

## An Interview With Warren and Norvel Benoit



### Where were you born and raised?

**Warren:** I was born in Germany, abandoned in an orphanage and several years later I was adopted by an American serviceman who married a German woman. We relocated to the United States where I became an American citizen.

Not long after settling in the United States, my adopted mother divorced my adopted father and married my adopted father's brother. She later divorced him also and moved back to Germany. So I was raised by my adopted mother's 2nd husband who was legally my uncle. Got that?

**Norvel:** I was born and raised in New Orleans. My father owned a furniture store; my mother was a journalist; I have one older sister.



Warren in German orphanage

### How did the two of you meet?

**Warren:** We met while shooting pool in college. I was studying to become a doctor and Norvel planned to attend law school after obtaining her B.A. in History.



Norvel with her parents

### Why did you both go into sales instead of becoming a doctor and lawyer?

**Warren:** Easy answer: we needed money! Together we began selling vacuum cleaners on school nights and on weekends we sold ice-cream bars out of a truck while costumed like Fudge Popsicles. We both seemed to have talent for sales so decided to obtain our insurance licenses which offered a bit more dignity than dressing like Popsicles. We worked strictly on commissions and the two of us were our total "sales force". We sold disability/cancer insurance policies from an "office" (bedroom) in a home we were renting. I began traveling the country and recruiting agents in almost every state to sell our products while Norvel remained at home processing our paperwork (underwriting and claims) to make sure every policy was issued correctly and every agent was promptly compensated. Our agency grew and I am currently operating in 44 states. For further expansion, about 10 years ago I incorporated a medical malpractice insurance company to insure medical doctors in Louisiana. Most of my time lately is spent overseeing renovation for newly acquired or tenant damaged properties. Several days a month I do guest-speaking at health fairs or trade shows on my specific niche of payroll deduction sales to municipal sectors. I originally began attending dog shows as a break from my work but now, we are both American Kennel Club licensed Judges, attending dog shows is yet another 'job' on my resume.



1980 Business Promo

**Norvel:** The early years of our insurance business I was working mostly nights so I also had a day job teaching elementary school. Later in my insurance capacity, I incorporated a state licensed school to teach the insurance agents pre-requisites and Continuing Education to fulfill their mandatory requirements. Once our insurance business was stable we wanted to buy a house but could not since we did not have money for a down-payment so we took a course outlining how to buy real estate with no money down and implemented its strategies with exactness. We bought our first home to live in, then acquired another home to fix-up and lease out, then another house fixed/rented, etc. Our goal was to acquire two rental properties per year, every year, and we would keep them as investments. We repeated our “cookie cutter pattern” of purchasing similar homes, in similar neighborhoods, with “the right things wrong with them” (-meaning defects we knew how to fix). By the mid-1980s I earned a professional Brokers license which added another dimension of expertise in contracts and negotiations. Initially we considered real estate to be a hobby but today

it is a business alongside our insurance agency. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, we were basically out-of-business for several years due to property damage and flooding so I used the sabbatical to take courses for a Masters in Theology but now but now my daily job consists of managing property acquisitions for LLCs and real estate partnerships.”

### **Why do you continue to live and rebuild in an area notorious for hurricanes?**

**Warren:** The childhood song Itsy Bitsy Spider comes to mind because after a wash out the spider always climbs back up again.

**Norvel:** Hurricanes are not a novelty here but rather a fixed reality. I was raised with hurricanes; my parents dealt with hurricanes; my grandparents also and so on. Hurricanes are a seasonal way of life, an anticipation of the unexpected, a profound experience of man’s fight against nature. People raised in New Orleans “get it” and we stay bonded by our unique culture, our Mardi Gras, our localized cuisine, our Saints, our decadent festivals and our any-reason-is-a-good-reason-to-party attitude. Such gusto comes from living on the edge, knowing one storm can end it all forever, so we fully enjoy every day. I remain here to be with my 500,000 best friends!

### **How and when did you become involved with Great Danes?**

**Norvel:** In 1973 I was asked by friends to feed “Dana”, a Great Dane, in their absence but what they didn’t tell me was Dana was due to whelp any day. The first day I went to tend her inside their home I was met by a nervous mama-dog dropping puppies all over their house! Later my friends insisted I take home the runt, marked with every color of the rainbow, from



Us handling to BOB/BOS with mother/son

a fawn x blue breeding. “Bayou” died young from genetic issues but I studied up on the breed and acquired a better bred harlequin.

