



# Raising Baby

Have you ever wondered how your Greyhound was raised as a puppy? One curious owner decided to find out.

*By Joe Kam*

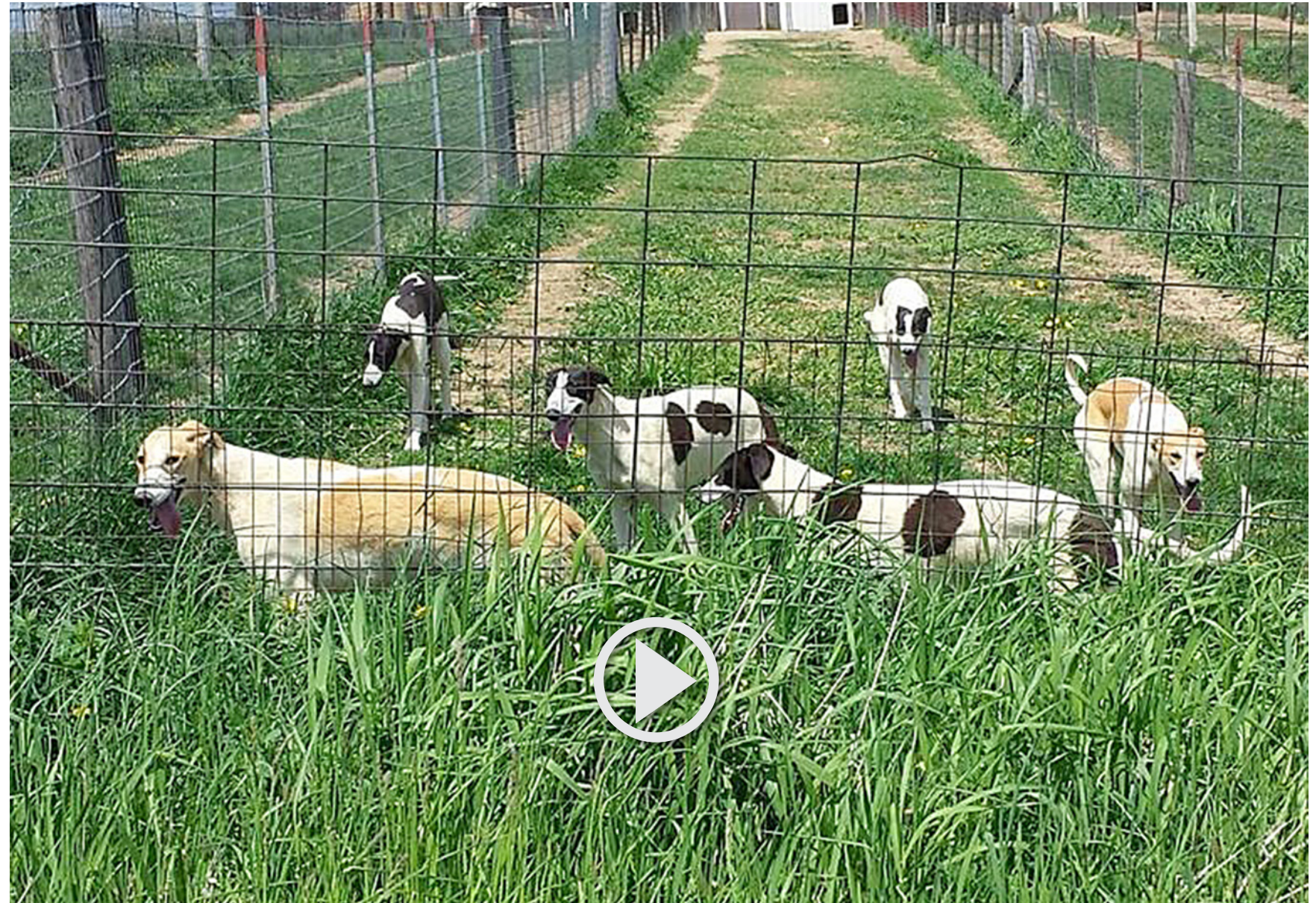
Sometimes when I watch my retired racers, I wonder what they were like when they were puppies and how their life was before I adopted them. I'd ask myself questions, like: Did he steal toys and keep them for himself? Was he the one who instigated play and antagonized the others? Did he learn to dig those craters on the farm? I was curious and wanted to know more, so I contacted several Greyhound farmers and asked questions.

One farmer in particular, Melissa Schmidt, really touched me with the story of how her determination to start a farm came to be. "I fell in love with this breed after literally spending one evening at a Greyhound farm. After the first time seeing them, I begged my husband every day for four years to let me get into the Greyhound business. That is approximately 1,460 days! He finally gave in."

National Greyhound Association (NGA) Greyhounds are born on farms,

in climate-controlled buildings, where they stay with their mothers until they are between six and ten weeks old, and occasionally longer. Once they are weaned, the entire litter moves to a large outdoor pen, known as a run. There they can play until they tire themselves, take a nap, and do it all over again. Typically, Greyhound puppies stay with their littermates on the farm for a year.

