

# How I Became a Greyhound Activist



*by Dennis Anderson Contributing Member, Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds*





**Vickie Sublette's Sophia**



**Julian Valentine's angel Sally**

### *It all began on a cruise ship in 2015.*

I was cruising between Honolulu and Sydney and I finished all the books I bought onboard so I decided to borrow from the passenger's library. Here I found 'Comet's Tale' by Steven Wolf. Steven was afflicted by physical disabilities and a friend suggested he adopt a greyhound as a way of taking his mind off his problems. On his first visit to a greyhound rescue centre he was adopted by Comet. Steven tells how he trained Comet to be an assistance dog and describes the life they had together. It was such a moving story which remained with me but at the time I did not consider adopting a greyhound to be an option.

In 2017 a friend, who had also read 'Comet's Tale', suggested I adopt a greyhound. I knew nothing about greyhounds but I knew a neighbour who had adopted one so I asked them a lot of questions. My friend discovered that Greyhounds as Pets was having an open day at a Petbarn on the outskirts of Sydney and that she and I should go and take a look. I had no intention of adopting that day. Well two of us went to Petbarn however, three of us came home, the addition being a 3-year-old female

ex-racer. I immediately re-named her Comet in honour of Steven's Comet.

Comet settled in well at home only requiring a redesigning of the backyard, purchase of bedding, coats etc, etc. Comet was no problem; she never chewed anything, she travelled well in the car and did all the lovable things that I now know greyhounds do. She did have one problem, she was very nervous around other dogs and would whimper if one came too close. It was this issue that caused her to fail her Greenhound assessment. I started searching on line for a solution and discovered that this could be an inherited trait.

As luck would have it the paper work that came with her from GAP included her racing name. With this information I was able to trace her breeder who was also her trainer via Google. I rang him and asked if she had displayed this behaviour when she was with him. He advised that she had and that was why she was not successful on the racetrack. I then asked about her litter mates. I thought if I could speak with the owners of her litter mates and ask them if their dog had similar issues and had they been able to overcome the problem.

My first action was to contact GAP and ask their advice on how to track Comet's siblings. They advised I contact the NSW Greyhound Breeders, Owners and Trainers Association GBOTA. So, I rang GBOTA their advice was to go online and search the Greyhound Recorder. This I did. It gave me the names of Comet's parents and litter mates. She had seven brothers and sisters.

Armed with this information I again rang Comet's former breeder/trainer. He told me that one was never named and that Comet and the other six went on to race. At the time I did not realise the significance of not being named. I do now. So, one dead. He then advised me that he kept one to race himself along with Comet. The other five were sold to other owners. The one he kept was put up for adoption at the same time as Comet but did not pass the GAP test. So, death number two.

Following this conversation, I went back to the internet for further research with the Greyhound Recorder. I found the racing histories of the remaining six along with their last known owners and trainers. I thought how easy is this I will just get contact details for them and ring

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them and ask if their dog showed any signs of anxiety. How naive of me. I could not find any contact details, so back to GBOTA. As I asked about these people by name all I got from GBOTA was that they had no record of them. I thought how strange, not only have the dogs disappeared but also the owners and trainers. What sort of business are they running here and what are they hiding?

My only knowledge of the greyhound ban in NSW and the subsequent backflip was what I had heard on the mainstream media. Then I made the connection that if Mike Baird regarded this industry with such distaste that he sought to ban it coupled with my unsuccessful attempts to find Comet's siblings something was rotten. I did not know what but I decided to find out. Back to the internet.

My initial research gave me the bare bones; the Four Corners program, the Inquiry, the ban, the opposition to the ban, the Orange by-election and the backflip. Now I had a starting point, the Special Commission of Inquiry conducted by a former High Court judge the Hon. Michael McHugh AC QC. I downloaded and printed all 735 pages. Then I sat down to read.

As I read the first paragraph of the Special Commission's report, I was shocked and horrified. Below I quote

excerpts from this first paragraph to give the reader the full horror of what the Special Commission discovered. 'The normal life expectancy of a greyhound is between 12 and 15 years. Over the last 12 years 97,783 dogs have been whelped in NSW. Currently, there are about 6,809 registered greyhounds. Absent death through misadventure or illness, the average life expectancy of a greyhound indicates that another 90,974 greyhounds should still be alive. Some pups that were whelped in the last 18 months may be within litters, being reared, broken in or in pre-race training and not registered. However, even assuming that none of these juvenile animals (approximately 10,253) has been destroyed, where are the remaining 80,721 greyhounds? What has happened to them?'

The report details the killing of tens of thousands of healthy dogs, the injuries suffered by dogs during racing and the drugging of dogs, I also discovered how participants in the industry had lied to the Special Commission. It took me a long time to read. I found parts so distressing that I had to put it aside for a few days before I could continue. By the time I finished reading I had come to the realisation that anyone with a shred of human decency could only draw one conclusion upon reading the report, shut it down. Now I understood exactly what

sort of business they were running and exactly what they have to hide.

Now that I was aware of the level of cruelty and criminality within the greyhound racing industry my next task was to find out who did what and when. Back to the internet. I discovered that the Special Commission was the result of a Four Corners program on live baiting screened in February 2015. Immediately following this screening, the then Liberal Premier of NSW Mike Baird appointed the Special Commission to conduct an inquiry into the greyhound racing industry. The Special Commissioner presented his report to Baird in June 2016 and Baird did what any decent person would have done, in July 2016 he announced the banning of the industry. Four days later the then leader of the Labor opposition announced that Labor opposes the ban.

