

Odd Animal Behavior

This story is true in every detail except for where I have slightly embellished it. I was probably about five years old at the time, which would make the incident 85 years ago. The 85 years is not germane to the story, but I want the reader to appreciate that, at 90, my mind, loose and rattling around in my skull, is not immobile. So, the story:

Our tiny white house was situated on a dirt road in a neighborhood at the edge of a small village in southern Oklahoma. The time was late summer. That meant going barefoot, playing Hide-and-Seek after sundown with neighborhood children, and sitting on the lawn on quilts while counting “shooting stars” across the eastern horizon.

The neighborhood men had come home from work, washed up, and eaten supper, and they joined my dad on our front porch or on the lawn to listen to broadcasts of Joe Louis, world champion heavyweight boxer. My dad, glued to the set, envisioned every throw and jab of left and right. The women visited among themselves. We children played tag and other running games.

A small, yellow-haired dog ran up, darting in and out of our small group. We were having such fun with our newfound, nameless friend. Perhaps I became more aggressive than I should have, or I touched the animal and scared it. For whatever reason, the little fellow nipped my ankle.

He didn't break the skin, but the sensation of his teeth on my flesh scared and infuriated me. I dived for him. He saw me coming and darted out of our yard and down the road. Finally, after about a half-block, panting breathlessly, I caught the rascal. Holding him with both hands, I knelt and bit him back.

The instant I felt his hair on my tongue, the thought popped into my mind: My friends and all the adults in the neighborhood watched me chase the dog, grip him with both hands, and kneel to bite him.

They must have thought my behavior strange, and the dog might have thought, *What an odd animal.*