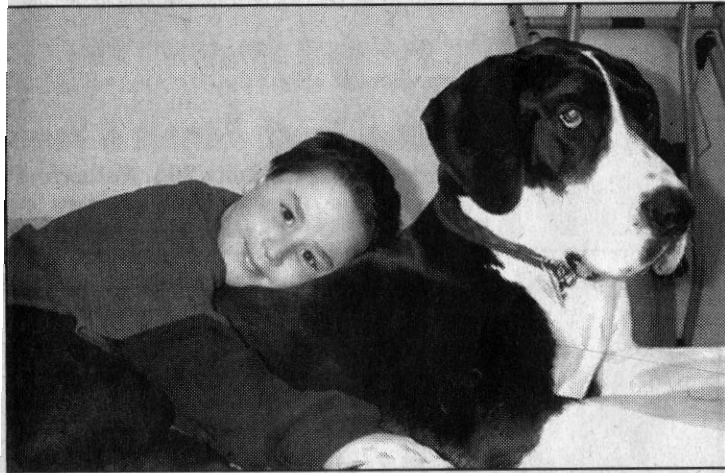


Great Danes continue to prove their namesakes



Photo, Judi Roach

What's not to love? Troy, nephew of Judi Roach, shows his affection for her Great Dane, Scarlett.

By Jennifer Merritt
REPORTER

RUTHERFORD — Given the name, it should come as no surprise that Scarlett is a princess. For one, she knows how to get what she wants. She isn't particularly outdoorsy (she doesn't care for rain), and she isn't above playing hard to get with Max, her next-door neighbor. And just like Vivian Leigh's portrayal of Scarlett O'Hara in "Gone With the Wind," one look into her eyes tells you she's trying to figure you out. But she warms up immediately — and then comes the drool cloth.

That's because Scarlett is a 130-pound Great Dane, who, according to her owner Judi

Roach, always puts a smile on her face.

Roach, a Rutherford resident and graphic designer in Nutley, is also a donation coordinator with Mid-Atlantic Great Dane Rescue League (MAGDRL), a volunteer organization serving NJ, NY, PA, VA, WV, MD, DE, and NC that helps find homes for abandoned or homeless Great Danes. Roach said there are currently 80 Great Danes awaiting adoption in NJ alone.

Great Danes tend to be large in size, ranging anywhere from 90 to over 200 lbs. The breed is believed to have started in either Germany or England for hunting purposes. There are several different types for this breed of dog: Fawn, Harlequin, Black,

Brindle, Blue, and Mantle.

"Generally, they're incredible dogs," Roach said. "There's not a morning I wake up and I'm not smiling because of Scarlett, and that's what keeps me volunteering. They just have great personalities. They're outgoing dogs - they want to be with people. I think that's what I love so much about the Great Danes."

Roach has lived most of her life with a Great Dane by her side. It began with Velvet, whom her parents adopted before she was born, and stayed with Roach for the first 10 years of her life.

"I would beg my parents when I was younger to get another Great Dane, because my first experience with Great Danes was so great," said the 32-year-old. "I was yearning for another one."

The opportunity for another Dane didn't come under the best of circumstances. Her family adopted Blue, a female, as a walking companion for her father after he had brain surgery.

After her father passed, Roach and her husband Garry, a chef in Mahwah, took in Blue as well as another Dane, Brutus, a male in need of a home. The Roaches lost both dogs last year: Blue to cancer, and Brutus to a degenerative spinal condition.

"We vowed off dogs for a while, because Brutus' illness was really stressful on us,"

Roach says. "For three years he was ill and he just gradually declined in health."

But eight months ago, Roach's mother found Scarlett through MAGDRL, and thought she would be the perfect addition to the family. Her mother passed this January, and Roach says it's almost as if her mother knew she would need another being to help fill the void.

As any animal lover will attest, every animal has its own personality. Roach says Great Danes tend to be extremely loving and "silly" dogs who love to lounge around. Because of this, and despite their large size, Great Danes don't need a lot of space, and do well in apartments and condos. Nor do they eat a lot. Roach gives Scarlett four cups of Kibble and a few ounces of wet food a day. They can also at times be protective.

"I was a baby when my parents had [Velvet], and she would stand between a visitor and the play pen," Roach recalls. "If they tried to come near me, she would just lean against them. When you form that bond, they love you."

However, Roach says that Great Danes bred in the U.S. are generally thinner and longer, which can produce spinal, arthritis, hip and joint problems.

"When you have such a big gap between the legs, it tends to weigh on the spine," she

noted.

A Dane's size doesn't just cause physical problems — Roach said their awkwardness in the home is the main reason most people turn Great Danes into MAGDRL.

"A lot of people see them in a pet store, and they're adorable — they fit in the cage, and they're just so cute," says the 10-year volunteer veteran. "But they don't realize that you can't have a coffee table; they will knock the kids over once in a while."

MAGDRL tries its best to find out everything about a Dane before it comes into the rescue. Before Roach adopted Scarlett, she knew she had been in a foster home and that that she was good with kids, other dogs, cats, and strangers.

"It was piece of mind knowing that when I adopted her," she said.

The adoption process is just as rigorous. Potential homes must have carpeted steps, a fenced in yard, and other requirements. MAGDRL volunteers want to ensure a good home and conduct house visits to make sure all requirements are met.

For those who are unable to adopt, there are other ways to help. MAGDRL is completely staffed by volunteers, and their duties and level of involvement vary from transporting a dog to simply sending out an e-

mail.

Donation is also an option, as it is the organization's sole source for food, medical care, and shelter for the Danes.

"We just about break even at the end of every year. It's very tough," Roach said.

People can also serve as foster homes for Great Danes, a process similar to fostering a child.

"We have many dedicated foster homes, but we do need more," Roach said.

According to Roach, one major plus to adopting or fostering a Great Dane is that there will never be a shortage of love around the house.

"There's just something about coming home to someone who's always happy to see you," she said. "I think what stops people [from adopting] is their work schedule. My job is very high pressure, and it's really nice to be able to come home to Scarlett - she just makes us laugh."

To find out more about the NJ chapter of MAGDRL, how to help, or see dogs available for adoption, surf www.magdrl-nj.com or call 973-334-1628.

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