The dog was enormous.
We lived in a small cottage in the mountains of Colorado, where I worked in construction, mostly hitting my fingers with a hammer and making serious attempts at cutting something off my body with power saws while I tried to build houses during the day and write at night. I had been looking at the local consumer guide, called The Shoppers Bulletin, when I saw an ad:

**EMERGENCY! AM LEAVING FOR HAWAII FOR A CAREER CHANGE. MUST FIND HOME FOR LOVING GREAT DANE NAMED CAESAR AS THEY WON’T ALLOW DOGS IN THE ISLANDS. PLEASE HELP!**

All right—I know how it sounds. Nobody who lives in a small cottage in the mountains of Colorado with a wife and baby should, probably even consider a pet, let alone a dog, let alone a very large dog—at least nobody with a brain larger than a walnut. But I had once been associated with a female Great Dane named Dad when I was in the army and had ever since had a warm place in my soul for them. The secondary force, the force that kicks in whenever I visit a dog pound, roared into my mind, the force that says, *If you don’t take him, who will?* This I drive has brought me dozens of dogs and cats, a few ducks, some geese, a half dozen guinea pigs, an ocelot, several horses, two cows, a litter of pigs (followed by more and more litters—my God, they are prolific), one hawk, a blue heron, a large lizard, some dozen or so turtles, a porcupine and God knows how many wounded birds; chipmunks, squirrels and one truly evil llama (am I the only person in the world who did not know they can spit dead level for about fifteen yards, hitting your eye every time?).

And so this man brought Caesar, who looked more like a *Tyrannosaurus rex* than a dog, into our small cottage.

His measurements were astounding. He stood forty-one inches at the front shoulder, his head a bit higher, and when he got up on his back legs and put his feet on my shoulders he could drip spit (his favorite hobby seemed to be disseminating spit and slobber) on top of my bald spot.

But size is relative. Had we seen him out in open, say from half a mile away in the middle of a large field, he would have looked magnificent. Here, in a small room, he overwhelmed the furniture.

“Isn’t he, you know,” my wife said, moving to a position of relative safety in back of the couch, “rather large?”

The man shook his head. “It’s just because he’s in here. Take him out for a run along side the car and you won’t even notice him. Why, just the other day I was talking to my girlfriend and she was saying how Caesar seemed to be getting smaller because he fit into her closet so well, kind of back in the dark”—he moved toward the door as he spoke—“where he likes to make a bed, out of the way back in the dark”—his hand was on the knob—“why, in a short time you won’t even know he’s here ....” And he was gone. I won’t say he ran, but by the time the door was latched he had his car started and was pulling out of the driveway.

It all happened so fast I don’t think the dog even knew he was gone. He sat for a moment, staring at me, then out the window; then he climbed on the couch, knocking over the coffee table, two end tables and a lamp.

He used his paw to push the drapes aside and saw the car just as it was disappearing and he made a sound like a cross between the closing whistle at a major auto plant and how I imagined the hound of the Baskervilles would sound.

Then he climbed down, moved to the front door and sat.

Staring at the door.
Waiting.

“Well,” I said, "that wasn’t so bad, was it?”

My wife looked around at the wreckage—when he’d jumped down he’d put his weight on the back of the couch and tipped it over—and sighed. “What do you suppose happens when he has to go to the bathroom?”

It nearly became a moot point. For a time it didn’t look as if he would live. I have never seen a dog grieve like Caesar. His heart was truly broken. He sat by the door all that day and all that first night and when it was apparent his owner was not coming back right away, he lay down with his nose aimed at the door and waited.

Although he would drink a small amount of water, he would eat nothing. Great Danes are not fat in the best of times—all angles and bones—and within two days he looked positively emaciated. I tried everything. Special dog foods; cooked hamburger, raw liver, bits of bread with honey, fresh steak—he wouldn’t touch any of it.

The third day I called a vet.

“Does he drink?”

“Barely.”

“How long since he’s had food?”

“Two, no, three days.”

A long pause. “Well, if he’s drinking he’s not going to dehydrate. Give him a couple more days and if he doesn’t eat then you’ll have to bring him in and we’ll tube him.”
“Tube him?”
“Force a tube down his throat and pump liquid food directly into his stomach.”

I looked at Caesar. Even skinny and lying by the door he seemed to block out the light in the room. He was civil enough when we petted him but he mostly ignored us and would pointedly push us out of the way when we came between him and the door. I didn’t see how it would be possible to force him to do anything.

