

Gnarled

(the hound dog song)

by Robert Force

My first 'coon hunt was in Lawrence, Kansas about 1971. I was hitchhiking to the East Coast, taking a Southerly route because it was getting into winter along I-90. Somehow, I fell in with a bunch of banjo pickers who took me home. We joked around, ate a meal and played some bluegrass together. When it got dark, we next tossed back an apparently prerequisite number of whiskies and before long we were headed into the backwoods in pickup trucks with dogs and guns.



Being a Northwesterner where this is not a tradition, this was as different an experience as I had ever hoped to encounter. It left a lasting impression, for sure. I never did shoot at anything. I'm not sure they did either. Perhaps it's just as well considering the lubrication factor. But I did get to listen to the music of hounds while stumbling around in the dark in an altered state and it stuck with me.

A few months later I was at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. As I was walking along the upper campus pathway I was impressed by the gnarled and twisted oaks which grew there. "Gnarled," I said to myself, "That'd be a great name for a 'coon hound." And the words and tune of this song literally leapt into my head.

I've had a lot of fun with this tune over the years. On occasion, at a couple of outdoor festivals, dogs have wandered up onto the stage and joined me. Now there's a tribute to authenticity!

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(starts out slowly, wistfully-- reflective with rubato...)

Gnarled, old Gnarled-- sweet puppy--
We ain't goin' huntin' no more.

'Cause Gnarled, old Gnarled... (as fast as you can sing!)
Done cleaned out the 'coons on the whole North Shore!
Done cleaned out the 'coons on the whole --North --Shore!

Well, my dog Gnarled is a hound dog's dog
Snufflin' uppa 'coons and razorback hogs.
He can find a 'gator in a peat bog
And ol' Mr. Possum in a hollered out log.

chorus: Dog Gnarled-- aroooo (howl)
Dog Gnarled-- aroooo (howl)
Dog Gnarled-- aroooo (howl)
... My dog Gnarled!

My dog Gnarled is smart as they say,
Much more than any on the government's pay.
Only bites the mailman he gets in the way.
Lays in the shade in the heat of the day. (chorus)

He's a flop-eared wonder with long, bony legs,
Eats only mush and ostrich eggs.
Wouldn't touch water if you got down and begged;
Prefers to do his drinkin' from the squeezin's keg. (chorus)

My dog Gnarled is a pretty strange breed--
One half ornery and the other half mean.
He's got a set of chompers you wouldn't believe
And his voice it sounds like the oper-ree (chorus)

Yes, my dog Gnarled... (repeat second verse)

--final chorus-- Heavy on the howls. Operatic!