

Meet . . .

Owner Handler
Shirley Struble
Shakti Danes

Number of years showing dogs. 16 in Great Danes, a few years in Old English Sheepdogs many years ago.

Your kennel name and how you got it. Shakti Danes. Shakti is the spirit that completes and makes you whole. The Yin to the Yang.

Where you live. Brighton, Michigan.

Where do you travel to show? Midwest; Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, and Canada.

How many shows do you attend in a year? Approximately 25-30.

Have you ever hired and/or used professional handlers and for what purpose? Yes, when I had hand surgery and sometimes when I feel the need. Less than 10 times total in 16 years.

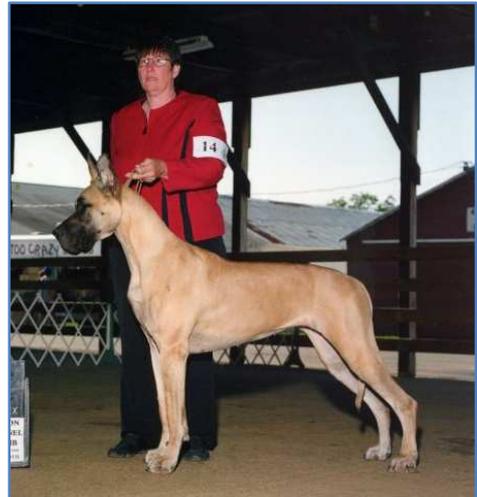
What made you decide to owner-handle your Great Danes? We are a team and we work together as one team. I was a bit set back when I took my first puppy to a show in 1998 and the handler that the breeder hired grabbed the dog and dragged her off. It ruined it for both of us for quite a while and my daughter never came back to a show. She is now 32 and still dislikes them.

What are the greatest advantages of owner-handling your dogs? I am not sure there are any other than me being a part of the process. My whole reason for showing is to do something fun with my dogs and to train and compete with them. So it is the only way I would do it. Between my handling and my dogs being natural eared I don't think there are any advantages if you are talking about winning.

What are the biggest challenges of owner-handling your dogs? Doing the research on judges and shows. Learning which judges like which types. Paying attention to how the dog is showing. It is much harder to know what is going on when you are in the ring. It is easier to see the dog from a chair, ringside.

What do owner-handlers need to consider if they want to be competitive in the ring? What judges prefer both in types of dog and in handlers. We have many types and styles of Danes and judges have their idea of ideal as we all do. I take some dogs to some judges and other dogs to other judges depending on head and substance. The fact is you are going to lose a lot on the way to learning how to do this. It is a very highly skilled group that you are competing against and many times I have ruined my dog's chances by not paying attention. If your main goal is to win, then you should hire a professional handler. I want to compete with my dogs more than I want to win.

Do you feel your dog has ever been over-looked in the ring by the judge because you are an owner-handler and if yes please describe. I have been skipped over many times. I have no way of knowing why. I also show natural eared dogs so it is a double whammy. I do know that when I walk in the ring and the judge never ever



looks at me and does not even examine my dog that it is a waste of my time to go back to them. This is the other part of my responsibility. I keep notes and I vote with my entries. I will give every judge two chances unless they are out and out mean or rude, which almost never happens. Then they go on my Do Not Show list. And there are more than a few names on it. In fact we are seeing the effect of this by the low numbers that some judges are now pulling. There are more and more owner-handlers who are getting educated and who vote with their entries.

Do you feel there is any stigma against owner-handlers in Great Danes and if yes please explain. I have been welcomed and helped by most of the handlers in my area. I have been given help and handling tips from all but a few. I have felt very welcomed and supported in the Great Dane community. I have had judges give me feedback and help. I think that the Dane community is very open and supportive with very few exceptions.

What tips would you give a new owner-handler to help them step up their game? Go to classes and train yourself and your dog. Watch the pros. We have some awesome folks in the Midwest. Ask questions and let judges, breeders and handlers know that you want to hear what they have to say. And keep your opinions about other people and dogs to yourself!

What is the most valuable advice you ever received about handling your own dogs from a professional handler? To be Vanna White and sell the dog. I have a friend who tells me this all the time. It is not enough to jog around the ring. You have to sell your dog as the greatest thing out there. I am not very good at this part yet.

What is the most helpful technique you ever learned just by watching professional handlers? Selling the dog and playing and having fun with them.

What are some common mistakes you see owner-handlers committing in the ring? Fussing with the dog non-stop. Not paying attention. Taking too long to stack the dog. Not watching for ring procedure before going in so you know where to go.

What have been some of your show ring successes as an owner-handler? I finished two dogs to American, Canadian, United Kennel Club and International Championships all owner-handled. One was also natural eared. Sir also has a Group 4 which was fun. All of my dogs also do obedience and therapy work though I am still not competing in that venue. I had two puppies certified for Therapy Dog International at 11 months old.

What are some of the most rewarding things about owner-handling for you? Doing it as a team. Most professional handlers began as owner-handlers. What keeps you from taking that same route? I am always willing to help but most times I have my hands full with my own dogs. I have taken dogs in for people when needed if I am available. I am also not very social so many times I am hanging with my dogs instead of visiting ringside.

Who is your favorite judge and why? I do not have one favorite. I do have a group of favorites. I LOVE any judge that looks at my dog and talks to me about what they think. I also love to be able to follow what they are doing and why. I don't have to like the same dogs but it is nice if I can see what they like based on what they picked that day.

Bonus Question! (Please answer!) If the mockumentary movie "Best in Show" made a sequel with you as one of the characters, what famous actor/actress would play YOU? Sandra Bullock.