I discovered that what followed in the next three months was an aggressive campaign to overturn the ban that brought together the strangest combination of forces. The Labor Party was joined by ultra conservative radio 'shock jocks', the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, News Corporation, the gambling industry and the racing industry in campaigning against the ban. The Deputy Premier received death threats. During this period a by-election



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was held for the safe National Party seat of Orange. The greyhound racing ban was one of the hot issues in the by-election and the Nationals lost the seat to the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. The Government went into shock and announced that the ban would be overturned.

How could this be?! A comprehensive Special Commission of Inquiry lasting 18 months and producing a 735-page report highlighting cruelty and criminality on an industrial scale is now to have its number 1 recommendation ignored. I was outraged that such a thing could occur. What kept running through my mind was why.

Some reasons were blatantly obvious, the gambling and racing industries were solely motivated by money and did not care about animal welfare. To them the greyhounds were just a commodity to be used and discarded when they were no longer profitable. The government's motivation was that they saw they could lose government if the results of the Orange by-election were replicated at a general election. They rolled over to save their skin. The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party is made up of people who think inflicting pain and death on animals is fun. Why would they care about the mass killing of healthy dogs and the horrific injuries occurring on the racetrack. But what were the motivations of the others? How much money did NewsCorp and the 'shock jocks' stand to lose if greyhound racing stopped?

But in my opinion the most cynical of all was the Labor Party. Were they offered financial inducements by the gambling industry? Did they think that this was an issue they could use against the

government at the next election regardless of the moral principles involved? If Labor had any concern for the welfare of the greyhounds they quickly put that aside in their quest for power at any price. If Labor had a moral compass they would have stood with the government and supported the ban. If that

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had happened there would be no greyhound racing industry in NSW today. The irony of their decision to sacrifice thousands of greyhounds on the altar of political opportunism was revealed in the NSW state election in March 2019. Yes, the government lost support in rural areas but it did not go to Labor, it went to the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party.

Having announced the overturning of the ban the government attempted to justify its action by creating a Greyhound Industry Reform Panel. This panel was to review the findings of the Special Commission report and then 'provide recommendations on potential animal welfare and governance arrangements to reform the industry'. The panel consisted of five members. Three members were those I would expect to see on such a panel; a public servant, the CEO of an animal welfare organisation and a vet. The remaining two were very curious, the CEO of GBOTA and a former Labor premier of NSW. This raised questions in my mind, appointing the CEO of GBOTA was akin to making the poacher the gamekeeper and why would a Liberal government appoint a former Labor premier to head the review.

The Panel made 122 recommendations of which the government accepted 121. 'Wastage', to use the industry's term for the mass killing of healthy dogs and how to stop it was a significant issue in the Special Commission report. Greyhound Racing NSW has officially reported the birth of 34,653 greyhounds since 2012, an average of 5,775 per year. The Panel's report did not address in any detail how 5,775 retiring greyhounds were to be homed or rehomed every year. The fact that the Reform Panel did not detail how to fix this issue makes a nonsense of the whole review process. I knew then that this process was a bureaucratic white wash that was an attempt to convince the public that the government was serious about cleaning up the industry. What convinced me of this is that Premier Baird resigned a few

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**Michelle Koros has a harmonious family with Jasper, Angel and Chloe**

weeks before the Review Panel reported to the government in February 17. The stench was too much for a man who had attempted to do the right thing eight months earlier.

By this time, I had decided that the stench was too much for me too. I resolved to do something about this but I did not know what or how to go about it. Back to the internet. I researched animal welfare and activist organisations. While they all officially opposed greyhound racing, they were also involved with a range of other animal welfare issues. Whilst I applaud their advocacy on behalf of all animals, I perceived there was a danger that limited resources were being spread across a range of issues which could result in the one issue I was concerned about being lost in the bigger picture. I needed to find an organisation that was specifically concerned with greyhounds.

I also considered putting my efforts into greyhound rescue. I have the greatest admiration for the people involved in rescue. I know it makes a great difference to the greyhounds that get rescued but I thought about the thousands that don't. While I could put my efforts into saving a few greyhounds I would much rather try and do something for all greyhounds. But how could this be achieved? Back to the internet.

I started searching for organisations that specialised in greyhounds and that specifically work towards shutting down the industry. After a lot of research and a few dead ends I came across the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds. I decided that this was an organisation that has the same goals and objectives as myself and that is actively campaigning to shut down the industry. I am now working with the Coalition for

the Protection of Greyhounds.

What I had discovered is that the greyhound racing industry is so wrong on so many levels. Do I have all the answers on how to shut down the industry? No, but am I actively working on various ideas that may contribute to this ultimate goal? Yes. I am inspired by William Wilberforce who spent 46 years campaigning to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire. When he was campaigning, slavery accounted for 80% of Britain's foreign earnings. Wilberforce and his fellow abolitionists were certainly up against financially powerful forces just like those of us today who are working towards abolishing the greyhound racing industry. I do not have 46 years to continue the fight, unless I live to 115, but I will certainly do my best as long as I can to save these wonderful dogs.





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