



*Dylan Boxall*

*Rocky Mountain House, AB*

*Métis*

*14 years old*

### **My Dog Atim**

The chill of the river flowed around my ankles as I stood in the rain staring at the sky, my eyes blinking as the cold droplets fell against my face. The sky was grey and an eerie fog surrounded the river. The tops of the trees along the rivers edge began to sway. Suddenly, a low grumble came from the bank. I turned to look. It was my dog Atim, staring at me from the trees. He was half wolf, half German Sheperd. He was dark grey with a black strip starting from his jaw all the way down to his chest but the most distinct feature of Atim was his size. Even sitting he probably came up to my neck. Most people who met Atim ran away scared or kept their distance. I tried to reassure people that Atim wouldn't hurt a fly, but usually there was no reasoning with them. "Yeah, I think its time to go home too" I told Atim. I slowly walked out of the river; my skin reacting to the chilly air no better than it did the water. I slipped on my shoes and began the hike home. The storm was taking a turn for the worse so Atim was more than willing to follow.

The walk home was long and exhausting. Atim and I saw the occasional deer and we jumped through puddles trying to get home as fast as we could. "Finally" I yelled, barely able to hear myself over the pouring rain. Atim barked in agreement as we crossed the deserted park to my house. It was nestled where it was nearly invisible to anybody who was driving by. It was an old brown house with a purple door. The garage door was rotting out, and the windows were either cracking or already broken. It was an old run down house but it was still home. We walked up the front steps. I quickly glanced at the cracked driveway, but was not surprised to see nothing there. I open the old purple door and quickly stepped inside. I swept my hand across the wall to find the light switch in the dark. My hand found the switch and with a slight click the lights were

on. I blinked from the light and notice there was something on the kitchen table; a few half-eaten pieces of pizza. I laughed and said “Hey, Atim, looks like we forgot to clean up before we left the house.” He let out a few barks and I sat down to eat.

After I was done I looked out the window. *Hmm, storm’s not going to clear up for a while* I thought, *maybe I should just go to bed.* I walked down the narrow hallway and turned at the last door. My room was small; a single bed took up most of the space. The closet was no bigger than me. I quickly got undressed and lay down in my bed. As I was shutting my eyes I noticed a small picture on the windowsill. “Oh right” I said, slapping the top of my forehead. I reached up for the object and snatched it off the shelf. It was a picture of my mom and brother. I brushed the dust off and examined it. In the background was this. It was when we first moved here and bought it. I laughed, “Those would probably been the best days of my life, except Atim wasn’t there so it would have to come in second.” I whispered in the darkness. I heard big thumps coming down the hall and into my bedroom. Atim must have heard his name. I stroked his head as he lay on the floor beside me.

I remember the day we got Atim. My older brother and I were walking down the river like I was in earlier this evening. It was our first time there. We were walking along the edge when suddenly we heard tiny moans. We followed the moans and found Atim. I came up with the name and thankfully Mom let us have him. It took some convincing but everything turned out in the end. Those were the good days. It wasn’t too long after that my brother got in trouble with the law and ended up running away. I never saw him again. Since then my Mom has rarely been home either. She comes sometimes once every two weeks. Usually when I am at school. I put the picture back in its place. Every night before I go to sleep I look at that picture. It gives me good dreams. I rolled over and quickly placed the sheets over my body. “Goodnight, Atim”, I whispered, but there was no answer, only his heavy breathing. I fell asleep.

The next morning I quickly got up and had a shower. I was shocked at how much mud and dirt I had on me. Those mud puddles were not the best thing to walk through. After I scavenged the fridge for what it had left, and gave Atim half of what I found. “HmMMM, after school let’s go to the grocery store.” I said as I gave Atim half of an apple. After we ate I casually turned off all the

lights in the house and walked out to the bus stop. It wasn't far, just across the park. I usually had company whenever I left my house. Atim was always right behind me when I walked to the bus stop.

When we got there I wasn't shocked to see high school kids keeping their distance, probably because what looked like a huge wolf stood staring at them. I laughed to myself as the huge yellow bus pulled in front of us, avoiding contact with Atim and me. They scurried to their places and I gave Atim a nice pat on his enormous chest. "Bye Atim, make sure you go home" I said cheerfully and walked up the stairs. As I went to my seat I heard a loud gasp come from everyone surrounding me. The bus driver let out a shrill yell as he jumped back in his seat. Everyone seemed to jump back, mimicking the bus driver. I glanced back.

