

## Chapter 5

### LIVING WITH A GREAT DANE

Sharing one's life with a Great Dane is an experience filled with fun, love, frustration and, at the end of their lives, heartbreak. I'm often asked by 'non-Dane' owners how I can stand to lose them so soon. (Although most of mine live past 9, the average for the breed is more like 7). I answer that the pleasure they give while I have them make them well worth the pain of the loss. I simply cannot imagine living with any other breed and most Dane owners agree.

But on to the fun stuff! You're about to bring home your new Great Dane puppy and you need to make some preparations ahead of time. If the breeder hasn't already suggested this, you *definitely* need a crate. Crates are *not* cruel unless you overuse them! A crate, to a dog, is his den. His very own home where he can sleep, get away from the pesky kids, and be at peace as needed. A crate to *you* is a safe guard for both your dog and your house and a wonderful method to housebreak your puppy.

#### **Crates, which type and what size?**

It's a good idea to buy a crate large enough to house your Dane when he's full grown. This means a size of *at least* 28 inches wide, 48 inches long and 36 inches high. I've seen some that are large enough for small ponies! If you plan to have one crate double as a car crate, be sure that you purchase a size that will fit in your vehicle while still being large enough for your dog. Regardless of the size you end up with, you need to section it off while the puppy is small so that he has only enough room to stand and turn around. (Some crates have dividers that make this simple). Since Danes do not like to soil their beds, the puppy will whine to let you know he has to go out and relieve himself. If the crate is too big, he'll simply move to the area away from his bed and relieve himself there.

There are three basic types of crate. The shipping crate has solid sides that protect the dog from getting part of his body injured when being transported. Shipping crates come in both fiberglass and metal. The metal are usually very expensive but durable and they usually fold up. The fiberglass is strong, but less durable than the metal. It only breaks down by half its size. Only if you intend to ship your dog a lot by air, should you consider one of the enclosed type crates. Because they are enclosed, they don't allow air to circulate as well as the wire and fabric crates.

Wire crates will allow the surrounding air temperature to get to the dog. If it becomes necessary to provide shade or more warmth, you can either make or purchase a crate cover. The wire crate also allows you to have full view of the dog. This is especially good if you're traveling in the car and you want to be able to visually check your dog from time to time.

The crate I use and prefer are the fabric crates. They weigh next to nothing and fold compactly into a carrying case when you need to travel with them. The sides *are* fabric, so a determined dog could chew through them. I use them for puppies when I'm on the road in a motel or motor home. I've never had a dog escape from them.

### **Proper use of crates**

Crates are convenient for the human member of the family. For this reason, it can be tempting to overuse them. Please, for the sake of your dog, *don't!* He can spend the night in it and spend a small amount of time in it when you have to leave the house for a couple hours during the day or when you cannot be right there to keep an eye on him. But it's much better if you can also provide him with a safe, outdoor area where he can play in fresh air and relieve himself when necessary if you must leave him for several hours during the day. Of course, you'll also provide him with a warm (or cool) indoor area. Either a dog house with a soft bed or access into a room of the house or garage through a doggy door. Great Danes are *NOT* dogs that can be left outdoors in extreme weather, hot or cold.

A crate is a wonderful tool for housebreaking. Teach your puppy that this is his bed where he spends the night. Have him close by your bed so you'll hear him when he needs to go out. Most puppies from 9 weeks and onward can make it through the night. But give him the benefit of the doubt if he acts like he wants out during the night. When he cries or whines let him out, take him outdoors to where you want him to relieve himself and then *STAY WITH HIM* until he's done his duty. As soon as he's gone, *PRAISE HIM!!!!* He needs to know that this is why he came outdoors and that you are very happy with him. Soon he'll learn what is wanted, relieve himself and be ready to go back to bed.

It's much easier to prevent the puppy having accidents indoors right from the start. A crate greatly facilitates this. Remember that a puppy will have to relieve itself upon waking, after play and after eating. It's up to *you* to be watchful and anticipate when he needs to go out. I guarantee that if you are consistent, you'll have a housebroken puppy within a week! This doesn't mean you can leave him loose in the house unattended for hours on end, but if you're around for him to tell you, he'll let you know when he wants out. If, by 4 or 5 months your puppy still needs to relieve himself in the middle of the night, withhold water 2-3 hours prior to bedtime.

### **Early Training and Socialization**

Set house rules for the puppy right from the beginning. If he's to stay off furniture, don't go holding him in your lap while you're sitting on the sofa watching TV. If he's to stay out of certain rooms, he stays out from the beginning. If you don't want him begging for food while you are eating, enforce this from day one. If you think that once won't hurt, you're wrong! It's much easier to prevent the unwanted behavior, than to correct it once it's become a habit.

