

## INTRODUCTION

The intent of this book is to show what it's *really* like to live with, breed and show Great Danes. Although many books about Great Danes exist, I've found only a couple that express the pros *and the cons* of owning this breed. Deciding to own, let alone breed and show, Great Danes is not a decision to be entered into uninformed. I hope that this book will fill this need.

As of this writing, I have loved, bred, shown and lived with Great Danes for over 34 years. To date close to 30 have finished their championships and others are on their way.

My first dane was purchased as a pet. At the time, my opinion of "dog shows" was low. Of course, I had never even attended a dog show, but I had already decided that they were stupid! (Famous last thoughts). Marge Siers, from whom I purchased Phoenix, my first Dane, had a friend who was looking for a roommate. Her name was Penny Twaits. Marge said that since we were both crazy, we'd probably get along great. She was right.

Penny and I moved in together. At the time I had Phoenix (the Dane) and a German Shepherd named Aaron. Penny brought with her Ch. Tallbrook Farm's Taly Overcup, a daughter of the legendary Ch. Sham's Sacradotes and Ch. Thendara Henriette Keppen. Penny's mother was Kathleen Twaits who, with partner Jackie White, made up the well known and successful kennel of Tallbrook Farms. It didn't take me long to change my opinion of dog shows! I couldn't wait to start showing Phoenix and coaxed Penny into traveling 2 hours to my first *match* and handling him for me.

My first show was the Great Dane Club of California's Specialty. I remember especially one dog who walked into the ring and gleamed like a jewel. He immediately caught my untrained eye and I fell in love. His name was Ch. Von Raseac's Great Caesar's Quote. I think that this was the moment that I knew I was hooked on showing and breeding great danes.

Phoenix was not a show dog, and I wanted to show, so the search began. My first attempt to find a show dog began with the classified section of Dog World Magazine. I found an ad for a litter sired by a dog who was then the top winner in the country. Naturally I assumed that the puppies would also be top winners, stupid me. I admit that I went about this in such a way that I managed to do absolutely *everything* wrong! The breeders talked me into leaving this pup with them until the GDCA Futurity and then flying back to attend this show and bring her home. She was 2 weeks old when I bought her sight unseen. When I finally *did* get a couple pictures of her, I showed them to everyone. They weren't terrible, but they weren't great either. I guess no one said so because I was already so committed to this purchase.

In any case, she was 5 months old when I first laid eyes on her. I knew then that she was awful, but immediately managed to sublimate the thought. The breeders brought her into the house and it was obvious she'd never even been indoors before! She was a nervous wreck. I wanted her to sleep in my

room with me, but she was so unhappy, that I finally took her back outdoors to her pen and dog house so I could get some sleep. Naturally she did nothing at the Futurity.

When I arrived home with her and took her to her first match *everyone* came over to see the daughter of the famous Champion Whatshisface. I kind of wondered why no one said anything about her. (To the uninitiated, this is the kindest way of expressing one's opinion of a really ugly dog). Today I look back at her pictures and the only redeeming quality I can find is that she had a very pretty head, if you could get past the headlight eyes! Her temperament was nothing to brag about, either. She'd lie under my chair at the matches and try to eat anything that walked by.

Even so, I loved her and was devastated when my vet diagnosed a bad limp as possible bone cancer. I knew that if I were the breeder, I'd want to know about it, so I called them and told them what we feared. The husband of this wonderful twosome (who, by the way, was a veterinarian) had a lovely (intended sarcastically!) attitude. "Oh well," he said, "you can always cut her leg off and breed her." As it turned out, it wasn't cancer. One night the wind blew our front door open and the bitch got out. She was found dead in the street the next morning, having been hit by a car. Probably a blessing as I was perhaps naive enough to have bred her. But my heart was broken, nonetheless.

My real start in breeding/showing was a bitch purchased from Barbara Hutton of Homewood Danes sired by Ch. Grenadilla's Bit'O Tallbrook out of Polldane's Fame of Bogart. Her name was Homewood Country Sunshine. Although a couple of Sunnie's littermates finished their championships, Sunnie did not. She was a big boned bitch with a descent head, long lovely neck, excellent front, shoulder and topline. She had a good temperament and a good pedigree. Barbara and I decided to breed her.

The first breeding and resultant whelping, was perhaps the most stressful thing I'd ever gone through. The morning of the whelping, I got out of bed and immediately stepped barefoot on something which resembled the black skull of a crow with some black, stringy tissue attached to it. We later decided that these strange objects must be the remains of partially reabsorbed puppies. When the fully formed puppies finally began to appear, most were dead. Three survived, 2 dogs and a bitch. I named the bitch Sunnyside Heather. She was lovely and showed great promise but she was not destined for the show ring. She was diagnosed with Wobblers Syndrome at the age of 8 months. Although it broke my heart, I placed her in a loving home where she lived a long and happy life.

We repeated the breeding (prior to Heathers diagnosis of wobblers) and from that came Ch. Sunnyside Daffodil, my first champion. I also kept (having had her returned from a home that couldn't keep her) Daffi's sister Homewood Amber. Amber won a few points, including a major, but she just hated the ring, and so was retired. She and Daffi were both lovely sound girls with excellent temperaments, who passed on their qualities to their kids. Amber lived to 10 and Daffodil to 9.

In 1997 I sold one of my puppies to Joe and Pat McGoldrick of Phoenix, AZ. Ch. Sunnyside Ginger Gold completed her championship in record time and Pat, Joe and I became fast friends. Soon thereafter we decided that it would be fun to be partners in this crazy hobby. Sunnyside and Goldstrike

were merged to become SunStrike Great Danes. It's been an extremely successful partnership and friendship.

I have been a Dane judge (AKC) since 1995. It is my hope that by judging this wonderful breed, I can contribute more than I ever could within our limited breeding program. I am always interested in helping newcomers to the breed with any questions or problems they may have. Besides authoring this book, I would be happy to receive email at [jill@sunstrike-great-danes.com](mailto:jill@sunstrike-great-danes.com). The SunStrike homepage is <http://www.sunstrike-great-danes.com>.