups with the financial challenge of transporting Greyhounds to help them find permanent homes. Visit [SebastianHaulFund.org](http://SebastianHaulFund.org) for more information.

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