

RETIRED RACING DOGS FROM CHINA FIND HOMES IN KANSAS CITY



The largest international greyhound rescue effort is the inspiration behind this year's calendar.

When the Macau (Yat Yuen) Canidrome Dog Club in Macau, China, closed in July 2018, the fate of 532 greyhounds lay in the hands and hearts of an international network of animal advocates.

The Save the Macau Greyhounds campaign was a team effort led by Albano Martins with Anima Macau in cooperation with Grey2K USA Worldwide and the European rescue group, Pet Levrieri.

Surrounded by high-rise buildings in one of the densest population centers in the world, the greyhounds spent most of their time in damp, dark concrete kennels with rusty bars. Some dogs had no beds to sleep on and none of the greys had ever played with toys. The greys were underweight and many had additional health concerns, including open wounds and severe dental issues that resulted in countless extractions. Most of the greyhounds had been exported to Macau from Australia.

A 2011 article by the *South China Morning Post* reported that as many as 30 greyhounds a month were being euthanized at the Canidrome. This was due to race injuries, other health issues or simply not being competitive enough.

"The 532 surviving greyhounds were incredibly resilient to have stayed alive for so long," said Robin Olive Reich, a volunteer and photographer who documented life at the Canidrome as the rescue was underway in November 2018.

Martins said convincing the Canidrome owners and the Macau government to pay for the surviving dogs' veterinary care and transport was the biggest challenge.

In a BBC interview Martins did in August 2018, the reporter said, "But you can't find homes for them all." Martins replied: "Sure I can."

Shortly thereafter, the Macau government cut the initial 12-month rehoming period to six months. Martins then pressed the Canidrome to pay for the greys' transportation.

In the end, the Canidrome paid all the transportation bills (around \$2 million U.S.) and medical care (approximately \$170,000) to re-home the dogs.

"They accepted," Martins said, "and all was done with Grey2KUSA Worldwide main logistic support and Pet Levrieri support."

The majority of the dogs (307 to be exact) were taken in by American groups largely because the wait time post-vaccinations

and health testing is the shortest — just 21 days, compared to three months quarantine in Europe and seven months quarantine in Australia, said Isobel Deeley, Pet Levrieri associate member and translator.

"And it was imperative to get the dogs out of the Canidrome as soon as possible," she said.

In the United States, the National Greyhound Adoption Program (NGAP) in Philadelphia and Kansas City REGAP were two of several U.S.-based adoption groups involved in the operation.

To get to Kansas City, the pups travelled more than 12,000 miles by air and car — the greatest distance any REGAP greyhound has traveled to his forever home.

Since the first flight arrived in Chicago on Oct. 19, 2018, 22 Macau greyhounds have come to KCREGAP. At press time, two pups were in foster homes awaiting their forever families — all of the other greys have been adopted.

"Getting these dogs to Kansas City has truly been a labor of love," said Robyn Stone, KCREGAP president. "Despite everything they've been through, every single one of these dogs has been the epitome of unconditional love. KCREGAP is so lucky to be a part of their journey."



Dorian Famuliner brought Freya home in February 2019. She is known for piling her toys and then sleeping on her collection.



KCREGAP's last group of Macau greyhounds arrived in Kansas City February 17, 2019. Transport volunteers (left to right): Jim Twigg, Mary Bilson, Julie Bates, Julie Morrison and Sharen Miller. Pups pictured left to right: Oakley, Jesse, Maverick, Annie, Wyatt and Montana.

Sharen Miller was a transporter on the Chicago trip Oct. 19-21, 2018. She wrote the following shortly after the journey:

When I first heard about these six precious pups from China who endured and survived the horrendous life at the Macau Canidrome coming to join the REGAP family, it seemed so surreal. However, as I stood in the cargo warehouse in Chicago with the other volunteers, anticipation and reality overwhelmed me.

Julie (Bates) directed the release of the pups to ensure it was done properly and according to the strict regulations. One by one, each pup was freed from its crate leaving behind its horrendous past and beginning a promising new life full of love, freedom and family. We all wanted to endlessly hug and love on each one of these precious kids.

The first pup out was a gorgeous little blue girl whose chosen name was Amira. This name seemed so fitting because the name Amira is part of the phrase, "A Miracle." Truly, she and each and every pup that made it out of the Canidrome is a living miracle.

Char Osborn also went to Chicago and shared her experience:

You drive 10 hours, sleep, go to the airline cargo pick up area and wait... wait...

Then we're told they're here and five giant crates are brought out, but all you see are the dogs' heads with ears going every which way and then little barks that feel like they are calling your name.