Enroll your Dane puppy in a puppy kindergarten class once he's had at least 2 permanent DHLPP and parvo virus vaccines. He'll probably be around 4 months old. This will help him to socialize with other dogs and other people. Take him in the car. Take him to shopping malls and walk him around. Encourage strangers to approach and pet him. If you plan to show him in conformation, enroll him in conformation handling classes. Take him to a couple puppy matches. Give him as broad an experience as you can. Dogs who spend their whole lives in a house and backyard, are terrified if they have to leave their property. This is unfair to both you and your dog.

If your puppy shows unreasonable fear of something or someone, *DON'T* make the mistake of 'comforting' him. If you pet and hug him in an effort to reassure him, you're really teaching him to react in a fearful manner to this situation. For instance, say you're walking along the sidewalk and a stranger approaches from the opposite direction. Your puppy begins to hang back and try to get away from this person. The correct response on your part is to give a mild correction and tell the puppy 'no'. Enlist the assistance of the stranger and hand them a doggie treat to offer the pup. At the first indication that the puppy is going to approach the stranger, *praise him!* If his initial shyness is due to inexperience and not a shy temperament, he'll soon learn that friendly strangers are positive things! It would be a good idea to have a friend who is unknown to the puppy to act as the friendly stranger and keep repeating the experience until the puppy is happily approaching the stranger expecting to be petted.

After your puppy has completed puppy kindergarten, you might want to enroll him in an obedience class. If you do, and you're also intending to show in conformation, I would recommend that you do not teach the automatic sit. Although many obedience instructors will tell you that the dog knows the difference, it has been my experience that this is a confusing subject for the dog. If you want to compete in both conformation and obedience I suggest you complete one course of training and then the other. It's also easier on both of you if you concentrate on obtaining your title in either one or the other first. Although the obedience judges are usually willing to work with you if you have a conflicting conformation class, it's a lot of running back and forth for you and your dog. Dog shows are very stressful for dogs, even if they love them. Trying to accomplish both at once is asking a lot of your dog.

Great Danes are, for the most part, naturally well mannered. Perhaps this is one reason that so many Dane owners tend to be very lax in the discipline department. In many cases they get away with it. But if a dog this size is undisciplined and unruly, he's a time bomb awaiting detonation! We are hearing of Danes biting more often these days. Although poor temperament can certainly be inherited, I can't help wondering how many of these incidents could have been prevented if the dog accepted all humans as his superiors.

## Early Obedience Training

Although I do not consider myself an expert on obedience training, I'll try and give a few guidelines here for your new puppy. The rest you can learn from the many excellent books on the subject. (Also see the chapter on Obedience written by Lyn Richards).

Most Danes learn very easily. Occasionally you'll hear someone make a comment that they're dumb, perhaps because they tend to do many of the obedience exercises at a more leisurely pace than other breeds. Take my word for it, Great Danes are *not* dumb! My Daffodil was so smart that I had to put bungee cords on the refrigerator and baby locks on the trash cupboard and the others that contained food! Daffi could open *anything*, including doors and gates as could her daughter, Kiwi.

Being rather lazy when it comes to formal obedience training, much of what my dogs learn occurs during everyday living. For instance if I don't want them to rush out a door, I'll give them the signal for 'stay' (hand open, palm toward their face), as I go through the door. I praise them if they've shown any inclination to stay behind. Of course the first time I do this when they're babies, they have no idea what I want. I let them know by gently bumping their nose with the open palm, while saying 'stay', or 'wait' or whatever command you wish. It doesn't take long before I can go through the door without anything more than the hand signal. (I must admit, though, that if it's the door to the garage, and they think they're going in the car, all is lost! Then they get some pretty *firm* nose bumps!)

Down, sit and stay can all be taught during the course of a daily routine. Down works well while you're watching TV. You might want to initially use a food lure to get the puppy into the different positions. Then gradually require him to remain in the sit or the down longer and longer until you release him. Don't start by asking for a full minute 'down' the first time. If you ask your puppy to obey the house rules as they come up, his training will seem painless to you both.

I always try to at least start some elementary lead training with my puppies prior to them going to their new homes. This helps eliminate some of the stress that they encounter upon changing families. I usually start by fitting the entire litter with buckle collars to which I'll attach a foot long lead. The puppies grab each others leads and collars and the feeling of pressure around their necks becomes part of a game. For the next step I clip a 6 foot leather lead onto the collar and simply follow the puppy around where ever he leads. I'll carry a food treat and get down on the ground and call the puppy to me. I keep a mild tension on the lead, but not enough to scare him. When he comes to me, he gets the treat and lots of praise. Soon I can walk with the puppy, call him to me, and as he moves to follow, I put a little more tension on the lead. It doesn't take long before the puppy realizes that a small tug leads to a treat if he comes in my direction. From this we graduate to taking short walks away from the house. Again, I usually let him lead while I

follow. There are so many interesting new sights and smells to investigate that the pup usually forgets about being on a lead. Little by little the puppy will learn to walk along with you.

