



The legend of Maxim and the Curse of Probopolo

In 2002, when I got my first Great Dane, a female named Gemini, I fell in love with the breed, and have owned and bred Great Danes ever since. As my interest in the breed grew, I began studying and researching more about it, reading books and articles, participating in web forums, exchanging experiences and information with breeders around the world.

Later on, I started developing a specialized website. I wrote a few essays on controversial issues, published these on my own website and also on social networks. In 2012, I had the opportunity to translate the official "*German Standard of the Breed*" to Portuguese, established by the DDC - Deutscher Doggen Club - (German Great Dane Club), and published by the CBKC - Brazilian Kennel Club Confederation.

During all these years, I came across controversial and contentious issues related to the established color patterns in the official breed Standards, both, the European /FCI and the North American /AKC. I began to study and research the subject, concluding that there was no scientific theory to support or endorse the exclusion/disqualification of coat patterns of gray or gray and white colors, known as 'merle' in the Great Dane Standards, and that this disqualification is a baseless arbitrary, leading many breeders worldwide to sacrifice ('cull') healthy puppies whenever they did not fit within the established colors of those official standards. Finally, in December 2012, the DDC recognize this coat color pattern in their newly updated Standard, although with many caveats.

The coat color known as 'MERLE' (in German called 'Grautiger') is a color pattern in which we find black or darker gray patches over a grayish base color, while this gray base color can vary from light to darker gray, (which can also be a brownish-gray color). In other words, black and dark gray torn patches overlaid on a gray / or brownish-gray base color.

While for both, breeders and the public in general, the harlequin* coat pattern is still the most coveted color among other coat patterns and colors of this strain, (*torn black patches over a white base color), the most controversial and aggravating point on the exclusion of merles is the fact that its determinant gene is inherent to the gene pool of harlequins.

Thus, it is impossible to eradicate the merle phenotype from the breed, even though exclusionary selection procedures would be carried out for decades in the breeding, unless of course, the harlequin was also to be eradicated, since it is scientifically proven that every harlequin great dane has a merle gene in its genotype and, without it, its phenotype - Harlequin - could not be manifested. To clarify, I quote below part of a study on this subject:

"The main color I do not believe should be disqualified is merle. Merle Danes are common, and impossible to eradicate from the breed. While harlequin exists, merle is unavoidable. It is thought that harlequin is a lethal gene, so all homozygous harlis are miscarried or stillborn. That means that all surviving harlis must be Hh on the H locus, so heterozygous for harlequin. Whatever color you breed a harli to, it's going to pass down H or h, and M or m. The possible combinations are HM, Hm, hM and hm. Assuming the genes from the other parent are hm, HM will result in a harli, Hm will result in a solid carrying harli, hm will result in a solid, and hM will result in a merle. So in every harli breeding there is a 25% chance of getting a merle. Even breeding a harlequin to a harlequin will give merle puppies (as well as double merles and harlis - the double harlis won't survive). On the basis of this, it seems illogical to disqualify merles, especially as without the merle gene the much-prized harlequin would not exist. In addition, merle is a much older color than harlequin, and must have existed in the Great Dane for some time before the harlequin mutation occurred, so history is firmly on the side of the merle Great Dane."

Source: Dog Coat Color Genetic - www.doggenetics.co.uk/danes.htm

Given these and other evidences, another issue emerged from the ethical and moral standpoint (not to mention the Christian point of view), what or who was legitimizing the action of killing ('culling') healthy puppies among breeders and, consequently, incentivizing this practice to become a commonplace among them? (While the general public, i.e. people who don't know the breed or do not fall into this category, remain unaware and alienated to this discriminatory, prejudice and malignant practice.)

The answer to that led me to the next question:

To what extent the official standards were encouraging, legitimizing and becoming co-responsible of so many unnecessary and systematic killing and mistreatment of those Great Dane individuals? At this point, my crusade in favor for life began.

From then on, my goal became to sensitize and awaken people worldwide to the fact that many Great Dane puppies, which do not have the desired and acceptable colors in those official Standards, were summarily killed at birth, since they would have the same costs to be raised as their siblings, but would not have the same commercial value.

I started writing and publishing a few articles on my website and forums of the breed, and in 2009, I developed a card game named "*The Great Danes' Suits Playing Cards*", aiming to shed light

on the coat color issue of the breed in a playful and creative way, although it is not yet available at this present date.

As a fondness for children's books, I decided that the best way to address to the color issue would be a children's book for adults and children, i.e., through a fable would be possible to address the issue figuratively, in order to bring into focus the ethical and moral matters related to the subject.

I began to pray and asked God to inspire me to write a story, enabling me to meet three goals:

- Bring knowledge about this breed to the general public;
- Present the issue on the merle Great Dane: the implications for these individuals and consequently the ethical issues involved;
- Build a storyline on Christian foundations and an on evangelistic approach.

Thus, *"The Legend of Maxim and the Curse of Probopolo"* arose. While writing it, there were moments I was surprised about the unroll of its events; sometimes it made me laugh, whereas, others made me feel sad; it was as if I was reading a story that unfolded before my eyes. I felt as if I was just a scrivener or a reader. At the end of the story, it was with great joy that I verified: all three goals had been fully achieved. Truly God answered my prayers and inspired me to write this story.

Now, I just hope that this book will succeed in its purposes, providing insight and wisdom to the Great Dane breeders, teach people to respect and prioritize life above anything, giving it its real value, and encouraging readers to re-establish a relationship of love and trust with our Creator, through the One by whom and for whom all things were created: Jesus Christ.

"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him." Colossians 1: 15-16

Only the One who has the power to create life has the right to destroy it, when one wants to decide over life and death, one is trying to assume God's place.

I wish God will grant me inspiration to write many other stories to teach young and old, readers of all ages, about His love and wisdom in a joyful, amusing and enthralling way. The next adventure of Maxim might be on the way; we may live to see it. I believe, do you?

"Any religion or philosophy which is not based on a respect for life is not a true religion or philosophy."

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)