

A Priceless Gift



He came to us in a quaking, light fawn colored heap... withdrawn into himself by the fear of the unknown destination he had, only moments before, just reached. Despite the company of other greyhounds, one of whom was equally frightened, he found no solace. Two of the three greys that had shared this journey, in questionable comfort, did not emerge willingly from the dark confines of the van. They seemed to find only a tiny bit of safety in the shadows...and in the smallness contained within the metal walls. The outside was too vast...too intense...too new ...and much too overwhelming. Their fear was not the least bit quelled once they were guided to their new environment after having been pried and lifted from the spaces they had claimed during their two-hour journey. The fear revealed in their body language was as taut as the leashes that held onto them, protecting them from all of the dangers that they would, hopefully, never come to experience. And in just those first few seconds, as we saw Randy for the very first time, he owned a piece of our hearts. We had already fallen in love with this furry, four-legged bundle of love.

After being ushered to and then released into a totally enclosed turn out area, Randy immediately sought the safety of the nearest corner. Two chain linked sides to withdraw into were better than none, he must have thought. It was not as good as the ground swallowing him up...or becoming invisible ...but it was his only option and he did not hesitate to take advantage of it. He sought out a similar corner when he was first introduced to his new kennel 'condo'...and despite its luxurious comfort, Randy was too frightened to even notice...much less appreciate. We acknowledged him with comforting, softly spoken words every time we passed his condo. His eyes, however, were transfixed on some place far away, as if by pretending not to notice us, he himself would not be seen...and could remain safe. Little did this sweet boy realize, however, that he was in the safest of all hands...and that the gentle words we spoke to him would gradually penetrate his protective furry armor while on their way to warming his heart and unlocking his soul. We knew we were on the right course of action with him... having had a lot of practice with shy greyhounds...and, as yet unknown to Randy, he was already reaping the benefits of the infinite patience and endless love we immersed him in.

Initially, Randy welcomed the safety of his hard, metallic condo enclosure much more than he did our warm, soft caresses. Our touches brought on a knee-jerk reaction with him. They seemed totally foreign to him as if he had never before experienced such gentle sensations...and he reacted accordingly...as though he were anticipating something painful. It was equally painful to observe...this precious, innocent creature reacting so fearfully to the newness of love.

It was inevitable, of course, that he would have to eventually leave what he believed to be the safe confines of his condo, in order to answer nature's call. We had strategically placed Randy's 3-door condo so as to gain easy access to him, knowing full well, that it was unlikely that he would voluntarily exit, despite our words of encouragement. So time and time again, when doing turnouts, we would approach him through one of the two opened doors as he was determined to remain scrunched up and glued to the corner of his condo. We would shift and lift one end of his body and he would counteract by securing the other end of his body with pressure from his extended legs against whatever part of his condo was in reach. It wasn't easy moving a greyhound that was determined to remain stationary...but in time...with gentleness and patience, Randy relinquished his 'foot hold' inside his crate, allowing himself to be extricated from and guided out to within 10 feet of his condo. He would then put on the 'brakes' as any vocalization by one female resident greyhound, in particular, would cause him anxiety...and any speck of confidence he might have had for the first quarter of the distance to the outside pen, quickly disappeared. At that time Randy, as if by magic, was transformed into a make shift 2-legged wheel barrel...propelled by another equally resolute 2-legged animal for the remainder of the distance to the turnout area. Once there, Randy quickly tucked his tail in between his legs, secured it underneath his belly, scooted into the far pen...and squatted to do his business...all the while nervously looking up and around...with terror in his eyes as tree limbs rustled in the wind, leaves drifted aimlessly across his line of vision, cars passed in the distance or a lawn mower etched a path in a nearby field. He hugged the ground...feeling, perhaps, a bit less vulnerable...and less visible to whatever he perceived was out there that could cause him harm. He couldn't WAIT to get back inside...safe...and away from all of those unknown demons he was forced to endure in the scary world outside, beyond the kennel door.

Our soft words and light caresses soon began to have profound results. Randy's eyes began to seek us out...and no longer denied him or us that priceless bridge to a necessary form of silent communication. They still expressed worry...but they imparted, to some degree, a grateful element of trust where there had once been an abundance of fear. His body no longer flinched when a gentle hand was drawn against his muscular contours...and he began eating in our presence...instead of waiting for us to leave his immediate space. Then one morning, we noticed it. There was a slight...barely perceptible movement at the end of his longest appendage! Randy had started to visibly appreciate and acknowledge our collective efforts. There was LIFE at the end of his tail...a NEW life that would gradually eradicate his dubious past. Randy would come to know peace and contentment as it permeated his entire being...body... and soul. It was heartwarming to observe this new indication of being more relaxed...but what was even more impressive was that Randy continued to send out additional signals to us that he was feeling more comfortable. We started to leave him outside longer, in the company of more confident greyhounds. It was important for him to learn from his condo-mates...to socialize...and become desensitized to the outside fears that had previously eaten him up with anxiety. Gradually, his overall demeanor began to change.... Randy's head no longer searched for real and imagined threats to his being. He stood more upright and proud. His tail was no longer velcroed to his belly...and eagerly

reflected his new found enthusiasm for kennel life...and life, in general...as he thrashed it happily from side to side. On numerous occasions we observed him totally relaxed... sunbathing with 'the boys.'

Inside, Randy's condo door was frequently left open. He was acquiring more confidence and it wasn't long before more than just his nose was breaking the plane between his condo opening and the inner realm of the kennel. Randy had finally reached the point where he would follow us around while we replaced water pails in each of the kennel condos. He was overseeing us...making sure that all of the kennel amenities for himself and his brothers and sisters were 'up to snuff.' He felt important...and...he was!!

There were times when we would be outside for a few minutes working in the turnout pens, while Randy remained uncrated inside. We'd open the kennel door to find him camped out just inside the door, on a towel...awaiting our return! At other times, he would drag the towel further inside the kennel in his initial attempts at 'playing.' We welcomed his efforts with huge smiles and responded to him lovingly and enthusiastically. Randy, too, was beaming...as if he were a child who had successfully ridden a two wheeled bike, without training wheels, for the first time, while in the presence of his proud parents. It is heartwarming beyond words to witness his growing confidence level while he play bows and socializes outside with his kennel mates. When we approach Randy and his kennel mates outside for 'play time,' his tail waves rhythmically ... and along with the other tails, creates a silent symphony as they all eagerly await our presence.



There are still instances when Randy's incredibly expressive eyes will reflect uncertainty and worry... especially when the wind whips around outside, creating havoc, by randomly propelling miscellaneous objects that serve to invade his field of vision. He will then, temporarily, revert back to earlier times when the imagined demons materializing from his new surroundings had not yet been neutralized by the warmth and love of his caregivers. But his responses are certainly understandable... and are to be expected. He is still learning...

and there is so much of life he is unfamiliar with and has yet to experience. He has only started his life's journey...and has, inevitably, encountered obstacles that have impeded him...but only briefly. In recent months, since his arrival here, he has always had someone he could count on to provide him with comfort and reassurance, to break his fall should he stumble...catch him before any damage was done...and place him gently but firmly back on level ground...slowly... one tentative paw at a time.

Randy remains a 'work in progress'...a truly exquisite and magnificent work, at that. He has penetrated the deepest recesses of our hearts...and did so quite innocently and unknowingly...just by being himself...a handsome, furry, fawn-colored angel. Soon, someone special, whose heart welcomes and nurtures the needs of shy greyhounds, will answer the calling and will share in and echo these sentiments about Randy...our precious boy... a priceless gift...just waiting to be opened.

Written by Nancy C. Barbour, December 2007

