

## **How not to Become a Member of the Runaway's Club**

*By Marcia Herman*

We have visions of our Greyhounds following us around while we move from place to place, while working in our gardens, walking on the beach, or hiking in the woods. These are lovely fantasies, but they should never become realities unless our loyal, royal companions are in a fenced area or attached to leashes. Even highly-trained working law enforcement dogs have been known to bolt and be killed while on duty. Often, instinct is more powerful than training.

The vision of a Greyhound loose on the beach reminds me of a time when cries of "Suzi's loose! Suzi's loose!" echoed across the beachfront in Dewey Beach, Delaware. Hundreds of Greyhound-owning people who were attending the annual "Greyhounds Reach the Beach" event scampered around looking for her, hoping to catch her. As everyone knows, a loose Greyhound is a Greyhound who likely has a date with injury or death sooner rather than later. In this case, everyone knew Suzi Waddell wasn't in any danger. Suzi was seventeen at the time and was simply tottering around the beach, sniffing the seaweed with her owner at her heels. We were just having fun with Suzi.

On the other hand, here are a few examples of true, not-so-amusing scenarios that occur repeatedly; a couple of these events have happened to our own dogs over the years. Sometimes these loose dogs return home; sometimes they don't – not alive anyway. Even worse, some are never seen again.

"Our foster dog escaped while someone was looking at him and considering adopting him."

"My Greyhound is afraid of thunder. He panicked, jumped through a window and climbed the fence to get away from the storm."

"Our 9 year-old Greyhound got out while chasing a cat (or squirrel, or rabbit, or bird, or you-name-it)."

"Our 4-year-old (or visitor) opened the front door and our Greyhound ran out onto the road."

"Our two Greyhounds were in the back yard doing their business. When I went to bring them inside a few minutes later, they were both gone. The fence gate was open."

"Our mailman rang the doorbell. When I cracked open the door to take the mail, our Greyhound pushed the door open and ran away. I didn't realize that a Greyhound could get through a slightly-opened door that easily!"

"We were walking our dogs when a loose dog charged us. One of our hounds backed right out of his martingale collar – the "safe" kind – and ran away. We found him waiting for us at home a half-mile away. He knew the route home because we walk it every day. His paws were bloody from running on pavement, but he was OK otherwise. Phew!"

"We've always let her out to do her business; we live in the country, after all. She never left the yard before. This time, she ran into the neighbor's driveway and was killed by a delivery truck."

The list of escape scenarios is endless but not to worry. Recognizing that "stuff happens" to even the most careful Greyhound owner, taking a few simple precautions will reduce the possibility of your Greyhound escaping to almost zero. The most common escape route is a door, gate, or window that's slightly opened. Most escapes are made by newly-retired foster or recently-adopted Greyhounds. All these new retirees know is that an open door, window or gate is much the same as the starting gate at the track; they may think that opening means RUN! Fresh off-the-track Greyhounds know nothing about cars, highways, traffic, or even how to get back home if they are lucky enough to be unharmed. To them, "home" is the track kennel. Disoriented Greyhounds whose adoptive owners may not even know their kennel names run full speed to nowhere.

Sometimes Greyhounds who've been in homes for years will decide to run out the door, too. Although these Greyhounds will also be in danger from traffic, they will often know the way home if they've been walked or driven around the neighborhood.

Here are some suggestions for escape-proofing your Greyhound so he or she doesn't become a member of the "Runaway's Club."

### ***Escape-proofing While Outside***

As soon as you adopt your hound, have it micro chipped. Tag collars (buckle or breakaway or a loose slip over-the-head type) while in the house or when on the road are added security. Reserve properly-fitted martingale collars for leash use. The extra loop that makes them wonderful for leash-walking is what can make them deadly in the house, crate, or yard. Dogs have been hung by the extra loop when wearing them while no one is supervising them.

Always go into the yard with your new newly-retired Greyhound, even if it's fenced. Every dog is different; you have to watch and learn from each one by observing behaviors. Once you learn what each dog is capable of/interested in doing, especially near the fence, you can proceed with preventing escape by making your yard even more secure if need be.

Fence in at least one yard with a sturdy fence a minimum of 4 feet high; 6 feet is better. Secure even the narrowest openings; Greyhounds can squeeze through unbelievably narrow spaces.

Lock the fence gate with a brass padlock; brass doesn't rust. Keep the key inside your home. Greyhounds are quite capable of flipping up an unlocked chain link gate latch in the blink of an eye. Other slide-and-hook-over latches are available and work well, but a lock is best.

If your dog is a climber or a jumper, avoid chain link fences. Get a high, solid panel fence with no cross members that

allow getting a foot up.

If your dog is a digger, place stone or concrete under the fence.

Keep lawn furniture and equipment away from fences. They make excellent jump-over-the-fence points.

If you have no fence, a leash is mandatory – always, even if obedience-trained. Greyhounds have remarkably poor recall because of their ability to focus on whatever has their attention. Their intelligence and independence can be their downfall when their focus isn't on the owner.

Check to see if your dog's collar is properly fitted. Greyhounds can easily back out of poorly-adjusted martingale collars. The material on properly-fitted martingale collars also stretches over time, so those collars do need to be checked and readjusted periodically.

When walking your hound, place your hand through the leash loop, wrap the leash around your wrist, and hold the leash firmly. Allow a bit of slack between your hand and the dog's neck so the dog will not feel like you have a stranglehold on him. If the hound is startled, hang on. You will not be able to run after and catch your loose Greyhound. If it gets loose, do the opposite of what you want to do; do not chase.

Keep house and vehicle windows opened no more than 6." Greyhounds have been known to escape through partially-opened car and van windows and doors. They can even push house windows open if they get their needle-nose underneath.

### ***Escape-proofing While Inside***

Be paranoid about open doors and windows. It takes a split second for a Greyhound – particularly a recently-retired one – to blindly charge out the door or a window because of an interesting new sight, sound or scent.

Be sure children or adults who are not Greyhound-knowledgeable don't open doors leading to the street. Most will not be able to restrain a Greyhound who wants to get out and run.

Be aware of where your dog is whenever anyone opens a door. Front doors are particularly dangerous as they usually lead to an unfenced yard and the street or to a fenced one with an opened gate. A Greyhound nose is very capable of pushing open a door or a gate opened only an inch or a door that has not been clicked shut by the last person going through the door. A gated foyer or vestibule with a second door is ideal if you can arrange that.

Ideally, rooms leading to exterior areas could have half doors that can be shut when people are coming and going. However, some clever Greyhounds can operate door knobs; they grasp and turn them as well as we can! Doors with lever-type handles are a piece of cake for the determined Greyhound. These need to be dog-proofed as well. Child-proof door knob and door lever guards are available in baby and toddler departments at the mall or hardware store.

Workmen need to be as dog-savvy as you are. Many dogs escape while workers go back and forth from the house to their trucks or to their "workshop" in the garage. If they can't be trusted to be as paranoid about open doors as you are, find some workmen who are.

Garage doors need to be kept closed if an interior door leading to it is ajar. Greyhounds have been killed on moving days because of doors and garage doors needing to be open. Kennel your dogs and other pets on moving day.

It sure sounds like Greyhounds aren't much fun if one has to be so careful about them getting loose. But really, once the preliminary Greyhound escape-proofing is done and you've become accustomed to watching for open doors and gates and checking for properly fitted collars, you won't even think about doing it; it will just become second nature to you. By taking a few precautions your Greyhound is highly unlikely to be hurt or lost and you won't ever need to be separated from your fast friend.

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