

Trust...A Deadly Disease

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There is a deadly disease stalking your dog. A hideous, stealthy thing just waiting its chance to steal your beloved friend. It is not a new disease, or one for which there inoculations. The disease is called trust.

You knew before you ever took your greyhound home that it could not be trusted. The people who provided you with this precious animal warned you, drummed it into your head. A newly retired racer may steal off counters, destroy something expensive, chase cats, and must never be allowed off his lead!

When the big day finally arrived, heeding the sage advice, you escorted your dog to his new home, properly collared and tagged, the lead held tightly in your hand. At home the house was "doggie proofed." Everything of value was stored in the spare bedroom, garbage stowed on top of the refrigerator, cats separated, and a gate placed across the door to the living room. All windows and doors had been properly secured and signs placed in strategic points reminding all to "CLOSE THE DOOR."

Soon it becomes second nature to make sure the door closes a second after it was opened and that it really latched. "DON'T LET THE DOG OUT" is your second most verbalized expression. (The first is NO!) You worry and fuss constantly, terrified that your darling will get out and a disaster will surely follow. Your friends comment about who you love most, your family or the dog. You know that to relax your vigil for a moment might lose him to you forever.

And so the weeks and months pass, with your greyhound becoming more civilized every day, and the seeds of trust are planted. It seems that each new day brings less mischief, less breakage. Almost before you know it your racer has turned into an elegant, dignified friend.

Now that he is a more reliable, sedate companion, you take him more places. No longer does he chew the steering wheel when left in the car. And darned if that cake wasn't still on the counter this morning. And, oh yes, wasn't that the cat he was sleeping with so cozily on your pillow last night? At this point you are beginning to become infected; the disease is spreading its roots deep into your mind.

And then one of your friends suggests obedience. You shake your head and remind her that your dog might run away if allowed off the lead, but you are reassured when she promises the events are held in a fenced area. And, wonder of wonders, he did not run away, but came every time you called him!

All winter long you go to weekly obedience classes. After a time you even let him run loose from the car to the house when you get home. Why not, he always runs straight to the door, dancing a frenzy of joy and waits to be let in. Remember, he comes every time he is called. You know he is the exception that proves the rule. (And sometimes, late at night, you even let him slip out the front door to go potty and then right back in.) At this point the disease has taken hold, waiting only for the right time and place to rear its ugly head.

Years pass—it is hard to remember why you ever worried so much when he was new. He would never think of running out the door left open while you bring in the packages from the car. It would be beneath his dignity to jump out the window of the car while you run into the convenience store. And when you take him for those wonderful long walks at dawn, it only takes one whistle to send him racing back to you in a burst of speed when the walk comes too close to the highway. (He still gets into the garbage, but nobody is perfect.)

This is the time the disease has waited for so patiently. Sometimes it only has to wait a year or two, but often it takes much longer.

He spies the neighbor dog across the street, and suddenly forgets everything he ever knew about not slipping outdoors, jumping out windows, or coming when called due to traffic. Perhaps it was only a paper fluttering in the breeze, or even just the sheer joy of running—

Stopped in an instant. Stilled forever—your heart is broken at the sight of his still beautiful body. The disease is trust. The final outcome, hit by a car.

Every morning my dog Shah bounced around off his lead exploring. Every morning for seven years he came back when he was called. He was perfectly obedient, perfectly trustworthy. He died fourteen hours after being hit by a car. Please do not risk your friend and your heart. Save the trust for things that do not matter.

I would like to offer two additional accounts about the dangers of having a greyhound off its lead in an unfenced area.

This first account is really a basic tragic accident, due to not having a properly fitting collar. The owners actually had the dog on a lead, but unfortunately were using only a flat buckle collar on the dog. The dog became frightened at something, and just backed out of her collar. She took off away from them at top speed. Before they could manage to even get close to catching up to her, she had run out onto a road, and was instantly killed by a car. This is one of the reasons we advise using a halter or martingale while walking your greyhound in an unfenced area.

The second account involves too much trust and a lack of common sense. The owners lived somewhat out in the country. Their home was surrounded by woods and they were well off any major roadway. They had their new greyhound about three weeks, when I got the phone call that I hate the most, "Our greyhound is lost!" I knew these owners did not have a fenced yard, but they had sworn they would keep the dog on a lead when taken outdoors. Upon further questioning, I discovered that they quit using the lead after about the first week. The weather had gotten cold, and so early in the mornings they would simply turn her out the back door, wait for her to "do her business," then call her back in. "She *always* came when she was called," the woman lamented to me. They felt it was safe enough to allow her off the lead for just short bits of time, as they didn't live near a high-traffic road, and she had never ventured into the woods before. Unfortunately, the little greyhound *did* bound off into the woods this particular morning. Perhaps she heard a squirrel rustling in some nearby leaves, or smelled a rabbit, but whatever the reason, she had taken off into the woods, and they could not find her. Our hopes of finding her safe and sound faded a little more with each passing day, and no sign of the pretty little female greyhound.

After several weeks, our worst fears were confirmed. We got a call from a very nice man, who had been walking through the woods with his son when they discovered the still, cold body of a small, dead greyhound. He got our number off her collar ID tag. She was found many, many miles from her home.

Why did she run off this time when she had been so reliable before? Why didn't she come racing back as she always had when her family called for her? Who knows? What we do know is that ultimately dogs will be dogs. No matter how much or how long you train and teach your dog, there may come a point where their instincts will win over learned behavior. Please don't be fooled into a false sense of security with your greyhound. Take the time; make that little extra effort to ensure your greyhound will be safe. Remember, they are depending on you.