Her pups have a variety of toys to play with: stuffed animals, braided ropes, tug-of-war toys, rubber tires, and balls. Of course, they also dig (perfecting their technique in creating those large holes that drive us crazy), roll around, and run, just like they do in our backyards. During this time, they also start “figuring out pecking order and how to negotiate, mediate, pick on each other, and establish who the boss is—all the things they are going to need for the real world,” Melissa



*Click on the slideshow to view more adorable Greyhound puppy pictures!*



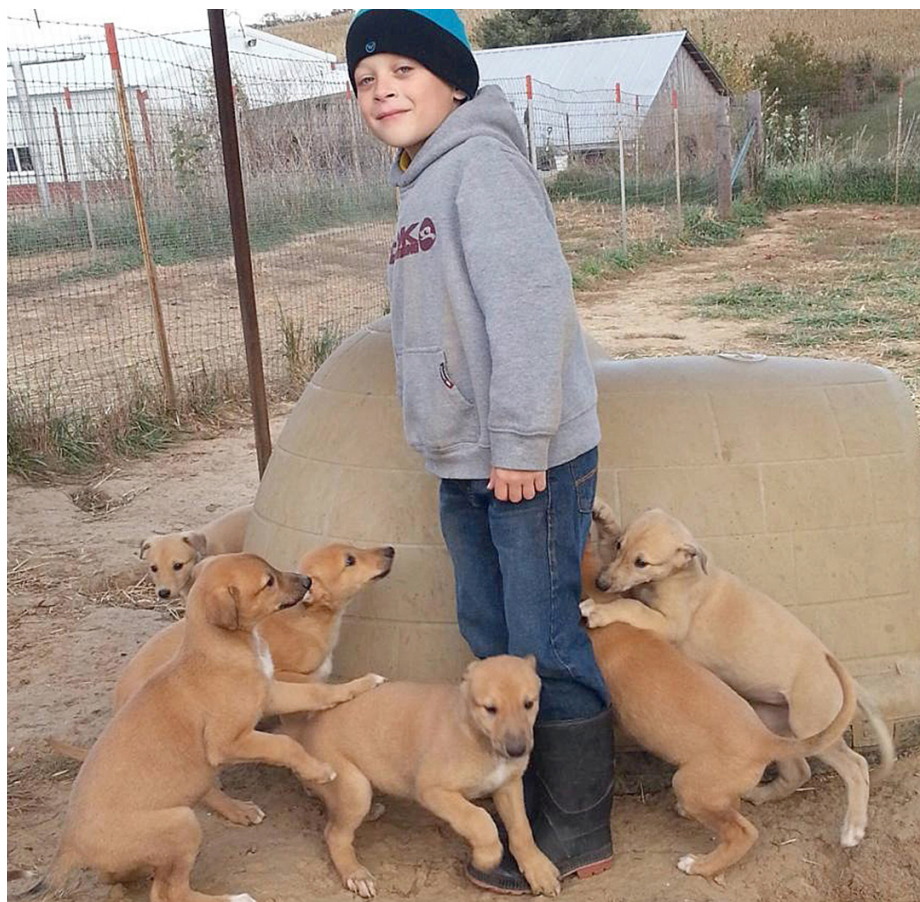
said, adding it's similar to what we do at home with our siblings.

Greyhound puppies have dog houses filled with straw, to keep them warm in cooler weather, and have fresh water available at all times, not just for drinking, but for playing, too. Most farms have kiddie pools in which the dogs can lay, splash, and play. During the warmer months of spring and into the heat of the summer, sprinklers mist the runs to keep the dogs cool.

As the pups grow older, they are separated into smaller groups and moved into larger runs. They generally start in 100 ft. runs, then move to runs that are 200 ft. As they get older, they finally grow into runs that are 300 ft. long or longer. The fenced-in runs are usually parallel to each other, so the dogs can socialize and chase each other along the fence line.

Greyhound farms often have visitors, which the dogs are always happy to see. If you've never been to a farm, remember to wear long sleeves and long pants to protect your bare skin. Greyhound puppies have sharp teeth and nails and can't wait to include you in their play. They're not called "land sharks" for nothing!

An important part of a puppy's development is socialization. Greyhound puppies are handled every day, and the older ones are also given attention throughout the day. Melissa has six children, ages 6 to 17, who all play a big role on the farm. They help socialize the pups from the minute they are born. The children help with tattooing, worming, vaccinating, walking, and moving the pups to new runs. They also routinely bring puppies into their home to give them some



extra attention. After all, who could resist those adorable faces?

Worrying about the health and well-being of the dogs is also a part of being a Greyhound farmer. "I do worry a lot about safety, but more so about the heat or air conditioning going out," Melissa

said. "I have alarmed my buildings for temperature controls. I couldn't even sleep at night, worrying about it getting too hot or too cold for the pups and broods." Notices are sent to her cell phone if the temperature in the buildings changes significantly. To her it's peace of mind.

Melissa said she also feels very strongly about her responsibility to Greyhound adoption. She does regular hauls to adoption groups for free, and helps them whenever she can. Each time a brood is adopted, she provides all of its vaccinations, pays for a health certificate, and gives the adoption group a healthy donation.

Being a Greyhound farmer is a tough, but rewarding occupation. Being on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is just like being the



parents of children, but on a larger scale. Most days start between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. and don't end until approximately 10 p.m. Between feedings, changing water buckets, turnouts, sweeping, picking up after the dogs, and disinfecting and hosing down pens, there's still more to do. So why is Melissa a Greyhound farmer you might ask?

"I do what I absolutely love. It radiates from every cell of my body, beginning from my heart," she explained. She adds that her favorite place to be is "in the brood barn and the whelping barn. You just can never be in a bad or sad mood around any of them.

"Getting to work every day with the most beautiful, graceful, gentle, funny, loving, and loyal animals on the

planet," witnessing the birth of their amazing babies, and watching the pups they raise turn into mothers and athletes is the ultimate reward for their labor of love.

If you ever get the opportunity to visit a farm, ask as many questions as you can, while watching the happy hounds doing what they love to do — dig, play, and run. ■

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*About the author: Joee Kam and her family adopted their first retired racing Greyhound in 2004. They currently share their Grand Rapids, Michigan, home with Sasha, a 13 and one-half-year-old Golden Retriever, and Joy (AJN Joy Lee). Joee volunteers with [Allies for Greyhounds](#) and is the founder and president of the non-profit [Greyhound Facts Inc.](#)*