They are beautiful and you can see they are scared. As soon as you start talking to them, they don't look so scared and you get tail wags and maybe a kiss or two. They go out for a potty break before the 10-hour drive back to K.C. I'm a little worried wondering how the trip will go.

We get to name the greys; we picked the names Finn and Blink.

Almost immediately they fall fast asleep for the first time on their nice soft dog beds, covered with quilts and getting sweet talk from Allison.

We stop for a break and as I am getting the greys out of the van, I see a lady walking over to me, it's 2 a.m., dark and I'm wondering. She asks if she can pet the greys and we start talking. She's a greyhound lover and has a rescued greyhound. We talk about Finn and Blink's journey, the greys still in China and she thanks me for rescuing them, then we say goodbye and she wishes us a safe trip.

I put the greys back in the van and as I'm walking back to get in, she walks over and hands me a \$20 bill, saying she hopes it will help. I'm blown away by her generosity and how greyhounds change the lives of the people who love them.



Shawn, Amy and Taylor Smith 'foster failed' with Gus (his foster home became his forever home) in December 2018. They're pictured here with Gus and his sister, Shay.

Allison Smith co-piloted with Char during that first Macau "mission."

I was lucky enough to be the passenger on the trip back from Chicago. I rode with Finn and Blink. I think the one thing that really stood out to me is how calm the dogs were. Both really took everything in stride. They were looking out the windows, but never seemed anxious about all of the change.

Both Finn and Blink took turns nudging my hands to get pets and always making sure we were all touching each other. It was like a new family pack.

These dogs had no reason to trust us or even want affection from us, but both were sweet and just seemed to enjoy the calm and human contact. This just goes to show how dogs are more accepting than humans are.

The Macau greyhound adoptive families echo that sentiment and are amazed at how well the dogs have adjusted to home life.

Daniel and Kacy Seitz and their children, Hudson, 8, and Damek, 6, welcomed Astrid into their home in January 2019.

Loud noises and sudden movements can cause startle seizures in Hudson, who has cerebral palsy, so a quiet, calm breed was a must.

"We couldn't have a dog that was a 'watch' dog who would screech every time the doorbell would ring," Kacy said. "We also didn't want a dog that would jump on or 'attack' her or any guests. Manners are important in our home, especially since we have a constant barrage of family, nurses, therapists and case workers in and out of the house."

The family first met Astrid (REGAP name Anzu, racing name Shak Shak) at a meet and greet. That day also became her "Gotcha Day" and was the day they brought her home.

Astrid, 9, immediately put her head in Hudson's lap — the wheelchair was no concern for her, Daniel said.

"We met her and it was instant," Kacy said. "I kind of feel like she picked us."

And in an ironic twist, Astrid's birthday is March 25, which is also National Cerebral Palsy Awareness Day.

Amy and Shawn Smith have fostered 11 greyhounds. They have foster failed before and they and their 9-year-old daughter, Taylor, fell for Gus (racing name O.K. King), 8, in December 2018.

"He's really sweet," Amy said. "I think we're finally seeing his real personality now that he feels safe and comfortable."

Now that he's learned he's allowed on the furniture, Gus tries to steal his humans' "spots" and enjoys being tucked in each night.

"He'll melt into you if you pull him onto your lap," Amy added. "Then he relaxes and goes to sleep."

Right: Astrid (REGAP name Anzu, racing name Shak Shak) traveled more than 12,000 miles to her forever home. Before leaving the Canidrome, she was photographed with Albano Martins, president of Anima Macau, and Wan Khoh, Canidrome's chief supervisor.

Below: Astrid was adopted by the Seitz family in January 2019. From left to right: Daniel, Astrid, Damek, Hudson and Kacy.



As with many retired racers, both Astrid and Gus had to learn how to climb stairs.

"He didn't do stairs for the longest time," Amy said. "It was finally popcorn that got him up."

Some dogs are fearful of storms and fireworks, but not Freya, 9, (racing name Win's God), adopted by Dorian Famuliner in February 2019.

She loves toys, especially collecting them into big piles and hiding a slipper or two.

"She likes my slippers," Dorian said. "I will come home and at least one slipper is in a different place than where I left it."

"I find it so amazing that she's so upbeat and chipper and so well mannered after what she's been through," he said. "It's like she knows she was rescued and she's grateful. Her soul is just beautiful."

— Lisa Horn

Two Macau greys, Calvin and Oakley, appear in February of this calendar. Calvin belongs to Tracey Allen-Ehrhart and Dave Ehrhart. Oakley's forever home is with Ted Zoellner.