## **What was the foundation pedigree from which you first began showing and breeding your harlequins?**

Corbett Kennels, Lee Corbett and Dr. Oran Corbett, DVM of Vinton, Iowa, and Antonia Pratt / Meistersinger Kennels of Louisville, KY



Our “Mikey” made history 1st BIS on GSMD

The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog BIS, BISS, CH Derby’s Kleiner Kaiser won the 1999 National Specialty and was the first GSMD to be awarded a Best in Show in the United States. We continued showing “Mikey” in 2000 until he won a second Best in Show, and was ranked #1 GSMD, then we



Our “Caddy” won 25 Bests in Show

## **What Great Danes do consider your first success?**

Our first Champions were CH I’ve Spotted the King and CH Masquerade’s Confetti Gal.

## **Have you owned and shown any other breeds?**

Certainly! Besides Great Danes we owned #1 Greater Swiss Mountain Dog (2000) and #1 Standard Poodle for Breed (1996-1997) and #2 Sporting Dog in America for 2 consecutive years.

## **Please tell us about successes with other breeds you have owned:**

retired him for breeding. “Mikey” was bred by Kristin Kleeman, co-owned with legendary dog man Dr Sam Lawrence and handled by Frank Murphy. We continue to be members of the GSMD Club.



Best in Show before being retired

Our black Standard Poodle, BIS, BISS, CH Kaylen’s Cadillac Style, accumulated 25 all breed Bests in Show, 94 Group 1st and too many Specialties to even count. “Caddy” was co-



“Caddy” celebrates another Best in Show

owned/handled/bred by Kay Palade Peiser and “Caddy” has produced 103 Champions to date. He was #1 Standard Poodle and #2 Sporting Group dog for two consecutive (1996-1997).

**Please tell us what top ranked Great Danes you have owned:**

BIS, BISS, CH Giant Step’s Front Paige News (Paige) was the top winning harlequin in the history of the breed. She accumulated 7 all breed Bests in Show, was Best of Breed at the Great Dane Club of America’s National Specialty Show at the age of 6 years (1996) and at age 7 years was the Winner of the Top 20 Competition (1997).



“Paige” winning GDCA National Specialty 1996

“Paige” was ranked #1 Great Dane on all Group Systems for 2 consecutive years (1995-1996) and garnered over 100 Best of Breed wins, over 60 Group placements including 20 Group 1st placements and 14 Bests in Specialty Shows. “Paige” was bred by Mary Anne Zanetos and the late Eileen Durkin

and we co-owned “Paige” with Mary Anne Zanetos. “Paige” was handled to all of her impressive wins by Jeffery Lynn Brucker .



Scooby” was a truly special dog

BISS, CH Caprata’s Scoobydoo of Alpine was a dog we acquired after he won Best of Winners at the 1998 Great Dane Club of America’s National Specialty. “Scooby” won 13 Specialties in less than 6 months

and was ranked #2 Great Dane in 1999 at his untimely death (aggressive nasal cancer). He was expertly handled by Ray Cataldi, bred by Mike Arnold and co-owned with the late Toni Blue Wilson of Mexico.

BIS, BISS, GCH Rojon’s Say Yes was bred by Dr. Adam Protos and we co-own “Liza” with Mary Anne Zanetos and Sharron Barney. “Liza’s” record thus far includes 2 all breed Bests in Shows, 14 Bests in Specialty Shows, winning Best of Breed at the Great Dane Club of America’s National Specialty in 2010 and



“Liza's" 2nd Best in Show picture included us



“Liza” winning GDCA National Specialty 2010

Best of Opposite Sex at Great Dane Club of America’s 2011 National Specialty Show.

### **Can you please tell us what goes into the making of a top ranking Specials career for a dog?**

**Warren:** We were fortunate to have as acquaintances many top handlers, breeders, judges and aficionados in Great Danes. It would be impossible to individually identify every mentor but suffice to say each had a unique perspective regarding their approach to the sport of pure-bred dogs. In answer to your specific question, to create a “top ranking Specials career” one must listen only to people who have been successful. There are many fellow dog lovers out there ready to tell you how to show or promote a dog to notoriety but unless they have personally done this (and done it several times) than they really do not know the facts. It is the same in any competitive sport, you want to copy those with a proven track record; imitate and

emulate the actions of successful people because they are not dreamers but have actually proven themselves to be successful. One important caveat: always begin with the most exceptional breed specimen you can find because Specialing is about exhibiting “excellence”.

### **Tell us an interesting or humorous story which happened to you during a judging assignment.**

**Norvel:** I was judging a breezy, outdoor show somewhere in New England with a well-trained Ring Steward who had ribbons and trophies meticulously arranged. First class I presented to the exhibitor a blue ribbon and a little round pewter trophy to go with it. The next class I presented another ribbon with a little round pewter trophy and noticed that in this particular class even 2nd and 3rd placements had a pewter trophy placed with their ribbons so I awarded those trophies too. By the next class my Ring Steward was screaming something about all her paperweights holding down the ribbons had been stolen!