If you have a puppy you intend to show, this is the time to begin training for the conformation ring. Ideally you want a dog who will *love* the show ring. The best way to accomplish this is to train the puppy so he thinks that dog shows and conformation are the best things in the world, after YOU of course! I start teaching baby puppies to bait (stand and look at a treat, preferably with ears up) when very young. I get a small treat and let them sniff it. Of course they want it! The second, the *very second*, the puppy is standing still with all 4 feet on the ground (it doesn't matter where the feet are) give him the treat. Keep this up and little by little the puppy will associate the fact that he's standing still and looking at the treat with actually *getting* the treat. Once the puppy has the idea, you can start placing his feet where you want them. Front feet should be even and facing straight ahead with the elbow directly underneath the withers. The hind feet should be placed parallel also, with the hocks perpendicular to the ground.

You must also get the puppy used to having the collar placed high up under his neck without fighting it. He must allow his mouth to be opened by a stranger and his teeth examined. He mustn't sit or cower when his testicles are manually examined by a judge. By frequently examining all these areas and working him with the collar high on the neck, the puppy will not resent this when he goes to his first show. Also get him used to you lifting and placing his legs where you want them.

Take your puppy out to shopping centers and areas of people activity where he can meet strangers and be exposed to new sights and sounds. Take him in the car, up and down stairs, in elevators and to the pet store. Enter him in local matches. (More on conformation show training in chapter 9).

Living with a Great Dane on a day to day basis takes a little more forethought than a smaller breed. Danes get *very BIG!* This means that they can reach *very HIGH!* This means that things such as your dinner are not safe if left unattended on the dinner table or counter top. I don't care how much training your Dane has had, I've never heard of one yet that was reliable around available food. Better yet if it's his owners food! In this house, everything edible goes on in or on top of the refrigerator, or in the drawers or cupboards. I once had a Dane steal an entire ham that was thawing in the sink and eat it down to the bone before he was discovered. One evening Kiwi nabbed a huge and *very hot* stuffed potato off the countertop (tinfoil and all) when I just turned around for a second! I was standing *right there!* Daffodil used to open the refrigerator, food cupboards and the trash and would help herself. The fridge sported a bungee cord and the cupboards were all fitted with baby locks! Years ago Ch. Tallbrook's Bit'O Honey ate an entire 5 pound bag of sugar! It's a wonder it didn't kill her! Years later her great-great-great-great-great grand daughter, Poppy did the same to a 20 pound bag of sugar. Didn't kill her either, but she didn't get it all!

The size of the adult Great Dane also places his tail at a height where it can become dangerous! The least amount of damage is caused when the tail is wagging hard and sweeps everything off the coffee table. Watch out for toddlers around wagging Danes as that tail is hard and can be like a whip. It isn't unusual for a child to get swiped across the face with the dogs tail. And, gentlemen, protect your privates! Wagging tails are also placed just right to hit you in the family jewels!

### **Great Dane Beds**

Because of their large size and weight, Danes need soft bedding to avoid developing calluses on their thighs and elbows. It's best to use cloth on the beds that is non-abrasive, don't use canvas. A soft blanket or phony sheepskin is the best choice. You can buy beds made from orthopedic 3" foam. These are covered with the sheepskin on one side and cloth on the other. The cover unzips for washing. Of course, you may decide to allow your Dane access to your furniture, in which case, forget the bed!

Some owners allow their Danes to sleep in their beds with them. This is fine if you only have one or two Danes. But if you have 5 as I did at one time and allowed them to sleep in my king sized bed, it's too much! You cannot have 5 Danes in your bed and have pretty sheets. You also have no room for you! Several times I was kicked from my bed onto the floor, to say nothing of being stepped on and squished.

If you have a Dane that has an aggressive tendency or doesn't accept you as pack leader, *do not* allow this dog on furniture of any kind. This makes him your equal and you do not want to encourage this. He is *not* your equal, *you* are *his* leader!

If you use a crate, be sure that the bedding is very soft and comfortable. A base of 4" foam would be best, with a sheepskin cover. Beds of this type are great around the house. Be sure it's big enough for the puppy as he grows to adulthood. At least 28" x 36" and bigger if possible.

Living with Great Danes in the house is basically common sense combined with enough knowledge to properly train and control your dog. A dog that knows it's place and what is expected of it is a happy dog. This will, in turn, make you a happy Dane owner.