One Greyhound’s Story

I am four years old. I have tattoos and more than a few scars. I had a successful career though I’m already retired. My name is Niall. I am a greyhound and this is my story....

Dates don’t mean much to dogs but the humans tell me I was born on July 9, 2008. Summertime. I love summertime! I was born at a greyhound farm in Abilene, Kansas. That’s somewhere in the USA. It was warm. My mother was warm and soft. I would never have guessed Mom was a racing champion! Her name was Fast Pass. My father’s name was Jawa Leonas Best but I never new him. He was a serious champion. Wow. There were 6 little wiggly pups including me. My sister Ardelia was born first, then me, then Raskal, Shondrell, Shondrella and finally... little Zehava popped out last. Life was safe and sunny.

One day, maybe it was late August, someone picked me up and rolled green ink inside one of my ears! Then this clamp thing with little needles shaped like numbers & letters pinched me really hard and, before I had a chance to do anything about it, the other side was done too. I could never see what they did but, boy did it smart! The humans say I have numbers tattooed inside both my ears. In my left ear is my litter number, 47802, that all my brothers & sisters have. In my right ear, I have numbers and letters, 78B. 7 means I was born in July. The 8 means it was 2008 and the B means that I was the second pup whelped in my litter. Can you guess what is tattooed in the ears of my sisters & brothers? Greyhound puppies must be registered with the NGA (National Greyhound Association) by 3 months of age and we all must be tattooed to be registered.

I come from a long line of racing greyhounds. I know who all my relatives are back several generations and even know that a dog named Pilot was the first of my line all the way back in 1820!!!! What a family tree! There are famous champions in my bloodline, like Dutch Bahama & Downing! Doesn’t Downing look like me? They are both in the Greyhound Hall of Fame! Pretty neat, huh? I can show you my pedigree if you are ever curious.
My name turned out to be prophetic. It happens that I was the most successful racer in my litter. Niall is Gaelic and it means, “champion”. I ran 89 races and came in first 10 times, 2nd 10 times, 3rd more than 10 times and in almost all my races I was out first with a good lead. I knew how to do it right! If you got mixed up in the pack of dogs trailing in a race, you could be bumped & bruised and get mud & dirt in your eyes from the leaders up ahead! You see, we are very, very fast dogs. We run at speeds of 45 miles per hour. We can reach that speed in about 2 seconds! Can you imagine how far I can run in one minute! That is why I always have to be on a leash unless the area is fenced. I could get lost or hurt in a flash.

Oh, back to my story.... my brothers, sisters and I lived in a small hut that had a doggie door for us all to come and go whenever we wanted and the hut was in a fenced yard. Life was fun there and our mother stayed with us until we were four months old. Then we got moved to a larger yard so we could stretch out and run. We chased a fluffy thing being pulled behind a tractor sometimes. Can you picture us all running together? So much fun! We lived there until we were 10 months old. I have so many great memories of playing with my littermates! After that, things changed a lot. We got moved inside and were placed with another litter of puppies who would train with us to be race dogs! This all sounded very exciting to me! We trained every morning at the crack of dawn. The trainers watched us and decided which ones of us could have successful careers. We each lived in wire cages and wore muzzles on our faces when we were all together because we have thin skin and even a playful nip can cause a big wound. I suppose I did well. I just wanted to catch the lure!

I ran my first professional race at Southland Greyhound Park in a place called Arkansas, June 3, 2010, when I was 19 months old. I came in second! People cheered for me! I felt good and strong! We zoomed around an oval racetrack after a lure they called “Rusty!” Here are some pictures of me wearing the #5 at Southland Park.
Back inside I noticed the dogs that came in last place were not as happy as I was. They were not treated as well as I was either. This did not seem right to me. Weren’t we all beautiful greyhounds?

I ran 89 races. As I mentioned I did well so I was treated well. I was transferred from Arkansas to Palm Beach in Florida in February of 2012. I did not race again until almost the end of May! I guess I had to get used to the new place or maybe I had an accident and needed to heal. We dogs don’t have great memories for stuff like that.

My racing days were over by July and I was happy because I was not having so much fun anymore. At Palm Beach they raced me about every 3 days compared to 7 days between races at Southland. I was 4 years old and soon someone from a rescue agency came and took a few of us away to find us homes with a nice families. We travelled to Vermont. My group were all given funny car names. Mine was “Trans Am”. It was August and I had to get used to another new place but the people there were all so very kind to me all the time. I lived in a wire crate with about 40 other greyhounds all in crates around me. It looked a lot like the racetrack but we were never expected to do anything but be good dogs and look cute. Volunteers came in and took such good care of us!

My picture was put up on something called a website. Whatever that is, one day a nice lady saw my picture there and showed it to her family. The boy said he had to come see me and his mom & dad agreed.

On the last day of the Christmas vacation, they came down from a faraway land called Canada and visited with me and some of the other dogs. They met some of the others first but I knew they really came to see me. I could tell. A dog senses these things. Anyway, we met and I ran around in the yard with them. I gave them lots of attention and snuggled up to them when they called me. I even tried to slip my head into a fancy collar the lady was holding. I could tell that collar belonged to another special greyhound who went before me. They brought their little Jack Russell terrier with them and we all got along fine. But, for some reason, they left without taking any of us home with them! This made me wonder.... Adopting a pet is a big responsibility so I thought maybe they needed time to think. I hoped they would come back. I really liked that boy!
Guess what? They came back a few days later and signed adoption papers and took me home! It was a scary ride in the car. Where was I going?

When the car stopped I went inside a nice house and slept like a baby on the fluffiest comforter I ever laid down on! Was it a cloud? Was this heaven? What was happening to me? Where were all the other greyhounds? I was happy but it was strange for me and I cried a little in the night. Greyhounds had been all around me my whole life 24 HOURS A DAY!! Windows were new. Television was new (I still can’t figure out what those humans are doing in that box but my family seems to think it is normal). Hardwood floors... like skating rinks! How do these humans walk on these things. Never mind the stairs!!! We never encountered these things!

My story has a happy ending but I am sad to report that many magnificent greyhounds never know the comforts of a loving home. Like everything, there are good race tracks and bad race tracks. Good handlers and bad. Some greyhounds are killed because they don’t win races. Some die from neglect. Some even get hurt so bad racing that the veterinarian has to put them down. Many dogs find homes. Many others don’t. Macey, my family’s first greyhound and first owner of my beautiful collar, never raced and was in very bad shape when she was adopted in 1995. All her teeth were broken, she had many scars and was very, very thin. She ate her food like every meal was her first and last! She must have been abused. She was afraid of men in dark coats and loved ladies with blond hair. She could never tell her real story but she had a happy ending too. Here is her picture!

My name is Niall. I used to race but that is all just a strange dream to me now. I am a lucky dog. I’m safe, comfortable and happy with a family who really loves me ... and that is all a greyhound could ever want.