I’ve Spotted Zulu handled by Warren

### **Tell us about the Danes who live with you now.**

**Norvel:** Currently we have two rescued Great Danes. “Roger” was left on our porch after someone found him standing in the middle of interstate (he is deaf). He was so emaciated his first few days were touch and go but he climbed onto Warren’s lap and ‘signed’ he wanted to stay forever. A few months later we adopted “Rainman” mainly to keep the deaf dog company then found out “Rainman” has severe and destructive storm anxiety. The irony, of course, is when it thunders one dog goes crazy and hurts himself while the other dog just sleeps through all the noise because he is deaf.

## Tell us about the Danes you co-own which do not live with you.

Currently we co-own multiple BIS, BISS, GCH CH Rojon's Say Yes (Liza) with Mary Anne Zanetos and Sharron Barney. Also we co-own a puppy out of "Liza" named Rojon's New York New York (Gordon) who is co-owned and lives with Mary Anne Zanetos.

## Which accomplishment in show dogs are you most proud?

BIS, BISS, CH Giant Step's Front Page News winning the National Specialty, winning the Top 20, and winning 7 all breed Best in Shows to make her the top winning harlequin in history of the breed.

## Is there anything in Great Danes or in dogs in general which you have not yet done but would still like to have the opportunity to do?

**Warren:** One of my goals was to judge the Great Dane Club of America's National Specialty Show which I did in 2009. I have served as 2004 National Specialty Show Chairman, 2010 Top 20 Chairman, 1993 Futurity Chairman, served on the GDCA Board of Directors, Auction Chairman too many years to count, and acted as Auctioneer at most GDCA events. I have judged in several European countries so at this juncture I would probably say I have achieved all I would have wanted to do.

**Norvel:** Between the two of us, I believe we have done virtually everything there is to do in this sport. In the past I also served as South Central Division Chairperson, Top 20 Chairperson, Futurity Chairperson, Judges Hospitality and for many years, and currently, I have served as Historical Chairperson for the Great Dane Club of America. I have judged oversees and expect the apex of my canine career to be when I execute the honor of Judging Dogs at the 2013 GDCA National Specialty.



Warren Judged 2009 GDCA National Specialty Show



Norvel in our race car

## Besides anything involving dogs, what do you do in your spare time?

**Warren:** I begin every morning walking our dogs at least 1 mile for fitness, since it is good for them and good for me too. I own an alcohol "Funny Car" for competitive auto-racing and attend Saints football, Hornets/Pelicans basketball, Thoroughbred horse racing, and music festivals of any type. I am very involved with charities on both local and National levels. I am a 2-time past Chairman of Goodwill Industries of SE La and actively serve on the Board of Directors American Red Cross SELA chapter. I have served on many local hospital boards, served on Senate approved commission for Department of Insurance and currently serve on Loyola University Business Advisory Board. I am past President of National Association of Professional Enrollers and was the Epilepsy Foundation's Man of the Year in 2005 and inducted into Men of Fashion in 2008. I host many political events like golf-tournaments or black-tie fundraisers. Whenever



Paige enjoying the RV Paige enjoying the RV

ly topics. I follow a daily meditation practice and have been a Certified Instructor with Chopra Center University/ Dr Deepak Chopra for many years. I devote several nights a week to aerobics, Pilates and kickboxing and recently began fitness conditioning to enable me to trek Mt Kilimanjaro, in Africa, next year with some eccentric friends.

**What would you like people to know most about you that is non-dog related and might surprise them?**

*Warren:* Even though I am self-employed, I continue to work a 7 day week and that includes holidays too. I built my business myself and I enjoy remaining productive.



Our dogs enjoying the pool

possible I love to entertain local friends or business acquaintances visiting New Orleans and naturally I participate on grand scale in Mardi Gras parades. I am also Trustee for GDCA Charitable Trust. *Norvel:* I am the full-time homemaker to whatever Great Danes (or other pets) share our home and I continue to assist locally with dog rescues. I have served on the Louisiana S.P.C.A. Board and have organized many highly profitable fundraisers for animal shelters. I belong to professional writers associations including Romance Writers of America (under pseudo name, of course) and frequently compose articles for insurance or real estate trade journals on various time-



Horses were another hobby

*Norvel:* I would rather spend my day composing a theological exegetical paper than doing just about anything else. Surprised?

**What is the legacy of yourself that you would like to leave behind for Great Dane fanciers?**

*Both:* To simply have people say we were good dog people; that we always put the best interest and optimal care of our dogs ahead of any competition.

*Thank you to Warren and Norvel for taking time out to share with us.*