

BEST FRIENDS OF MALCOLM LAKE (by Brenda Martin)

It was a cold brisk morning the last week of November, 2006 as I recall. I was up early enough to get the household tasks done before I headed to Kingston to meet with the United Way Resource Allocation Committee where I served as a volunteer since I retired. My husband had an 8 o'clock appointment in Kaladar to get his truck serviced. I had let the three dogs out of the kennel to get a short break before I headed to town.

One more job... to get items from the downstairs freezer for our evening meal. I heard a dog at the door. It was Ginger, the youngest. It was strange that she wanted inside already as she loved the outdoors. Once inside Ginger was under foot and whining. Next, another dog at the door. This time it was Snoopy, the oldest and littlest. He hurried inside and laid down on the mat by the woodstove. It took a moment for me to figure out that his eyebrows, chin and ears were covered with icicles. What in the world was going on!

I went to the door looking for Jenny, the yellow lab, the heaviest by far. She was such an obedient dog that I expected her to come promptly, but it didn't happen. I checked the kennel, the yard and scanned the shore. I could hear her whimpering. Oh gosh, she must be hurt. My heart was pounding loudly so it was hard to determine where the sound originated.

I scanned the lake. There was ice but our family had not been ice fishing yet as they wanted to check the thickness. I spotted Jenny...more than a hundred feet from shore and...in the water. She had broken through the ice and was paddling frantically. I yelled some encouragement "Keep swimming girl. I'll help you!"

I rushed indoors threw off my dress clothes, grabbed a portable phone, and socks. My floatation suit was downstairs. My short laced-up boots were in the attic. My lifejacket was where? Downstairs, too. I'm going to need that. I can't swim. I'm talking out loud. Who to phone? Who would be home? Our neighbours are all cottagers. My son was working in Harlowe. My husband was in Kaladar. Gerry and Joy across the lake might be home. As I rushed around getting clothes, I dialed and got an answer. I blurted out that I needed help that the dog went through the ice. The climb into the attic for my boots had made me overheat! Downstairs I dressed in the rest of the gear and grabbed a lifejacket. There was a hat in my coat sleeve and gloves in my pocket.

I ran to the lakeshore to check on Jenny. Only the ice at the shore had been checked. It looked like a long way out there. I would need a rope. Ropes were in the garage. The longest ropes were so heavy I couldn't even drag them. I grabbed a yellow rope with a snap on the end. I rushed to the shore and fastened the rope to the maple tree closest to the dock. I was ready to fasten the other end to my waist when Gerry arrived in the yard. I dropped the phone beside the tree and we talked about the options. We both knew the ice would be thin...but how thin? Maybe we could get a boat to the open water. Justin's duck boat was on the trailer at the patio. We threw out the decoys and yanked the boat off the trailer. We got it to the shore but it wouldn't slide at all on the lake. Twenty minutes have passed by now. Back to the ropes!

I put the rope around my waist and crept out. The rope was not going to be long enough. Gerry thought that holding his end would be OK so he unsnapped it from the tree. The ice was snapping and cracking as I tip-toed out. Jenny was watching me approach all the while crying like a baby. I laid down and crawled the last 20 feet. I made it to the hole...now a large gaping hole. Jenny came right over to me. Luckily, she had on a collar. I had her! I pulled and tried to get her up on the ice where I was lying. Crack! The ice broke and I was now in the water with her. My head was above water at that point until...she climbed on my back. Under I went! Terror! I could see the light above me. I prayed for God's help to get back to the hole. My flotation coat kicked in and my head and shoulders popped out of the water. Jenny was on my back and her weight was pushing me under. I can't seem to get my breath. I tell her, "You have to get off my back, Jenny!" She does so, but is crying in a high-pitched tone. I tried to reassure her and coax her to keep swimming. On the shore Gerry's face is redder than fire and he is frantically yanking on the rope while on his knees on the ice. That is what is taking my breath away. I yell, "STOP yanking. HOLD."

