

Great Dane breeders, David and Betty, are Animal Angels pet sitters based in Wrexham.

David and Betty have kindly shared their experiences of caring for and breeding Great Danes, here is their story...

We were involved with animals long before we knew of the existence of pet sitting organisations and have kept, at various times, some animals as pets, and others in a commercial setting. Ponies, dogs, rabbits and cats have been pets, while the others, although kept in a business manner, were also treated more like pets and companions; dogs, horses, goats, chickens. The sadness of life is that love usually begets sorrow. Committing one's heart to someone or something, guarantees that at some future point your heart and mind will be traumatised at the very least.

Every animal that has entered our lives or we have been pet sitters for, has eventually and inevitably, under various circumstances, been taken from us. Some have died and others have been reluctantly passed to new owners. But, in the regrettably short time we have shared our lives with them, they have brought happiness and memorable experiences that will endure for the rest of our lives.

Our last pet was Cadwaladr, (named after an ancient Welsh prince), a Great Dane who lived for a meagre six years (nature's curse upon Great Danes), but in that brief period, he filled our lives and was a most loyal companion. He loved us both, but his best friend was Betty. They were inseparable, and when he unexpectedly collapsed and died at her side in the garden almost ten years ago, she has grieved for him up to this day. We have resisted until now to own another dog because, in our minds, Cadwaladr still lives, and we don't want to replace him. Our memories of him are bittersweet; sad in his absence, but we often smile when we recall his personality and his exploits, he was a handsome character and he knew it!

Breeding Great Danes

We had previously owned Great Danes, had even bred two litters out of Cleopatra, an adorable fawn bitch. At the time we were renovating a remote old smallholding and farm house in Italy where the dogs had free space to range in safety. Her pups were superb and we had no difficulty in finding owners for them. If you have never been involved in raising a litter of Great Dane pups, we can whole-heartedly recommend it as an experience not to be missed in this lifetime. From helpless little fist sized bundles to lolloping leggy adolescents, you can virtually almost see them growing. Insatiable curiosity and appetites, an endless urge to play would quickly tire their mother and even us. Growing so quickly, the time came around far too soon when they had to leave us. "Cleo's" first litter was of eleven pups, but the last one out died later,

despite our attempts to keep her alive. Cleopatra instinctively knew the pup was doomed, because she refused to take an interest in it, allowing it lie unattended at the side of the whelping box. Without our intervention, the pup would have passed away much sooner and suffered less through our mis-guided caring. Nature usually knows best.

One pup from that first litter stayed with us, she was a skinny one and held little appeal for prospective owners and was never chosen for a new home. Naturally Betty and I were drawn very close to her, a brindle bitch that we named Delilah. She never did put much meat on her bones, but she was never short on energy. A fussy eater, Betty, worried, used to feed her by hand trying to tempt her with tasty delicacies that other dogs would demolish in seconds. Notwithstanding her small food intake, she was an enthusiastic animal, forever a young pup at heart, with strength to spare for play, even as a mature dog, ceaselessly plaguing her mother Cleo and, became Betty's permanent shadow.

Some years earlier, while I was contracting in the Middle East, Betty would sometimes join me on a visitor's visa for a period of time when I was able to arrange accommodation for us both in other engineers' married accommodation, when they themselves were away on leave. Frequently, while we were house sitting the couple's place, the pets they kept also became our responsibility, in other words we were pet sitters for the period of our residence there. Dogs, cats, canaries and parakeets; all of which brought their own problems. Animals that wouldn't eat, upset by their owner's absence, other's that were too shy to approach and some that were sick and needed that special attention (someone else's animal that dies in your care is something that would weigh heavily on one's conscience). A parakeet is one that we particularly remember. He or she, we're not quite sure which, was besotted with me and at every opportunity would sit on my head or shoulder and amorously nuzzle my hair or my ear. Betty, on the other hand however, it would attack ferociously whenever she went close. Another was an older dog that was lethargic and apparently very sick. He wouldn't eat or drink and I had to hydrate him with a syringe and even force food into his mouth which he often spat out anyway. I was very worried by the time his owners were due to return from leave, because he seemed very low. I could hardly believe his miraculous recovery when he saw his mistress walk through the door.

Pet Sitting for Animal Angels

Since being engaged by Animal Angels as pet sitters, we have been allocated several pet sitting assignments, including a regular customer who has a veritable menagerie of animals. All of which are pets, the exception was a badger who visited their garage every night to sleep. He probably sought shelter there at some stage, through illness or injury, but the customer provided bedding and food, and so he became a regular lodger who disappeared at sunrise. It had no fear and just waddled in and out of the back yard at dusk and dawn, passing by close enough to touch. The owner's dog, one of their sheep and a chicken, required daily medication; not a

problem until we had to administer a pill to a chicken that didn't want to swallow it. We contrived to overcome this difficulty by crushing the pill, dissolving it in water and then, by means of a syringe, we got the medication down her throat. Easy you might say, but, holding a flapping chicken under one arm, trying to prize open and hold her beak while squirting the medicine into her mouth without choking her, requires some dexterity, not to mention the desirability of a third arm.

With the number of animals we have kept and been pet sitting for over the years it is virtually impossible to remember anything that does not carry a pleasant memory, (except that of parting with them).

David and Betty (Wrexham)

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