

# *"Let sleeping dogs lie" ...*

By Ben Friedman



Let's explore the significance of this saying, which you have probably heard many times before, especially as it relates to Greyhounds. First, let's look at the saying from the perspective of all dogs. What do we humans do when we are startled awake? Jump? Yell? Swing our arms? We do all of these things naturally as a form of self defense for the simple reason that at that instant we don't know what is going on and our natural fight or flight instincts kick in. Other animals, including dogs, are no different. In the case of dogs, their natural defense instincts cause them to growl and bite. This is true of all dogs, regardless of breed. This is why the age old saying is an important rule to follow.

In the case of Greyhounds, this instinct is even stronger for several reasons. Put yourself in the place of a typical Greyhound as it lived most of its life prior to finding a Forever Family. Most of its life is spent living in a three foot by four foot crate, where its only belongings are the blankets or pad that it sleeps on and maybe a bone that it has to chew on. This is it. This is their life outside of a few quick turnouts a day and maybe a couple laps a week chasing the elusive rabbit. This crate, which is really just big enough to allow the dog to lie down in, is its house or "den." An animal's natural instinct is to protect its den. Just as you would defend against someone coming into your house and taking your bed, so would a Greyhound, or any other animal who was raised in a similar fashion.

Now, let's move that dog into a home. Your Greyhound probably has a favorite place to sleep, whether a dog bed, couch, or simply a cool spot on the floor. To them, that is their spot, or their "den," and their instinct is to defend the three foot by four foot area that they sleep in. They naturally don't want to loose it or have anyone else in that space and will defend it. Now coupled with their natural fight or flight instinct, you can see how if they were startled awake, they could possibly snap at or bite whatever startled them. This is not a general indication that the dog is aggressive or mean, it is simply an instinct.

Let's look at another reason why the old saying is very meaningful. Greyhounds, like many other breeds of dogs, have a second inner set of eyelids that are somewhat translucent. If a dog is asleep with only those eyelids closed, it can appear to be awake because it looks as though its eyes are open. Usually you can tell the difference between them being awake or asleep because you can clearly see their eyes moving and tracking you as you approach, but even that is not fool proof if you just look at them quickly or don't pay close attention. This is especially difficult for children to notice.

As a rule of thumb with any dog, especially with Greyhounds, you should not approach them while they are lying down, unless you clearly know that they are awake. Children especially need to understand this as they may innocently want to pet the dog or even play with it, and may end up startling it and inadvertently get bitten. If you are going to approach a dog that is lying down, you should always announce yourself as you approach. This can be done by either by calling the dog's name or by making other sounds. You want to make sure you see the dog raise its head before you get close. It is vital that you and anyone that will come in contact with the dog know this and follow it, even if the dog has lived in your house for an extended period of time. No one, especially the dog, wants to have someone injured when it could have easily been avoided.

I hope that this has been helpful. If writing this helps even one person keep from being bitten, or keeps one dog from being disciplined or worse, then it has been worth it. As a foster and Forever Family of Greyhounds, and as a parent of a young child, it is important to me and my family that everyone stays safe.