At the edge of the hole I try to lift myself up on to the ice, but it cracks and breaks off. It is too thin near the hole. My gloves are wet but not frozen so next time I heave myself up, my gloves stick to the ice allowing me to pull myself further from the hole. My waist is out of the water and I gently drag my legs and feet. I crawl toward shore while Gerry is pulling hard on the rope. By the time I get to shore Gerry is looking grim. The portable phone is still lying by the tree where I first put it. I dialed Kaladar garage and told them to send Donnie home immediately that the dog is in the lake. The phone rings. It is Joy. She has been watching with binoculars; she tried phoning people as well. Their friend Roy Wilcox is on his way and hopefully the fire department. I resume talking to Jenny, hoping that she has enough strength to keep paddling. At least 45 minutes have passed since I found her in the water.

Roy arrives. He wishes that he had brought a canoe. Some of the local fire department members arrive. They see the predicament and are not allowed to go on the ice. Roy goes home for a canoe and a chisel. I am ushered inside by the fire captain, Linda who takes down the details of the situation. When I take my outdoor clothes off, I am dry except for my damp socks, wet hat and hair. The water rescue unit from Sharbot Lake arrives; a paramedic comes inside to check my vitals. I am feeling anxious about the dog so my blood pressure is slightly elevated. I insist that they get Gerry from outdoors and check him as he has a heart condition. When they do this, they find his blood pressure to be over 200. He is now restricted to the couch and being monitored.

Through the window I can see their efforts to reach Jenny. Roy is in a canoe on top of the ice and used the ice chisel to propel himself to the hole. There is a rope tied to the canoe so the rescuers can pull the canoe back to shore. When he reaches the open water, he grasps Jenny by the collar. She is so tired that she is not struggling but Roy is having difficulty lifting her into the canoe. It takes several attempts. The canoe tips and out goes the ice spud. He drags Jenny over the edge and she topples to the bottom of the canoe and remains there. The party on shore begins the process of returning the dog and Roy to safety. It take several minutes. My husband and son have arrived and are helping to pull the weighted canoe.

A paramedic takes Jenny to the back of the ambulance where she is placed in a recovery unit to restore her body core temperature. She appears semi-conscious but obviously exhausted. At least ninety

minutes have passed since I knew that the dog was in the water. I phoned our vet, Dr. Bob to see if he should see her. He advises that the unit will be better than anything else. Keep her in a warm blanket; try to get her to drink and eat throughout the night; phone if she gets worse. After 20 minutes Jenny is brought indoors and laid on a warm blanket at my feet. The other dogs are frantic to see her but we held them off for awhile; I lay on the floor beside her and tell her how happy I am to see her. She raises her head, licks my face and falls asleep. I say my thanks to all the rescue team as they leave. For the next couple of hours I cover Jenny with fresh warm sheets, encourage her to drink some warm milk and offer reassurance as I pet her. The other dogs are allowed to come see her. Snoopy climbs on the blanket beside her; Ginger licks Jenny's face lovingly.

For the rest of the night we tried to figure out how this happened. Neither Jenny or Ginger would have gone on the ice unless we took them. Snoopy on the other hand was a traveller and often would cross the lake to visit Ridge Lane people. Since he was also wet I believe that he was first in the water. Jenny must have went to help him, but being very heavy, probably broke through herself. How did Snoopy get out of the water? Chances are that he got on Jenny's back and onto the ice. Jenny was one of the smartest dogs we ever owned. She was very obedient, protective when necessary, loyal to the family and her dog friends. Luckily, Jenny recovered from the water trauma and continued to be a loving family pet for more years. I had a few nightmares and it took time before I wanted to go ice fishing. Overall, this is a happy Malcolm Lake tale of how to be a best friend. Written by Brenda Martin



Snoopy (Jan. 1990- Nov. 2007)

Top hunting dog; very friendly; the boss at the Martin house; wandered Ridge Lane for years to see the kids and cottagers; had a stroke the first day of deer season 2007.



Ginger (April 2000-June 2015)

Quiet; timid; hunting only when necessary; protective of kids; gentle with food and manners.



Jenny (Aug.2000-June 2011)

Bird dog; game dog; smarter than many humans; protective of family; loyal; could run long distances even in winter.