

Jenny and Brandy: Red Demons in the Dark

By Rob Hugger

While attending graduate school for fine arts, I adopted Jenny, a loving mahogany Irish Setter, soon to be joined by another exuberant red Irish Setter named Brandy.

I quickly discovered that Jenny and Brandy had very distinctive differences in personality. Jenny was a daddy's girl, always clinging close to me for petting and snuggling. She was a very alert pup, first to hear any sound or notice any movement, but not extremely brave. Whenever challenged by another dog or even Brandy, she was sure to be pressed against my leg in short order. Brandy on the other paw, was bouncy and self-assured and wouldn't tolerate too much foolishness from other dogs, Jenny included. And, where Jenny was a complainer and a cuddler, Brandy was the stoic and a dog of action.

For instance, once when taking the girls for a rowboat ride, Jenny spied the movement of a fish just below the surface of the water. She stood to a set and began to bark furiously. Brandy immediately leapt into the river in pursuit.

And during a cross country trip, Jenny spied a desert jackrabbit scurrying along side my van and began to bark. To my shock and amazement, Brandy flew out the open window of the moving vehicle to give chase. Poor thing landed in a cactus patch and I spent the next two hours removing spines with a pair of pliers. She sat there, not moving, with barely a whimper. Jenny, however, hung out the window and whined the whole time about being left in the van.

But one trait Jenny and Brandy had in common was that they would become instant best friends to anyone who spoke to them or offered a pat. People Poochies, you might say. Not exactly outstanding examples of vicious guard dogs. Their friend-to-the-world nature was somewhat of a concern to me. So much so, in fact, I wondered from time to time if they would do anything to help me, should the situation ever arise.

After graduation, I moved to California to pursue my art career and rented as my studio, an aging downtown storefront in a less than desirable area. Downright seedy, actually. And being the typical starving artist, it also served as my home. I had about thousand square feet of open work area, along with a small kitchen and tiny bathroom with a tin walled shower stall. Not what you would call homey, but for me, and the girls, it was wonderful.

To keep as much floor space as possible available for my work area, I built a suspended bed frame above an open stairwell that led to a small storage basement. I fastened one side of the frame to the stairwell wall and the other side sat firmly on the edge of a built-in, six foot high, wall length display case. As precarious as it sounds, it was quite sturdy and safe.

Each night, after toiling to create my masterpieces, Jenny, Brandy and I would climb the small stairway I had designed out of ever-increasing squares of two - by fours, (an art piece in its own right), then cross over the top the display case, to our sky bed. Jenny and Brandy didn't seem to mind being suspended six feet above the studio floor as long as I was with them.

All went smoothly until one night when I was jolted out of a sound sleep. Jenny was pressed tight against my side, as she would do when bothered by a pesky dog. I wondered if that had awakened me when Jenny emitted a very low, but deep chest rumbling growl. It set me on edge, as I had never heard her make such a threatening sound. I propped up on my elbows to see what Jenny was trying to tell me. Brandy appeared to still be peacefully sound asleep at the foot of my bed-in-the-sky perch. Being half asleep, I wondered if perhaps Jenny was just having a bad dream, but her head and ears were raised and I could feel the tension in her muscles.

It was a very dark night with little or no moonlight to aid my vision but I suddenly became aware of a shadowy figure stealthily moving just beyond the foot the bed. Someone had entered my studio through the back kitchen door and was cautiously making their way into my work area. I am sure the intruder had no idea that I was living there. He was just breaking in to steal my studio work tools he had probably seen through the storefront window.

Suddenly, and without the slightest hint of her being aware, let alone awake, Brandy leapt from the end of the elevated platform and landed full weight upon the head and shoulders of the intruder. I'll never know what went through the mind of the poor fellow who had just been crushed to the floor in what he assumed was an empty store, but his shriek of terror filled my studio. It was a sound I cannot describe, but will never be able to forget.

His cries of panic continued, along with snarling and growls. The intruder finally regained his footing and braced himself against the bed platform. With his head only inches from the end of the bed, Jenny decided it was her turn to act. She jumped to her feet and stood with legs wide spread and barked directly into the face of the confused and terrified intruder.

He screeched in renewed terror and fled toward the kitchen with Brandy tight on his heels. He hit the screen door with such force, that he tore it off its hinges. As Jenny and I

scrambled down on my narrow makeshift stairs, I could hear the fading screams of the man as he retreated down the alley behind my studio. His desperate voice, and Brandy's baying howls slipped away into the night.

Still not fully aware of what had just happened, I stood in the doorway and called for Brandy to return. I began to fear that the man might harm her, given the chance.

When she did not immediately come back, I quickly dressed, grabbed a flashlight and leashed Jenny to go in search. We were halfway through the kitchen, when Brandy trotted through the gapping doorway, tail wagging and with a piece of torn denim hanging from her mouth. I immediately dropped to my knees and began to hug and praise Brandy's bravery and daring and Jenny's alertness.

The three of us played for a while in the studio and I gave both of them as many dog treats as I had in the place. The girls were wide-awake, full of boisterous energy and loving the attention I was giving them.

Finally we collapsed on the couch. They placed their heads on my lap. Jenny rolled those soul filled liquid eyes up to meet my gaze as if to say, 'It's all right now. We're here.' Brandy curled up into a ball beside me and went back to sleep as I stroked her head. Jenny soon followed suit with her head still in my lap.

I still wonder, from time to time, about that poor unfortunate soul who learned how protective an Irish Setter can be on that fateful night when he encountered my Red Demons in the Dark.