“Okay, Woody! You’re up!” Chloe announced. “Moment of truth, Dawg!” “You don’t scare us, you little sausage!” “You got this, son!”

Everyone was yelling at once - some cheering me, others taunting me - but everyone knew the ribbing was in good fun. It was the Hard-knock Hounds versus the Big Bad Bruisers in the biggest event of the year - the Fourth Annual Neighborhood “It’s All in Good Fun & Games” Tournament.

It all started several years ago when Mom realized we didn’t know all our neighbors. “Knowing our neighbors is important,” Mom had said. “There are so many benefits to having good neighbors – and to have good neighbors then we have to be good neighbors! There are people living right down the road from us and we don’t even know their names. That’s going to change.”

So, Mom made her world-famous sugar cookies – 8 dozen to be exact – and Mom, Dad, Chloe and I began the task at hand. House by house, we rang the doorbell and waited. Slowly but surely, the door always opened. We introduced ourselves and handed them a batch of sugary treats. Shortly afterwards, we hosted a cookout for everyone. The rest, as they say, is history. Now we visit, watch out for each other’s houses, pick up mail when someone’s on vacation, and borrow – and loan – cup after cup of sugar.

And once a year we have a friendly competition. Whiffle ball, Horseshoes, Kickball, and now Cornhole.

Although the tournament was for fun, it was serious business. The losing team had to treat the winning team to ice cream sundaes. More importantly, the winning team got bragging rights for the year!

We were in the final round of play. The score was tied at 19. The first team to reach 21 points won. The Bruisers had already thrown, meaning my team, the Hard-knock Hounds, was on deck. It was my turn to pitch.

“Here are your four beanbags. All you need is to put one bag through the hole or put two bags on the board and we win,” Chloe encouraged as she handed me the bags. I listened as people still hollered. “You’re gonna choke,” one of the Bruisers yelled. “You can do it, Woody!” I looked over and saw Dottie Miller, the Maltese who lived next door. She was wearing a pretty yellow dress and was sipping her mom’s famous homemade lemonade. My heart skipped a beat. Besides Mom and Chloe, Dottie was the prettiest girl in the neighborhood. Suddenly, I was nervous. Mom and Dad must have noticed because they started cheering for me.

I gripped the first bean bag, focused on the hole, and gave it my best toss. It soared through the air and hit the pavement. “That’s okay, Woody,” my teammates yelled, “you’ve got 3 bags left. Sink this one in!” I tossed the second bag. Cheers erupted. We were one point ahead.

“All you need is one more point, son,” Dad yelled. I focused and tossed. Next thing I knew, I was hoisted in the air! “We won! Three cheers for Woody!” Everyone chanted as they tossed me up and down in the air.

I saw Dottie waving at me. I raised my paw to wave back, forgetting I held the fourth beanbag. I watched the bag soar through the air, land on the refreshment table and knock over a crystal pitcher. It wasn’t just any pitcher. It was Mrs. Miller’s favorite antique crystal pitcher – the one she served her famous lemonade in.

Shards of glass covered the patio. My teammates paused the celebration, and everyone helped clean up. Seconds ago, I was a winner. Now I felt defeated.

“It was an accident, son,” Dad reassured me as he and Mom swept up the glass.

“You dad’s correct. It was an accident,” Mrs. Miller said before I had the chance to apologize. “I’m just thrilled your team won!” “Me too!” Dottie echoed, wiping lemonade from her hair.

“Thank you, Mrs. Miller, but I promise I’ll replace the pitcher,” I explained.

“You don’t need to wor…” Mrs. Miller started to respond, but I held up my paw and respectfully interrupted. Accident or not, Mom and Dad had taught Chloe and me to respect other people and their property. I wouldn’t feel better until I replaced the pitcher.

“I have ten dollars and thirty-eight cents in my piggy bank. I’m guessing the pitcher costs at least twenty dollars. I’m going to get a job, earn the money and replace the pitcher.”

“You’re a good boy, Woody.” Mrs. Miller’s comment caused me to blush.

“Thank you. By the way, do you know of anyone who is hiring?” For some reason, this made everyone laugh.

“Actually, I do,” Mrs. Miller answered. “And they need someone with a good arm who can throw!”