

## Wilderness House Literary Review 14/2

*Pam Rosenblatt*

### **The King of the Neighborhood**

**T**he dog was king of the neighborhood. He was no pure breed, simply a mixed breed of German Shepard and Collie. He had medium length auburn fur, intense brown eyes, stern sharp front teeth, a perfect shaped nose with a wet black front, and a thick and wagging tail.

Yes, he was king of the neighborhood. He loved to chase tennis balls, run around the ½ acre lawn of the large English Tudor house, and try to catch any squirrel that appeared near him.

This dog who was king of the neighborhood was tough, too. The leash laws back then in the 1970s were not that strict. But his owners would put a leash on him, connect him to a run anyway. But this dog would simply yank at it in such a way that it would break and he would be free to roam the neighborhood.

Within an hour, he would return to the backyard of his house with three or four dogs and roughhouse with them, especially a local neighbor's dog, a beagle named April.

Then there were the treasure hunts he went on with his family's children and their friends. They would cut through April's family's backyard, walk across the neighboring tennis courts' parking lot, and hike along a nature path that ended up near a local country club's parking lot.

This dog named Togee was the leader of this group of youngsters. When he walked slowly, they all walked slowly. When he walked a bit faster, they all walked faster. When he sped up, why, they all sped up. And when he stopped, they all stopped, especially since they knew that Togee had found the right location, the location where a missing treasure had been buried.

The kids began pushing the old brown leaves away from where Togee, the king of the neighborhood, stood. Then they used small shovels to dig down into the earth as deep as they could go. Nobody cared that this spot was not on their parents' properties, but that there was a treasure to be found. And these children knew Togee had located it...

Well, they thought the king of the neighborhood had located it. All they ever found were worms, ants, japanese beetles, stones, big boulders, and sometimes a crinkled gum wrapper, a decomposing McDonalds bag, or a lost key. But never the treasure that the crowd so desired.

Then the group of children plus the dog would retrace their steps back to Togee's house and play some tennis baseball on the driveway.

Even though Togee never lead them to a much desired treasure, he did do lots of wonderful things: he would follow them to elementary school and be driven home by the children's mother; he would wander into the nearby city's center and sleep under the Mayor's desk located in City Hall; he would bring home presents to the family of the squirrels he caught; and he would act as a watchdog, scaring away uninvited – and sometimes even invited – guests.

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Yes, Togee was king of the neighborhood. The police sometimes had to contact his owners and request that they restrain him somehow. And his owners tried to train him not to leave the backyard. But Togee was a strong-willed animal and broke through everything that the owners did to keep him safe and secure at home.

While people joked about Togee and his toughness, he actually frightened some people. The mailmen and the newspaper boys didn't last long on the jobs as Togee would chase after them and nip at them. But, with his family, Togee was terrific, wonderful in fact.

There was a time when the family drove out to visit the mother's parents in Amherst, Massachusetts. The area was real country with foxes running in the wheat fields, and cows settling in the middle of dirt roads.

And there was this pig farm about a quarter of a mile away from the grandparents' farm house. The family often would walk by it and watch the pigs roll in the mud. Usually there was a terrible stench, so they didn't visit the area frequently.

One day, after the family had packed up their belongings to return home after a long visit with their mother's parents, they called out for Togee to jump into the car. But Togee was nowhere to be found.

The father drove around the neighborhood; the mother checked out the wheat field; and the three children kept calling "Togee!". But he was nowhere.

"Well, it's time to go home," said the father. "Hopefully, Togee will return and Grandma and Grandpa will take him home then."

But the two younger children, a girl and a boy, didn't agree. They clung to a cement post in the basement and cried, "We're not going home without Togee!" Their parents didn't know what to do. This scene went on for a long time, maybe one hour. The children kept calling out, "Togee, come home!"

Finally, the family heard some barking. The sun was going down, but they could see an animal running down towards the house. It was Togee!

But Togee had gotten into some mud. And he smelled similar to the stench clinging around the pig farm. He must have gotten into the pig's den and rolled around in the mud with the pigs! Needless to say, he was quickly given a bath and the family soon returned home to Boston.

Togee lived a long life, about fourteen years. How and when he died, though, was a mystery to his family and friends. One day, during a major blizzard, the mother opened up the backdoor to the house for some reason or other, and Togee bolted out.

She called and called for him to return. But he ignored her to play in the snow. The children shouted, "Togee, please come home!" But he never returned. The father drove around to look for him. But he couldn't find him. The police were alerted. But they couldn't locate him. Nobody knew what had happened to Togee.

To this day, the family drives around the old neighborhood, a place that they had left in the mid-1980s, looking for their beloved dog. Yet, Togee is still nowhere to be found.