



Shannon with Savannah
1999

My First

*A 14-year-old Handler's Experience Finishing her Bred By Exhibitor Dane
By: Shannon Soafer*

It all began six years ago. Our family decided to buy a puppy as a family pet, not just any puppy, but a Great Dane puppy. We searched breeders for a fawn bitch, but brindle seemed to be abound. After one year of searching, a fawn bitch arrived that we liked. Her name is Legacy's Forces of Nature, a.k.a. "Savannah." The breeder, our now good friend, Patricia Thurow, told us she was a beautiful bitch and that we should consider showing her in local shows. This seemed reasonable. We never predicted what would happen next.

While attending dog shows with Savannah I discovered Junior Showmanship. I couldn't wait to turn ten (the starting age at the time to show in Junior Showmanship). It was in the Junior ring that I first showed Savannah. I dressed as nicely as possible for a young 10-year-old girl. All was well until we were going around the ring and Savannah decided to play with the Cannan dog in front of us. Being inexperienced, I had the lead wrapped around my hand and as my dog lunged forward, I was dragged across the ring. That night Savannah slept under the coffee table and would not come out. I slept under there with her. I wanted to keep going on showing dogs. I enjoyed it and I desperately wanted to prove to everyone that I would not be a quitter. I began to work hard with her so the same disaster would not reoccur. I started going to handling classes once a week. These classes helped me to learn how to properly handle a dog in the show ring. As a matter of fact, I still take the weekly class to this today. I don't think that I have quite learned *everything* yet.

As time went on, so did my confidence. I began showing Savannah in the breed ring as well. Savannah received all of her points under me and we went on to accomplish many things together. We attended the Westminster KC Show, the Eukanuba National Championship Shows, and the GDCA Nationals in 2003, 2004, and 2005. Each new show was a hurdle that we jumped together in harmony. During those years I became ranked the No. 2 Great Dane Junior Handler in the country. What an honor!

The story gets better, and continues when my parents and I decided to breed Savannah. Since she was a nice bitch, we wanted to breed her to an extraordinary dog. Once again, we searched breeders, this time for a magnificent stud. We wanted to create the best match that would result in a balanced litter. Savannah has amazing strengths, such as her head and top line, but we needed a male that could help make some improvements as well. We certainly had our work cut out for us, but we found our Stud at Fireside Danes. Champion Fireside's I've Got To Be Me, or "Casey" was our boy. He had the body and substance we liked, while continuing to complement Savannah's features. After a long trip from Georgia to Michigan, the next thing we knew we were preparing for our new arrivals.

Champion

They came, all nine of them. Awaking at 5 am each morning, and everyday after school, I would help my parents care for the puppies. The aroma of dirty newspapers and the sound of squealing puppies filled our basement for three months. I kept my eye out for the puppy I was to claim as my own. Looking at the new generation of Great Danes, I found my boy, Legacy's Gladiator, or "Lance."

Selling the litter mates was hard, I was sad, yet excited because this would not be the end. Lance began to follow me around. I began training him as I once did his mother, who now enjoys lounging in the sun and getting "old." Lance waits at the door for me at precisely 4 p.m. every day awaiting for me to come home from school. He sleeps on my bed and gives me about one inch of room. He even began to answer to his new nickname, "Mr. Tinkles." I know, it's silly, but that's what he does...he is a boy you know.

Our bond has grown stronger and we became so close that I could sense when he is about to move his foot in the ring, and which one. Every day I work with him, brush his coat until it shines, and run a mile to build his muscle tone. I use Lance in the Junior ring, but the finishing him out of BBE in conformation was my first goal.

My quest to finish Lance began slowly. We started showing him the weekend after he turned six months old. We put him in the Bred-By-Exhibitor class at that young age because we wanted him to receive all of his points from BBE. The competition was stiff. It wasn't until he began to fill-out that he started winning. Then it all happened seemingly at once. He started winning points and BOB's. He also placed three times in the Working Group. We received most of his single points in a three month span, so I began only entering him in shows with a major entry. The very first major show weekend came and we received back to back four point majors. I could not believe it, my puppy was a champion out of the Bred By Exhibitor class! Champion Legacy's Gladiator!

I am told that I am the youngest handler at 14 to finish a Great Dane out of Bred By Exhibitor. That's certainly exciting to know, but the real thrill is all of the love, care and devotion I give to my Great Danes...and better yet, what I get back from them.

My adventure with Lance is a continuing saga. I want to special him in breed and continue to enjoy competition in Junior Showmanship. My new goal: Do our best to make the Top 20! Through our teamwork, knowledge and drive to excel, we look forward to a bright future together. In time, I plan to have more puppies, this time from Lance's breeding. The fun never ends...this is such a great sport!



Shannon with Savannah & her son, Lance
2004



Shannon with Lance, at the beach,
2005



*Shannon with Lance, finishing in 2006
February 2006*



*Shannon & Lance, Ch. Legacy's Gladiator
March 11, 2006*