



Phantom at rest. Debbie Barnett

Capturing the Phantom

By Suzanne Reep

The saga of the Phantom began on June 1, 2003 when Team Greyhound adopter Gerry Stone called me to report that a coworker had seen a Greyhound running loose on the Gamble Estate in Westwood, Ohio. "No problem," I told Gerry. "We'll go get her." We soon realized that this Greyhound was very shy, and not easily approached. What's more, she could run very fast and leap like a deer. Where did she come from and to whom did she belong? Little did I know that we were on the verge of a time-intensive, frustrating, and heartbreaking ten-month search for a loose Greyhound.

Volunteers hung hundreds of posters on telephone poles. We ordered a large humane trap from Wisconsin, and consulted with an expert on how to capture a Greyhound. After the Fourth of July, we lost track of her. Undaunted, we hung more posters in new locations. Two days later, we received a call from Mike Collins, a good-hearted Samaritan in Westwood who saw our poster on a telephone pole in front of his house. "I think the dog you are looking for ran through my yard this morning," he said. "The dog looks just like the picture on the poster."

Encouraged, I took some food over to Mike's house. Mike called later with the exciting news that the dog had come back to eat. The next weekend, Cara Brockhoff of Northcoast Greyhound Support posted to the Greyhound-List on the Internet that we were in need of volunteers, and people responded. The searchers came from everywhere — Dayton, Cincinnati, Columbus, Northern Kentucky — and lined the street, hoping that today would be the day we found her. We came equipped with walkie-talkies, binoculars, muzzles, cell phones, leashes, and bug spray (an absolute necessity on those muggy and hot summer mornings). The terrain was dense, marshy, hilly and very rough. We spent every weekend that summer and fall in the woods of Westwood, trying to find and capture the Greyhound.

Would a Bloodhound help? Worth trying, we thought. We posted our plea for help on an Internet Bloodhound list, and Steve Kahn of Columbus, Ohio responded. Steve and his Bloodhound Savannah made three trips to Cincinnati to help track

the Greyhound, who we nicknamed the Phantom.

After consulting with a veterinarian, we made the agonizing decision to tranquilize the Phantom. I found this prospect quite unnerving; would we find her before she could harm herself? Were we doing the right thing? After much consideration, we put tranquilizers in her food and quietly waited for her to take the bait. Phantom always showed up as soon as we put the food in the bowl. She grabbed the bait, ran into the woods, and we all followed. The Phantom eluded us each time.

One day, Sarah Stuart saw our lost dog poster and called to tell me that one of her students had seen the Greyhound. After talking to Sarah, I found out that she was involved with search and rescue and had a Belgian Malinois who was skilled at tracking other dogs. We were ecstatic when Sarah and Driver joined our search team. Two long-distance marathon runners from Dayton also responded to our plea for help. They had endurance and stamina, but the Phantom proved again to be the swiftest in the forest. From time to time, we ran into the Phantom on a trail in the woods. I imagined she was laughing at us.

After many heartbreaking attempts to catch her, we had to face the fact that the oral tranquilizer was not the solution. Autumn was upon

us and we were desperate to capture her before winter. We tried the humane trap, but with no success.

Mike continued to feed the Phantom twice a day. Westwood residents continued to call to report sightings, enabling us to track her movements. As the weeks rolled into months, everyone became frustrated and fearful that the Phantom would not survive the coming winter season. Two volunteers from Dayton built a warm shelter for the Phantom in the woods behind Mike's house. We started feeding her more food with lots of tasty treats to keep her eating at the same location and to keep her from wandering so far during the day. In December, I ordered the Collarum™, a humane snare trap designed to capture canines in the wild. It was a scary contraption and tricky to use, but we were desperate. The Phantom tripped it twice, but it missed her by a few inches because we had not set it correctly. The trap spooked her, and we abandoned this plan, as we had many others.

By now, I knew how *not* to catch a Greyhound.

While roaming miles each day, Phantom always returned to Mike's house for breakfast and dinner. During the winter, many people called to report that the Phantom was now stealing dog food bowls in the neighborhood. She was very fond of a male Rottweiler and more often than not shared his dinner in the

afternoon, often taking his dinner bowl to the woods to the owner's dismay. Feeling bad for the Rottweiler who was tied to a doghouse, I replaced his food bowl several times. Mike used a stake and rope to secure the food dishes. One day, Mike called me and said, "I found her food bowl stash in the woods. There are a lot of bowls."

In late January, after a snow melt, I was in Westwood with Grey, my senior Greyhound. We spied the Phantom lying on a hillside, sunning herself. A couple days earlier, the temperature had dipped to 18 below zero. It was a miracle that she had survived the bitter cold. Grey and I approached her very slowly. We made eye contact, and Phantom started walking towards us. I thought she looked sad and lonely. My heart was pounding and I thought how great it would be if I could get a leash around her neck. But it was not to be, and the Phantom ran off when I was about 15 feet away.

In February, Mike snapped the very first pictures of the Phantom. Shockingly, the photographs indicated that she was pregnant. A few days later, she apparently had given birth. We searched every day for the pups, but never found them.

