

MY EXPERIENCE AS A FOSTER CARER

My first foray into the world of the Greyhound came about when I attended one of the Adelaide Showground Home Shows. Always being an animal lover I tend to gravitate towards any stall that has displays of our native animals, dogs or other creatures. Whilst there I came across a stall displaying a large number of Greyhounds and providing information on adopting these beautiful animals, (GAP).

Having always had a great interest in any animal particularly those of the four legged variety I thought I would have a look.

“Adopt a Greyhound”, my first thought was why you would do that. I had little or no idea about Greyhounds and thought that they were “just racing dogs”, never having given further thought to their plight, in fact not even knowing of their plight. Shame on me when I look back at this time. I was of the opinion that I knew a lot about dogs having been around them and interested in them all my life. Little did I know the future effect that my four legged friends would have on my life and my partners and the joy, laughter and fun I would share with my foster dogs and their owners.

Looking back I feel that one of the major hurdles for our Greyhounds is the unknown. The Greyhound is never advertised as a pet and the only promotion they ever receive is one in the racing journals. The public are not aware of the fact that they make fantastic pets and great companions because they are never or very rarely sold as pets. Fortunately there are some good trainers and racing owners out there that are not in the game just to make money and to cast aside their dogs when they no longer make it in the field but thanks to GAP this is all changing.

But without further ado let me tell you my story:

Having looked at the gorgeous dogs on the stall I was about to walk away when I spied a flyer that said “would you like to foster a Greyhound”. My eyes lit up and I quickly pocketed this information and set off home to my long suffering husband.

Hi sweetheart, yes I did have a nice time; can I talk to you about something? then I handed him the flyer and said what do you think!. Long suffering as I said, he knows that to disagree when I have put my mind to something is a waste of time and energy so he said well I suppose we could give it a try if you get the information.

Three weeks later after having my house vetted and family members interviewed to see if we were good prospective parents, Diamond arrived. Now just to backtrack, as stated before I have always had dogs around but usually they have been small or medium size, in fact my two current dogs are only 6 inches high.

A knock came on the door late one weekend afternoon and as I went to the entrance I spied this ENORMOUS dog, or was it a horse. I have never seen a dog as big, what was I going to do with this!

Jillian wandered in and said this is Diamond, too stunned I accepted the lead and off we went into the house. After a bit of a handover Jillian left and I was all alone with this huge creature that I wasn't sure what to do with. Well I think he may want to go out so off we go into the garden. One hour later we were still in the garden and in the middle of winter in Crafers of all places. Why wouldn't he come in I asked myself after trying to tempt him with food, water, pats and more. This was 42kgs of dog and he wouldn't move. Bill wasn't home so I had entered into this agreement to look after him so that was that. I stood at his back end and pushed and finally got him through the door but no further and there he stood, shaking and drooling and looking petrified. What was wrong? It was the tiled floor. Never having been in a house before he wasn't used to the feel of the tiles. My first few hours were spent on trying to coax him to move. Wrong move what I should have done as I now know is to just walk away and leave him.

Eventually I managed TO GET HIM ONTO THE SETEE, WRONG MOVE AS HE CLAIMED THIS POST FOR THE NEXT 12 WEEKS OF HIS STAY.

Next step was to get him to come up the stairs as living in a two storey house we tend to live upstairs where it's warm. Second mistake. All appeared to be going well until he realised that instead of being flat he was higher up at one end than the other end. So what do we do he says, we stand there and shake and don't move, drool slipping out of his mouth and the look of absolute fear in his eyes.

As I was at the back end and not wanting him to fall down I hastened to push! I only weigh 47kgs and he weighed 42kg so there wasn't much to play with. Pushing didn't work, pulling didn't work so what we had to do was sit and have a bit of a talk. No that didn't work either; he still stood there in fear, tail between the legs and head down. Well it looked like I had failed as a foster carer and would have to call and get some help. Being one of the stubborn sex I thought I am not going to be beaten here so perseverance was the order of the day. I sat on the step below his head and moved one leg up to the next step then the other front leg and then stopped. Next it was the back legs and it was then that I realised that this huge dog could contort himself into a circle so that he wouldn't have to move. HELP!!!!!!!, WHAT NOW. We couldn't go up we couldn't go down so what was plan B. Well plan B turned out to be "put my head under his belly and bodily move him up the staircase till we reached the top of the 14 steps. Success I said as I fell in a heap on the top step and he put his feet on the carpet and ran into the lounge. Success and a broken back, but I had succeeded but thought I have bitten off more than I can manage here.

Diamond thought it was fun then he was on terra firma but now needed a wee. Where do I go he said I can't hold on. He ran around the lounge sniffing in every corner and then to the top of the stairs, but then he said I aren't going down there again so I will just have to go here.

One large thigh raised, tail up and a cascade of water right over the staircase. What's that for god sake I cried, where is all that coming from. As I said I am used to small dogs not ones that can pee a litre at a time, and over the stairwell at that. I did have to admire him for his aim as it cascaded down the wall and onto the stair carpet.

Well I cant back down now so I will have to rethink this dilemma, he is up here now so I cant get him down unless he decides to go himself.

After looking around the house Diamond then decided he needed to sleep after all the stress and I decided I had better clean the carpet before Bill came home from work and then decide what to do about getting him downstairs again.

I hour later I decided to give it a try and to cut a long story a bit shorter we went down the same way we went up, Diamond straddled around my neck and me heaving and groaning as I negotiated the stairs.

Five hours had passed by this time and so I had another thought and that was to take him for a walk and maybe he would settle down a bit. The walk went really well and apart from people stopping us to admire him there were no problems at all.

