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Tags: [animals](#), [child/parent](#), [violence](#), [streets](#)
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Nineteen eighty-four

Snarling, baring of gums, lips drawn back exposing sharp salivating teeth.

I used to get bailed up at my own back door by the neighbour's blue heeler. Terrified. Stopped dead. Frozen to the spot.

My father taught me that I had to show the dog that I wasn't afraid of it. I had to stand my ground. I thought my father was mad. I was going to be eaten alive. My progress was slow. Every few days, making it a few more steps down the ramp towards the dog, before I would turn back and burst into tears, safe inside the closed door. Barricaded up in my own house.

I built my courage. Staring the dog down as I walked towards it, acting as if I owned the place. After a few weeks I convinced the dog and myself that I wasn't afraid of it. I imagined the quiet growling as some kind of strange morning welcoming party. I would puff my slender pre-adolescent body up to its most magnificent stature, walk past the dog and keep on walking.

You are able to do that with dogs. Show them you are not afraid of them and they back off. Canines are less crazy and monstrous than their owners. Less cruel. I can't remember the dog's name but I remember its owner, Mrs Dunsford, she was more of a bitch.

When Mrs Dunsford's dog was on heat our dog, Speedy, went mad for it. Mrs Dunsford told us we should lock our dog up to keep him from going over to her house for a fuck. Out in the bush, the dogs had dominion, roaming their territory as far as they felt it expanded, constantly challenging one another at the fringes, coming home with torn ears and bite marks on their bellies.

We chained our dog up to keep the peace but the neighbour's dog kept coming over and fucking with our dog anyway, so we let Speedy off the chain.

A few days later my sister and I were across the road building a tree house with the Dunsford kids, when we heard Mrs Dunsford yelling from the other side of the house. We ran around to see what was going on. Our two dogs were at it again, wildly humping and Mrs Dunsford was trying to separate them. Our dog allegedly growled at her and scratched her arm with its paw during the awkward dismount.

She was furious, telling us our dog was 'vicious and should be locked up!' She told us, if we didn't get him out of there she would shoot it. She kept a loaded rifle in the house. I tried to grab hold of Speedy and walk him home but his sexual instinct had him glued to the spot. Instead we decided to go home, get the chain and come back.

On the way back, with the chain clanking noisily as I ran, a gun shot rang out. My sister and I screamed and ran like hell. Mrs Dunsford was standing there, smoking gun in

hand, her three kids behind her and my dog on the ground bleeding and straining for breath. The bullet had entered his chest and passed back out his left side. Speedy was limp and his whole body was trembling in waves of pain. When we tried to pick him up I saw him bare his teeth for the first time.

My father came over after hearing the gun shot. He knew we had been over there and was worried. Gun shots and cars back-firing were common sounds out there, but you always took a look. My sister and I were hysterical but my dad took control. He got the car and we raced off to the vet's. My sister and I were calling the neighbour all the bad names we could think of, all pretty innocent back then, 'cause this was before my sister went to high school and learnt how to swear and passed her learning on to me.

The long half hour car ride to the vets alternated between moments of pacification and aggression; trying to calm the dog one minute through our sobs and the next, plotting to shoot the neighbour's dog in revenge. Dad made it clear that he preferred to shoot the next door neighbour herself, 'the nasty bitch!'. He reasoned that shooting her dog, tit for tat, was totally unfair on the dog and would get him into trouble. It didn't stop us plotting though.

After a couple of days, Speedy came home. He seemed to have aged a few years, but he was mending. The cold war between our families stewed for a while, but by the very next summer the two tribes of us kids were back together building new cubby houses in disused chicken sheds and dragging trees through the bush to build bridges across the creek.

Speedy was a strong old bastard and survived the shooting. He was run over three times because he liked to bite the tyres of passing cars. He suffered heartworm and almost died and eventually seemed to go mad. At an incalculable age, he was hit and killed by a semi-trailer in the middle of the night. He had taken to sleeping on the warm asphalt of the road.

Years later, after I left home, I would occasionally see the old gun-toting neighbour at the post office near my parents' house. My mother had shared with me the local gossip that Mrs Dunsford's youngest son, aged about three when my dog was shot, had started an internet business selling sex toys. Everyone in the area knew that all those little parcels Mrs Dunsford was posting, were full of dildos, strawberry flavoured lube and butterfly attachments. Goody carnal little parcels. We would share an awkward hello. Just a 'hello' and each time I would think back to that horror day of dogs on heat, a gun shot and fur soaked with blood.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Speedy Bowden.