At this point, I was out of ideas. The search had taken an emotional and physical toll on me, but how could I give up after spending so much time trying to save this dog? She had outsmarted



Phantom, immediately after her capture. Suzanne Reep



The wounds Phantom received from darting were only skin deep. *Suzanne Reep*

us at every turn, but she was a survivor and deserved to live. After doing a lot of research, I found a Missouri-based company called Midwest Capture. The owner, Dana Savorelli, a retired bounty hunter of two-legged game, was also an expert in the chemical capture of animals. After hearing the Phantom's story, Dana agreed to make the 600-mile trip to Cincinnati. His services would be expensive, but he was our last hope. The Phantom had spent eight months in the cold, snow and rain. How much longer could she survive?

Once again, Cara Brockhoff came to the rescue and hosted several auctions. Thanks to the generosity of many caring people, the auctions

raised the majority of the funds we needed to pay for the Savorelli rescue team's trip to Cincinnati.

On March 26, Dana, Debbie, Bear, and Joe arrived in Cincinnati in their 32-foot RV. We met at a veterinarian's office to obtain the sedative that they would use in the dart gun.

The team realized on Day 1 that darting the Phantom was going to be challenging and difficult. Neighbors and children were outside that weekend enjoying the early spring weather, and they had already spooked the Phantom.

On Day 2, we eagerly arrived around 5:00 a.m. Dana set out to dart the Phantom in Mike's backyard. About thirty minutes later, Dana

appeared from around the back of the house.

"I missed her," he said.

"Dana never misses," said Debbie, "especially from 12 feet."

After some investigation, they discovered that the long tail of the transmitter dart was slightly deflected due to the design of the gun barrel. We were all very disappointed, Dana most of all. They made adjustments to the gun barrel. Equipped with spotting scopes, Joe and Bear, climbed tall trees in order to observe the Phantom's movements.

On Day 3, we asked Sarah and Driver help us track the Phantom in the woods. Phantom, skilled at eluding people, was drawn to other dogs, especially Driver who had quite a "nose" for the Phantom. It wasn't long before Driver found her, but dirt bikes roared out of the woods at the very same moment that Dana was preparing to shoot. Fifteen minutes later, as Dana was setting up again for a shot, police officers suddenly converged on us with rifles and guns drawn. Neighbors from a side street panicked when they saw us in the woods with what they thought were real rifles and camouflage clothing. They frantically called the police department. Day 3 was not a good day.

The police asked who was in charge. I told them our story and apologized for not informing the authorities of our intentions. (Dana had instructed Debbie and I to contact the police to let them know what we were doing, but the police got there before we made the call.) I confirmed that the muzzle looped around my belt was for the Greyhound. The officers were incredulous and not very happy. By the time the police called the SPCA to verify our story and then let us go, the sun had almost set. A few minutes later, as we were walking back to the RV, we saw the Phantom walking down the sidewalk. The police captain gave us his blessing to dart the Phantom and asked us to let him know when we left the area.

Panic set in again. I knew the Savorelli team needed to return to Missouri soon.

On Day Four, the rain began. Sarah loaned us Driver again. At the end of the day, Debbie told me she was becoming very fond of the Phantom. She said, "Phantom was play-bowing and flirting with Driver, until she saw Bear behind a tree. Then she ran behind a tree and peeked her head out from side to side just like Bear."

That evening, Dana told me they had gone to Walmart to buy a hunting blind, heater, and other supplies. They were prepared to sit in the



Phantom enjoys the company of Claire, a longhaired Dachshund. *Debbie Barnett*

woods all night. Dana was determined: "I know the Phantom will probably die if we leave without getting her." For Dana, it had become a personal thing. That night, the Savorelli team set up the blind and food bowl on a pathway that the Phantom regularly used.

On Day 5, the call came. At 6:10 p.m., Dana reported: "Bear hit her and we're starting to track her." Joe was carrying a large antenna and tracking device, and we had thirty minutes to find Phantom in the midst of a violent thunderstorm. I was about five minutes away when Dana called again: "We have her! We're carrying her out of the woods right now." They carried her up a steep muddy hill in the driving rain. Crying tears of joy and numb with shock, I knelt down

to see her. Debbie was checking her vital signs as we rushed Phantom to an emergency clinic. The veterinarian recommended fluids and released the Phantom into Debbie's care.

Debbie fell in love with Phantom while caring for her. With her instincts, experience caring for canines caught in the wild, and formal training as a Veterinary Technician, I knew Debbie could provide the perfect home for Phantom.

The next day, Debbie, Dana, and I hugged each other and said our goodbyes. I looked at Phantom one last time and wished her well. Then the Phantom started her long journey to her forever home in Missouri.

Phantom settled into her new home remarkably fast and started learning all about love and

how good people can be. She sleeps in Debbie's bed, plays with the other dogs, and loves to be bathed and groomed. Debbie said Phantom runs laps with the other dogs and loves to be petted by their spider monkeys. But some old habits die hard: "I tried to feed her downstairs with the other dogs," reported Debbie, "but she looked at me, snatched her bowl up in her mouth, and ran upstairs with it!"

About two years of age, Phantom spent almost half her life living in the wild. To this day, no one knows where she came from and her origin remains a mystery.

Suzanne Reep volunteers with Team Greyhound Adoption of Ohio.