Once home again I decided to leave him down stairs and go and watch TV. Being the sensitive and worrying soul I am I kept popping down to make sure he was okay. This fostering was bad for the nerves I was a nervous wreck by this time. Diamond was on the settee and asleep having had a great adventure so far.

Bill came home and I received the same response, what is he he's huge.

Later that night we settled down to watch TV and who appears at the top of the steps but Diamond. I learnt a lesson then and one that would stand me in good stead for all the other dogs I fostered. The lesson was leave well alone and in time all things are possible.

So let's move onto what it entails to be a fosterer:

- **Love of dogs**

But remember these dogs are different they are more like a shadow and do tend to follow you round a lot. As they feel more comfortable in their new surroundings they will settle and find their own place where they can sleep and be happy without having to move every time that you do.

Make sure that you have a nice warm place for them to laze around, but whatever you do and no matter how tempted you are don't let them get up on the furniture. Once done you will never get them down again which may mean a potential owner may not take the dog. Greys not only like comfort they like the same comfort as you and that may mean your bed or your lounge. If you are the future owner of the dog you can do what you want but once these intelligent creatures know where the softest place in the house is you will have a job to break the habit.

- **At times nerves of steel and lots of patience**

Nerves of steel when you take out your first grey and you get stopped and people ask you about them. Oftentimes the public have no idea about the Greys or their potential as pets.

It's always good to tell people how gentle they are and how they are different from other dogs. Once in conversation you will find that you know more than you thought you did.

Patience with people who think the Greys only use is to race and win money at the track.

Patience with those who think that they all chase and kill cats and rabbits. I usually used this conversation time to get the person to stroke my latest dog and see how placid they are.

People often get put off when they see the muzzle so a bit of explanation about why they have to initially wear it doesn't go astray.

- **Empathy** for the breed but don't ponder too much on those that you can't foster or it will depress you.
- **Resilience** for when things aren't going right or the grey doesn't seem to settle. Not all dogs settle well for at least a week; in fact I have had dogs that have taken three weeks to settle down.

I have found that you usually see a change at about 2 days, 1 week and then 2 weeks. If you have the Grey longer than 3 weeks you will see a totally different dog at the end of that period.

I have at times had Greys that have come from another foster home and have been told that this Grey is very placid and settled and no trouble at all. This has not been the case and I have found I have a dog that is totally different to what I thought I was getting. They usually settle down after a few days and are confused due to their shock at being moved again.

- **You may at times get a dog that doesn't settle** or is unable to interpret the rules of the house. Remember that most of the ex racers and even some of those that haven't raced are brought up in a kennel or a run, unused to the house and household noises. One of the big problems I experienced

- **Disciplined with yourself and the dog**

Disciplined with yourself as you have to set a routine that's not only for the dog but for you so that all is well in the household. This includes times to go out times to eat and times to walk. Rules have to be laid and boundaries set. Don't be feeling too sorry for the Grey because this is the second chance and a Grey fostered well will be a pleasure for a new owner. Ones that are left to do what they want because people feel sorry for them and their past life turn into a dog that doesn't know the rules of the household. There are lots of dogs that are sent back to GAP because the new owners can't manage them and they have to be rehoused and undergo more trauma.

- **Lots of patience**

- **Never ever assume that you know your foster dog** I did this when I opened the door to go outside. He decided this would be exciting to go out without the lead and I then spent well over an hour trying to catch him. At the time we had no fence so I don't know how we managed.
- Off he went down the street and then stood stock still till I got near him. He then thought this was a joke and he would have some fun and ran off again. He was eventually caught by a neighbour who enticed him into his garden. After that we invested in a fence that was no small expense.
- As with any other dog never leave the dog alone with a child. Although very placid the Greys make take some time to get used to small children as well as having to deal with all the other new things that are happening around them. A timid dog, who is trying to absorb all the new sights, sounds and other attractions, will not respond kindly to a child or children running about wanting to play and tumbling around all over the dog.

Many Greyhounds go to new owners with children but always remember that this may be the greys first encounter with children and with a home so be patient.

- Tails, well what do I say about tails. As well as being long and very thin they are prone to damage. Another example of my escapades with the greys is one dog that loved to see you when you came home. He had a tail so long and waved it about so much that one day when I arrived home there was I thought a massacre in the kitchen. Blood everywhere, on the cupboards, walls, and floor but nothing on the dog. I looked him all over and then noticed that the tail had some blood on it.

Ever tried to bandage a tail? Well it isn't easy. But first before you try to bandage make sure that the tail isn't broken. Broken tails can cause nerve damage and need veterinary attention.

If it's not broken, to stem the flow of blood you may have to hold the tail for a period of time till the bleeding stops. If not successful and you have checked its not a deep cut then bandage is the only way making sure the dressing is not on too tight. What can you do to stop this happening well I tried a piece of foam around the end of the tail which worked for a while. Other than that just thank the lord that you have a dog that loves you enough to greet you so warmly.

Never tie up the dog on a lead or a long rope and go out. They hate it and in the attempt to untie or bite through the restraint may injure themselves.

Don't put your dog outside on its own during the first few days off fostering, he/she may think you have left them and try to get out.

Gentle reassurance, coaxing and lots of love will reward you with a dog that settles easily.

What you get back, (usually)

- Love
- Affection
- Pure delight
- Feeling that you have done a good turn for this lovely breed
- You get hooked into doing it again

Problems you may encounter

- Difference between males and females
- Letting go and how to be objective:
- Remember when you foster there is always the end result and that is where you have to let the dog go to its new owners
- Trials and tribulations
- What you learn along the way