I soon realized what their problem was. Atim was standing on the steps. To the bus driver he must have looked like a large bear. "Atim, go home!" I said in a stern voice, but despite my harshness Atim just stared at the bus driver and wagged his tail.

"Get that thing out of here!" The bus driver yelled so loud even I was shocked. I quickly went to Atim and grabbed his collar. I led him outside and said "Atim, go home." He seemed to understand because he suddenly darted away. The bus became less tense and the bus driver came out of his defensive position. His face was red. I guess I would be scared too if a half wolf dog suddenly began breathing on me in such an enclosed space.

I took my seat and stared out the window. I couldn't see Atim anywhere; I hoped I didn't hurt his feelings, but I was angry too. My arm would be sore all day from carrying him off the bus. After the bus began moving I noticed there were a lot of people avoiding me. There was no one sitting within a two-seat radius of me and I could hear people whispering about Atim and me. I guess I should be used to it by now, aboriginal kids around here were outcasts. Nobody talked to them, even at my school people acted like they were scared of me. For one thing they didn't talk to me and they kept their distance. I wasn't the only one, though. Many aboriginal kids had the same problem. The only difference was they have grown to accept it. If you are not the same, you get

treated different. I, on the other hand, do not accept it. We have done nothing wrong. Most of us are good people, and we haven't done anything to them.

The deafening sound of the bus brakes interrupted my thoughts. I quickly stood up and joined the unorganized line out the door. When we got outside everyone seemed to create a wide distance between them and me. I suddenly became extremely frustrated. I tried to control my temper and walked quickly into school.

The day went as usual. Triple math class, then double science. By the time lunch came I had calmed myself down to walk out of the school without freaking out. I sat on the bench outside watching everyone gossip about the latest record by a band. I never really listened to music; I couldn't afford to buy it. After the bell rang I assembled myself for Social, the last block of the day. During the class Mr. Vermont explained what being prejudiced means. I had to laugh to myself because I found myself comparing my experiences with this new word. Were people really prejudiced against me and my people? I began daydreaming about the night my mom told me the story of when she was taken out of her home by the government and forced to learn English. That's why me and Atim relate to each other so well, we are both outcasts. My thoughts were interrupted with the sound of the bell. I stood up and walked to the bus.

When I got home Atim was waiting for me at the front steps. "How are you doing boy?" I said, patting his head as I opened the door to the house. Atim walked happily past me to his dog dish and began eating the few remaining crumbs of the apple from this morning. I studied the bowl, there on either side of it was the name 'dog.' I remember the day my brother and I bought that bowl. We couldn't find the name Atim on any of the ones in the pet store, so we had to make do with 'dog'. A rough bark from Atim shocked me out of my daydreaming. His bowl was empty. I sighed, "Let's see what we have" I moaned as I slowly opened the fridge.

The week went by fast. I ended up spending the remainder of my money on food for me and Atim. On Friday I got my report card. All my marks were in the eighty percent range and a few in the nineties. School came easy for me and I was good at it.

Before I knew it I was waking up on a Saturday morning. I was so happy I that it was the weekend I knew I would spend it at the river. The date was May twentieth 1977. It was a day that I would remember for the rest of my life. I woke with a start and quickly got dressed. I didn't even stop for breakfast I was so excited. I wanted to get to the river as fast as possible. Atim wasn't too happy about skipping breakfast, though. I was putting on my rubber boots when I heard the doorbell ring. I stood up and opened my little purple door. I was surprised to see a woman with blond hair and very pale skin on the other side. I opened the door all the way and observed that she was very well dressed. She was wearing a grey suit with a blue bow tie.

"Hello young man, are your parents home?" she said, trying to stare around me.

"Um, uhhh, well not my mom" I stuttered, still in shock that someone like that would be in a place like this. Before I could say anything more Atim came running past me. Everything seemed to move in slow motion as Atim jumped up to lick this woman's face. Atim's jumping and the mere sight of him must have shocked her. She screamed and stepped back. She fell down the concrete stairs and her screams stopped as she hit her head on the bottom. She was holding the left side of head and I could see blood dripping through her fingers. I ran down the stairs to help but she managed to push me away with her free hand.