It was, in the end, nearly six full days before he came around. I genuinely feared for his life and had decided that if he didn’t eat by the morning of the sixth day I would take him in to be force-fed.

The change came at six in the morning on the sixth day. I was sound asleep—actually close to comatose, as I’d been working on a construction crew pouring cement forms for basements and the work was killing me—and found myself suddenly lying on my side with my eyes open. I didn’t remember waking up, but my eyes were open and I was staring directly into the slobbering muzzle of Caesar.

I closed my eyes—lost in sleep for a moment, I did not remember getting the dog and kept them closed. It was no good. A tongue that seemed to be a foot wide and three feet long slathered spit up the middle of my face and I sat bolt upright and swore.

“Woof.”

It was not loud but it was perfect—an exact woof—and he looked directly into my eyes when he made the sound. It was so pointed, so decisive and focused, I knew exactly what he wanted.

“What was that?” my wife asked without opening her eyes—indeed, she could talk without awakening.

“The dog,” I said, “is ready to eat.”

I rose and made my way to the kitchen, the Great Beast padding along behind me. On the floor were three dishes. One had held canned dog food, a second dry dog food and the third water. They were all empty, licked shiny, and I took the sack of dry food down and filled one of the bowls.

He looked at it, then at me.

“Was I wrong?” I said. “Aren’t you hungry?”

He looked at the refrigerator, at the door handle.

“Something in there?”

I swear I saw him nod.

I opened the door and he slid his big head past my leg and studied the shelves for a moment before selecting a leftover chicken, which he swallowed virtually whole, then a cold beef sandwich I’d made for lunch—gone in a bite—and half a lemon meringue pie, before I could catch his collar and pull him back.

“Sit down . . .”

He sat—taking a few seconds to work his bony tail down—and looked at me and belched.

“You’re welcome. Do you have to go outside?”

My Life in Dog Years, Gary Paulson. pps. 67-89
My neighbor was standing in his garage and waved—he may have thought I was waving.

By this time I was just trying to stay alive and couldn’t have cared less if Caesar got loose. Indeed I wanted him to get loose. But the leash loop was tight around my wrist.

I found to my horror that I was along for the ride, and what a ride it was! We went through three more yards and the back of a bike rental shop along the road and finally slammed into the back doorway of a small cafe where, I learned later, Arnie sometimes went to beg his meals.

Arnie disappeared into the kitchen. Caesar tried to follow him and would have made it except that I became jammed in the door opening and even he could not pull me free.

There was a large woman there holding a very impressive cast-iron frying pan and she looked at me as she might look at a cockroach—looked directly at my head and then at the frying pan, which she hefted professionally. “Who are you?”

“I’m with him,” I said, pointing at Caesar while trying to cover my body. My shorts were in tatters and my feet were badly scraped.

“It’s wrong to chase cats,” she said.

“I’m sorry,” I said, and I meant it. Perhaps more than any time in my life I meant it.

“Go away.” She pointed to the door with her frying pan. “And take your dog with of you.”

And so Caesar entered my life.

He became many things to us—friend, entertainer, horror show—but he was never, never boring and his life comes back now in a montage of memories.

There was the Halloween when he greeted a little boy who came to the door in a were-wolf costume. There was one moment, priceless, when the two eyed each other, hairy monster-mask to Great Dane muzzle, at exactly the same height. I’m not certain what the little boy expected but he didn’t quail—he leaned forward and growled. I’m not sure what Caesar had expected either but it certainly wasn’t an angry werewolf. He made a sound like a train in a tunnel and disappeared into a dark corner of the bedroom closet and would not come out until all the little people stopped coming and the door-bell quit ringing. And it might be noted here that he had a remarkable memory. Every one of the seven years that he was with us, when the first trick-or-treater came to the door on Halloween, no matter the costume, Caesar went into the bedroom closet, pulled a housecoat over his eyes and would not come out until it was over. He had great heart, but courage against monsters wasn’t in him.

Then there was the time I was playing “get the kitty” with him. Arnie wasn’t there—usually he was off eating or trying to get married—and I would run around the house yelling at Caesar, “Get the kitty, get the kitty!”

