

A Dogged Fight

Christine Dorchak is on a mission to phase out greyhound racing across the United States

| FROM ALUMNI NOTES | BY CYNTHIA K. BUCCINI

When the Massachusetts polls closed on November 4, 2008, Christine Dorchak was among a crowd of 100 people anxiously awaiting the results at Jillian's in Kenmore Square. Their butterflies had nothing to do with the outcome of the presidential race. For more than a decade, Dorchak, cofounder and president of the national nonprofit [GREY2K USA](#), had been waging a fight to end dog racing in Massachusetts. She had crafted a ballot measure that would phase out the practice by 2010, and her group had campaigned hard all year. Now, all they could do was wait.

"We were on pins and needles," Dorchak recalls.

Just after 10 p.m., a local television news station announced the results: the measure had passed with 56 percent of the vote. As the crowd of supporters cheered, Dorchak ran to embrace a friend with such exuberance that the two fell to the floor. "I just couldn't believe that we had finally defeated the cruelty of dog racing in our state," she says.

The victory was the culmination of more than just a long political battle — it capped a personal struggle as well. In 1992, Dorchak (COM'90) was hit by an MBTA train as she crossed Comm. Ave. with her dog, Kelsey, one morning before work. She suffered severe head injuries and broke two bones in her back, and her spleen was crushed. Worse, her memory had been wiped clean. She didn't recognize her parents, her brother, or her boyfriend. She could no longer speak fluent Spanish and French, as she had after studying foreign languages at BU.

The one thing she could call to mind without hesitation: the rambunctious black

Russian terrier she had adopted several months before.

"When I came out of my first coma, having no idea who I was or what was going on, I was struggling to say something, and I said, 'How's Kelsey?' I've come to strongly believe she pulled me out of the direct path of the train."

Dorchak, an office manager at a downtown Boston law firm before the accident, spent two years recovering from her injuries and reflecting on her life. "I must be here for some reason, and it wasn't about me," she says. "Because my dog and I had this experience together, I felt I should help animals."

She volunteered for animal welfare organizations and in 1998 became director of research and public outreach at the New England Anti-Vivisection Society. About the same time, a friend told her about a group opposed to racing — they believed it was cruel to the dogs — who demonstrated every weekend outside Wonderland Greyhound Park in Revere, Massachusetts. Dorchak joined the pickets and supported the group's ballot initiative to halt dog racing. The measure was narrowly defeated in the 2000 election. The following year, Dorchak and two other members of the group formed GREY2K USA and got back to work. In 2006, they drafted a similar measure, but the state Supreme Court struck the question from the ballot, declaring it was overly broad, she says.

Not to be deterred, Dorchak and her organization took a new approach in the



Christine Dorchak (COM'90), cofounder and president of GREY2K USA, a national non-profit working to end greyhound racing. Photo by Vernon Doucette

2008 campaign, which she describes as smarter and better planned. The group obtained photos of the dogs' living conditions and records detailing the injuries reported by Wonderland and the state's other track, Raynham Park. Dorchak says the effort was endorsed by area animal shelters and hospitals, veterinarians, some business leaders, and two dozen lawmakers. "We wanted to show this was a nationally supported campaign in 2000. In 2008, we wanted to show that it was a locally supported campaign and that it was the people of Massachusetts who were saying no to greyhound racing."

The strategy paid off. Nearly 300 of the state's 351 cities and towns passed the measure, she says. "I was glad to finally have proof of my convictions, and that's what all those records were: proof that we

were fighting the right fight and that there was a problem that needed to be solved."

Dorchak, who earned a law degree in 2005 and is general counsel of GREY2K USA, says the group wants to phase out racing in every state. They have helped to halt the practice or close tracks in fourteen states since December 2004; now their sights are set on New Hampshire and Florida. "There are only ten states where racing is live and operational," she says. "I've got ten more campaigns to run."

She runs those campaigns out of a one-room office in Somerville, Massachusetts, which she shares with her husband, Carey Theil, GREY2K USA's executive director, and their adopted greyhound, Zoe. (Kelsey died in 2005 at fifteen.) "Ironically, I'm working to put myself out of business," Dorchak says. "That's my ultimate goal: to make GREY2K USA nonessential."