"Stay away from me!" She screamed and stumbled to her feet. I glanced past her, we were attracting a very large crowd of people on our driveway trying to see what was going on. One man with a huge black moustache and a red button up shirt came running up beside the woman and helped her to his car. Even with help she still struggled to get in. I just stood there, scared and surprised. I didn't know what was going on. I looked back at the purple front door and Atim wasn't there. I looked at the driveway. Most of the people who had been watching were now dispersed or had left. So I quickly sprinted into the house and shut the door behind me.

"Atim" I said, my voice extremely shaky. I kept calling his name as I entered the dark living room. I flicked on the lights and saw him lying on the couch with his head in his paws. I sat beside him and began stroking him. "It's okay boy, it wasn't your fault. She fell. I promise" I whispered. The whole day we just sat on the couch thinking about what was going to happen

next. After a while, Atim fell asleep but I was too worried. By eight thirty, though, my eyelids became heavy and I slowly fell asleep. That night I dreamed that I was standing in the river. The clouds were black and the rain was pouring all around me. I looked around but Atim wasn't there; I was alone. Lightning blasted almost right beside me. I was scared. I ran home but there was no way out of the river, I was stuck in the river as the water flooded all around me. There was no Atim; there was no help, there was nobody.

A knock on the door woke me from my bad dream. I looked at the time; it was nine in the morning. I wiped out the sleep out of my eyes and looked at Atim. The noise had also woken him up. "Atim stay on the couch" I cautioned as I got up to answer the door. The knocking became louder and more frequent. I opened the door without peeking through the eyehole. That was probably the biggest mistake of my life. A man with a blue uniform greeted me. He had a badge stating that he was an R.C.M.P. He was six foot two and had dark black hair.

"Hello," he said, "is there a parent or guardian in the premises?" he asked politely.

"No" I answered quickly, trying to keep my voice from shaking.

"Oh, okay, well um, I'm here to inquire about a dangerous animal who was spotted by several witnesses stating that he attack a woman who had a few bad injuries." He finished "I was wondering if this animal is here today?" I didn't answer but my heart stopped when I heard Atim brush past my leg and go to the officer. Immediately the man took out a leash from his back pocket and placed it on Atim's collar. I started to sweat as I watched the man leaving.

"Where are you taking him?" I yelled. I followed him down the stairs and out the driveway.

"He has been labelled a dangerous animal, we are taking him to the vet to be put down, I'm sorry." He answered politely. He led Atim to the police cruiser.

"No!" I yelled, grabbing the man's arm. "He has done nothing wrong! That woman tripped!" I stuttered over most of the words. The RCMP officer just brushed me off. "We have several

witnesses, including a bus driver who said that this animal attacked him” the man said as he opened the back door to his car.

“No! Please!” I yelled again. Hot tears were rolling down my face. “He has done nothing wrong!” I was screaming now as the man shut the door to the car with Atim inside. I looked at my dogs face through the caged glass. “Please sir!” I screamed as he went to the driver’s side.

He looked at me from across the cruiser and said, “I’m sorry.” He got in his car and drove away. Atim was staring at me through the back window as the rounded the corner. I fell on my knees and cried hysterically. *Why was this happening to me? He’s the only thing I have left, I need him* I thought as I got up and ran through the open purple door of my house. I ran into my room and grabbed the picture of my now dispersed family. *I was so happy then. It doesn’t seem fair, why did they leave me.* All these thoughts were running through my mind. Tears were still rolling down my face. The picture fell from my hands and onto the floor. It shattered to a million pieces. I fell down beside it, my breathing uneven. *It’s over. I have nothing left. Nothing at all.* I thought as my body curled up into a ball.

The rest of the day I sat there beside the shattered picture. My mind was racing, I couldn’t stop crying. The day began and ended this way. I sat there frozen as if I was a rock. I didn’t stop thinking about what happened until finally I drifted to sleep. I dreamed of people coming to take away my family.

### ***Author’s Statement***

I wrote this story to show how the judgments and prejudices of people can really hurt someone. Atim is a symbol for all people who have been judged for the way that they look instead of who they actually are. These issues are happening today and hopefully with more awareness we can stop it. I also wanted to use the relationship between a boy and his dog. A relationship between humans and animals are usually very strong, so I used that to my advantage. They can relate to

each other and face the same problems. This story takes place in the 1970s where prejudices against Native people were stronger than ever. This short shows the issues that arose from that time and also how our people dealt with them. In this story I wanted to state the emotion reality and trauma for many aboriginal children in that era, even after they have become adults. I wanted to make classmates and friends, even teachers aware that this did happen in one point in time, and it greatly affected the aboriginal community.