

## Chapter 1

### ARE GREAT DANES RIGHT FOR YOU?

There are many dog breeds from which to choose the one that is right for you. No breed is perfect for everyone and Great Danes are no exception. Just because you think that you want one is not reason enough to own one. In many cases, the beauty and size of this dog is its first attraction. I know it was for me. As a child I admired a photo of a Dane with its forelegs resting on its owners shoulders and its head towering over the owner's head in one of my dog books I thought that it would really be fun to own such a huge dog. My parents, however, had other ideas, and since they paid the bills, they made the rules. Years later, when I was married, I finally had my first Dane, a rescue dog named Huey. At that time I wasn't really "into" dogs and when we moved to California, Huey was placed with some good friends in Idaho.

1. A year later (1972) I purchased another Great Dane, Phoenix. He was a pick puppy from a bitch co-owned by Marge Siers of Bringold Great Danes. Herb and Marge Siers were veteran Great Dane breeders and Herb was a well-known handler. As I got to know Phoenix, I realized what a very special breed this was in terms of temperament. Calm, loving and silly, Phoenix made a Dane owner of me for life.

Sweet and wonderful as they are, Great Danes, as do all breeds, have their drawbacks. First on the list is the normally short life span. Six to seven years is probably on the high end of average, although there certainly are many exceptions. My Kiwi was fortunate enough to celebrate her 12th birthday on February 15, 1993. The following June, it was time to help her out of the pain of kidney failure. Her grandmother, Ch. Temple Dell's Sarah Davis also lived to age 12. Happily many of my Danes have reached ages 8, 9 and 10. Longevity is inherited, and it pays to look for this when purchasing a puppy.

Since Danes don't usually live as long as dogs of smaller breeds, there must be some causes for their early deaths. Unfortunately it seems as though Great Danes have more than their share of health problems. (Health and diseases will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 6.) Bloat, or gastric torsion, is probably one of the most common causes of death in Great Danes. Bloat does not usually occur in dogs under five years of age, but I co-bred a pup who had bloated and had surgery at the tender age of 4 1/2 months! Fortunately, this is the exception.

Hypertrophic Osteodystrophy (HOD) is a disease that affects puppies, usually from around four to ten months of age, during the fastest period of growth. The cause is as yet unknown, and many vets don't even recognize it when presented. With early detection, treatment is usually successful.

Wobblers syndrome, or spondylolithesis is a disease of the nervous system which causes the dog to have problems walking. There are several degrees of severity to this problem. Some dogs can live long lives with it; others must be euthanized at a young age.

Heart problems are quite common in the breed. Most heart problems do not affect the dog until age three or four years or older. Some can be managed, some cannot.

Cancer is one of the most common causes of death in dogs and Great Danes are possibly more prone to it than most; especially bone cancer (osteosarcoma). Fibrosarcoma and lymphosarcoma are also causes of death in Danes.

Many of the problems mentioned herein are related to the extremely rapid growth Danes experience. Stop and think that these dogs must achieve the equivalent growth in one year as a human adolescent experiences in eighteen! If anything small goes wrong with the metabolism or assimilation of nutrients during this very sensitive period, it's going to show up in the skeleton. Many of these problems can be managed or prevented with proper nutrition and all the elements for growth in the proper balance, effectively slowing the growth rate.

### **IF YOU CAN HANDLE THE HEALTH PROBLEMS, CAN YOU HANDLE THE DEMOLITION FACTOR?**

“But we were only gone for an *hour!*” you exclaim as you take in the pile of fluff that used to be your sofa, or the shavings all over the floor that were once a chair. A teething Dane puppy can do a lot of damage in a short time. You must be prepared to prevent such disasters and to laugh them off they *do* happen!

If you're the kind of person who must have an orderly house and a perfect yard, *don't buy a Dane!* Although most Danes are *not* destructive, when they *do* decide to taste the walls or munch on the stereo, those big mouths do BIG damage! If the digging power of a Great Dane could be channeled, perhaps they could be rented to landscaping companies to plant entire gardens!

So, up to now all you've heard is negativity and you're probably wondering why anyone would want a Great Dane if it can be so much trouble. There are very few books that will candidly detail the down side to the breed of interest. The fact is that ALL dog breeds have their own particular health/temperament problems. It's just difficult to find literature or people who will honestly show both sides of the coin.

Why do I own Danes? First and foremost, the joy and love they give more than makes up for the heartache of losing one. There is something wonderful about being able to barely get your arms around one of these big guys and hug them hard!

They're such GOOD FRIENDS! They're truly *people dogs*. They are house dogs who are happy to lie in front of the fire (or walk into it if they thought I needed them to do so) and be with those they love come what may. While that sounds like most breeds, there's more — lots more. Danes like to back up to people and rest their awesome rears in a selected lap. Danes can demonstrate their loving natures by just leaning against their human friends, rather than leaping and jumping and make a general nuisance of themselves. My Danes like to get a visitor between them and lean against the person until escape is impossible. Danes make great wall to wall carpets if there are enough of them. (With five, I've sometimes had trouble walking across the room). They are normally fearless guards. However, as soon as they know an unfamiliar person is allowed in, the leaning game starts. Danes are very clean in the house. Most puppies house break in record time,

some even before they've left for their new homes! Even with five adult Danes in my house, when they're all sleeping I hardly know they're around.

It's almost impossible to put into words what it's like to live with a Great Dane. These are just very special dogs and it would be necessary to experience Danes to understand. There's really no other way.

The beauty of these dogs is found in no other breed. When I watch my dogs gallop at full speed around my property up the back hill, ears alertly forward, heads held high, it simply takes my breath away. Then, in the next minute they're rolling on the grass inviting me to play with them or scratch their huge chests. Some of mine 'talk'. They "sing" or chirrup like birds usually while showing me their newest 'stuffie'. There truly is nothing like a Dane!