He would lope with me, jumping over furniture and knocking down tables (for obvious reasons I usually played this game only when my wife wasn’t there), and I would run and a sound like a train in a tunnel and yell and yell until he was so excited he would tear around the house by himself. (I know, I know, but it must be remembered we had no television or other forms of home entertainment.) If it worked well enough I could go and pour a cup of coffee and drink it while Caesar kept galloping, looking for the mystery kitty.

On this one morning I had done it particularly well and he was crazy with excitement, I running up and down the stairs, spraying spit (we often had gobbets on the ceilings when he shook his head), bounding through the air with great glee, and just then, at the height of his crazed romp, just then the front doorbell buzzed and without thinking opened it to see a package-delivery man standing there with a box in his arms.

Caesar went over me, through the screen and into the guy at shoulder height. He didn’t bite, didn’t actually hurt the man at all. In fact when the man was down on his back Caesar licked his face—an experience which I think could be duplicated by sticking your head in a car wash—but the effects were the same as if he’d attacked. The package went up in the air and crashed to the ground with a sound of breaking crockery (it had been a family heirloom vase sent by an aunt—and had been would be the correct words). The delivery man wet his pants and in a cloud of dog spit and dust clawed his way free, ran back to the truck and was gone before I knew exactly what had happened. Soon after, we received a polite note saying that that particular company would no longer deliver packages to us.

Caesar never became angry. I never saw him fight or be aggressive to another dog, and while he loved to chase cats, Arnie particularly, when the day was done I would frequently find Arnie curled up on Caesar’s back by the stove, the two of them sound asleep. But Caesar would get excited and forget himself when there was food involved, I particularly when the food was a hot dog. I think he would have sold his soul for a hot dog. With mustard and relish. When we had hot dogs or went on a picnic he would sit and I stare until somebody handed him a wiener and then he would hit like a gator. You had to throw it or he would get your whole hand in his mouth, up to the elbow.

I once was invited to a picnic and softball game in a small town nearby and since it was a nice day I thought it would be fun to bring Caesar. Had I thought a little more I would have remembered two things—that it was a picnic and they would have hot dogs and that Caesar loved to play ball—but then had I thought a little more I probably would not have owned Caesar in the first place.

I brought him out of the back of the truck and people came to see him—one young boy said he looked exactly like a four-legged dinosaur with hair—and after all the oohs and aahs at his size settled down, I left him in the
truck with the windows open, told him forcefully, "Stay!" (ha!) and went off to see what was happening.

I had gone about forty yards, saying hello to people and picking up a can of soda, when I met an old friend and stopped to chat. I had my back to the parking area and I suppose heard some of the commotion that was starting but it didn’t enter my mind until the man I was speaking to looked over my shoulder and said, “Isn’t that Caesar?”

I turned and my heart froze. Caesar was standing next to a small girl—she couldn’t have been four—and he towered over her. That wasn’t so frightening as what the little girl was doing. She had taken a bite off a hot dog and was holding the remainder out to Caesar.

Images of destruction roared through my mind. He had truly enormous jaws (I could fit my head inside his mouth) and he snapped at his food violently, especially hot dogs. It was too far for me to run in time and I yelled but it was too late by ages and I wanted to close my eyes but didn’t dare and as I watched, Caesar incredibly, with the gentleness of a baby lamb, reached delicately forward and took the hot dog from the girl.

He swallowed it in one bite, then licked her face and moved on—though I was calling him—looking for the next child.

They loved him. Kids came from all corners and fed him hot dog after hot dog and he was as careful and gentle as he’d been with the little girl. By this time he had the attention of the crowd and everybody loved him so much I thought they were going to riot when I tried to put him back in the truck.

I let him out when the game started, and he went to work in the outfield. He would sit around center field, in back of the outfielders, and watch the batter. If the ball came long or went between the outfielders he would grab it and run to the nearest player and drop it. I know of two grounders he shagged to stop a double—I hit both of them and was held at first both times because Caesar stopped the ball when it slithered past both infielders and outfielders.

He loved the game and loved the day and when the afternoon was done we went back to the truck and a little girl came running up to me and held out a piece of paper. Drawn on it in crayon was a picture of a dog, a big dog, with a yellow sun in back of him and stick figures hitting at balls, and scrawled across the bottom was:

WE LOVE YOU SEEZER.

He is gone now, gone some years from a combination of dysplasia and cancer that was impossible to cure or fix but I still have the drawing in a box somewhere. It shows up from time to time when I am moving or straightening things, and I think of him and the perfect summer afternoon when we ate hot dogs and played ball and made some new friends.