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Advanced Persuasive Writing  
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November 21, 2017

### Neighbors and Dogs

Living in a neighborhood is a balance of goodwill and tolerance. As the saying goes, “You can pick your friends, but you can’t pick your neighbors.” That may not be the correct phrase, but it is still true. When you move into a new house in a new neighborhood, you never know who the neighbors are, and the neighbors do not know you. You all may get along nicely and be able to live in harmony. Often, though, neighbors do not agree on what is neighborly, especially when it comes to pets, specifically dogs. Roaming dogs can destroy perfect lawns, and barking canines can break the quiet stillness of any neighborhood. Pet owners and neighbors able to balance tolerance and goodwill can live side by side.

Neighbors have two major complaints about dogs: barking and roaming. Barking is a dog’s form of communication. A dog may bark because another animal or an unknown human has stepped into their territory. A dog barks because they are happy to see you or they want something. Dogs bark and most dog owners are immune or conditioned to their dog’s barking. Being a dog owner myself, I understand the immunity. What doesn’t bother a pet owner might bother a neighbor. However, if you do not own the barking dog, a dog’s form of communication is not so charming.

Just like barking dogs, roaming dogs can also destroy the peace of a neighborhood. Free roaming dogs that live in rural areas where there is often no leash law poses problems for neighbors. Without leash laws, dogs are allowed to roam, and owners are not required to keep their pets fenced or leashed. No leash law also means owners are not required to license or spay/neuter their dogs. Dogs are natural roamers, and their territory can be large. If you live miles from your nearest neighbor, your dog could visit the neighbor and cause problems. Dogs also sniff for leftovers and knock over garbage cans creating a big mess. Lawns and flowerbeds

also suffer when dogs are allowed to run free in the neighborhood. On the dangerous side, dogs that roam can be a threat to humans and other dogs if they are aggressive.

I live on a rural street, and the neighborhood has both fenced and free wandering dogs. My dogs are fenced because doing so keeps them safe and within control. Our veterinarian also agrees with keeping dogs close to home and says that dogs live longer and stay healthier if they are kept indoors more than outside. However, in areas where there is no local ordinance prohibiting dogs from roaming, the choice is the pet owners.

Excessively barking dogs and several roaming dogs are a “bone of contention” between neighbors on Elizabeth Ann Lane. Six houses line the quiet dead end street located in rural Jefferson County and a dog, or multiple dogs, live at every house. Although all the residents own at least one dog, not all of the dogs are kept in a fenced yard. Because there is no leash law outside the city limits, the larger dogs are allowed to roam the street running through yards, knocking over trash cans and ruining perfectly manicured lawns. The dogs that are fenced can see the unleashed dogs strolling by and begin to bark excessively and will not stop until they taken indoors, or the unwelcome dog disappears. The unwelcome unleashed dogs are a problem for the dog owner with a fence and the barking dogs in the fence are contentious for the neighbor living next door.

However, I believe both dog owners, the fenced and the un-fenced, can live together and not have to resort to owning cats. There is a resolution where these neighbors can live together in harmony if the two neighbors can see the problem from the other’s perspective.

Most residents of Elizabeth Ann Lane have lived on the street for decades. The lots are large, giving neighbors a little room to breathe. This is not the case in urban neighborhoods. The first neighbor to make a complaint is Ms. Smith. She has lived on the street for decades. Her home is tucked behind a grove of trees, and there is no fence around the property. Ms. Smith also has an outbuilding that doubles as the office for her home business, and it lies within ten yards of the new neighbors, the Marshes.

Ms. Smith owns a somewhat grumpy Golden Retriever named Bunko. He is habitual, and each morning he strolls through the thick brush that separates his home from the Marshes, and when he is safely in the yard, he does his early morning business. Bunko's habit is so predictable that he has beaten a path in the grass and across the flower bed in front of the Marshes' house. The path continues to cross the property to the opposite side of the house and into the next neighbor's yard where it disappears into the surrounding woods.

When the Marshes moved into the house next door to Ms. Smith, they owned a smaller Cairn Terrier named Rocky, and he is exceedingly territorial. During Bunko's early morning and later strolls, Rocky can see Bunko through the cracks between the fence planks. And with enthusiasm, he begins to bark violently. Bunko pays him no mind and often will stop and stare causing an all-out barking frenzy.

Ms. Smith has lived on the street for a long time and is comfortable with the status quo. She thinks her new neighbors are not neighborly because their dog barks a lot. She works during the day in her home-office, and the barking interferes with her concentration. Also, on weekends during warmer weather, she enjoys a little time lounging beside her pool. Since Rocky moved in and if he is outside, the barking destroys her solitude. She believes her neighbors are not doing enough to control the barking making it difficult to work or enjoy time at her pool.

The Marshes are new to the street. They bought the house that stood empty for nearly a year and moved in quickly. Rocky is part of the family and lives most of the time indoors. When he is outside, he is kept securely inside the large fenced backyard. When the Marshes are away during the day, Rocky stays outside. They agree that Rocky does bark at other dogs and strangers on the other side of the fence but believe, whenever possible, they do all they can to quell the excessive barking. The Marshes are annoyed that when Rocky does bark at inconvenient times, Ms. Smith will knock on their door and complain in a threatening manner.

The Marshes believe she is unreasonable and demanding, especially since she does nothing to keep her dog out of other neighbor's yards.

Obviously, both neighbors care for dogs. Ms. Smith owns a dog that is cared for and part of her family. The Marshes own a dog and after moving to the neighborhood adopted a stray dog that roamed their street. Both homeowners care for their pets.

Also, both neighbors enjoy living on Elizabeth Ann Lane. Ms. Smith has lived on the street nearly two decades, and the Marshes bought their home because of its location and the serenity of the neighborhood. It's a perfect place to raise a family. Most importantly, both neighbors want to live in harmony and get along.

Since both homeowners agree that pets are important and want to build a rapport, the two neighbors must first try to see the problem from the other's perspective. The Marshes can try to understand that their new neighbor is upset with the barking because it interferes with the quiet on the street, the biggest reason the residents enjoy living there. Also, because there is no leash law in the rural neighborhood, Ms. Smith is within her rights to allow her dog to roam freely. Ms. Smith might consider that the reason the dogs are barking is that her dog is "teasing" them. She should also attempt to understand that when the Marshes hear their dogs barking, they immediately try to stop the barking and bring the dogs inside.

Through understanding and insight into the opposite sides of the disagreement, the neighbors can begin to compromise and build a relationship of goodwill and tolerance. Ms. Smith is encouraged to give a little extra time for the Marshes to solve the barking problem instead of immediately stomping across the yards and pounding on the door. This approach only makes the Marshes more defensive and causes the tension to increase.

The Marshes could check in with their neighbor periodically to see if more can be done to be a good neighbor with dogs. By doing so, they create positive communication. With communication open, Ms. Smith has the opportunity to kindly share any concerns and compliment her neighbors for their efforts to make the neighborhood more peaceful.

Living together as neighbors who own dogs and have differing philosophies of ownership requires a delicate recipe of generosity and patience. Ms. Smith and the Marshes, both being dog owners, can live in harmony when they view the issues from the other's perspective. The Marshes have dogs that bark at Ms. Smith's dog that roams the neighborhood. With that view in mind, the neighbors will be able to communicate without anger and reach a compromise. You may not be able to pick your neighbors, but you can choose how to live next door.