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# Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey raised a lion in San Francisco

Peter Hartlaub  
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Future Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey with his 5-month-old lion cub, Togare, in November 1964.

Chronicle archives 1964

In the beginning, Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey and his pet lion were no big deal in [the city of St. Francis](#).

They were so accepted in San Francisco that he brought the cub — which later grew to 500 pounds — to a kindergarten class at Hamlin Elementary School.

“Togare was an enormous success,” the Chronicle reported in 1964, speaking of the big cat, “and students in the classes he visited went home with shining eyes and a tall tale to tell.”

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LaVey would become one of the most notorious characters in city history, but his lion was an early entry point into a 30-year career of steady headlines and memorable antics.

By the end, their narrative became bonkers even by San Francisco standards — involving the Satanic Church, the police, a wounded SPCA worker, future S.F. District Attorney Terence Hallinan (defending the lion), a face-off with a jaguar, lots of property damage and San Francisco movie royalty.

And what became of the lion? That story is even more wild.

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The Chronicle ran its first feature about Anton LaVey’s lion, Togare, on Dec. 13, 1964, after the cub visited Hamlin School in San Francisco.

Let's start at the beginning: LaVey's first appearances in the Chronicle were in the paper's least demonic pages, the Women's Section. A July 7, 1964, story headlined "He's a Ghost Inspector at Night" described LaVey as an "organist, hypnotist and psychic investigator" living in a strange Richmond District home with black walls and a fake passageway fireplace. But there was no mention of the devil or lions. LaVey wouldn't found the Church of Satan, an international religious organization now headquartered in New York, for 18 months.

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Church of Satan founder and relentless self-promoter Anton LaVey unveiled a model of himself, complete with a nude woman on an altar, at the San Francisco Wax Museum on Oct. 25, 1972.

Jerry Telfer/The Chronicle

In early stories, LaVey also relayed his work experience, a curriculum vitae that shifted constantly through his life, to the point where it was impossible to decode myth from truth. At various times he claimed previous jobs as a lion trainer, carnival organist, police photographer (the police denied it), circus performer and accordion teacher.

But the lion was very real. The cub, named Togare, entered LaVey's 13-room Victorian mansion at 6114 California St. around Halloween 1964. There were news reports of LaVey walking the animal through the supermarket and dining with astrologer and sexologist Chester "Gavin" Arthur, grandson of 21st U.S. President Chester A. Arthur.

"Somewhere between the ragout and the fromage, LaVey's pet — a 250-pound lion named Togare — leaped on Gavin in an excess of lion love and tore his poor suit to tatters," Herb Caen reported on April 7, 1965. " 'This,' laments Gavin, 'is what I get for not hiring a lion-sitter.' "

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Church of Satan founder Anton LeVay with his pet lion, Togare, in April 1966.

Chronicle archives

Rather than be scandalized by the feline's public appearances, in the 1960s San Francisco seemed mostly cool with raising a lion in a residential neighborhood. The Chronicle in 1965 reported more than 60 big cats living in the Bay Area. Many were smaller ocelots, but there were reports of citizens paying up to \$700 for a lion or tiger.

When the media grew less interested in the lion antics, LaVey added a bombshell. He shaved his head, donned a cape and devil horns, and on Jan. 28, 1966, performed a wedding between a local socialite and journalist as a "high priest of Satan." A naked woman was on an altar. And LaVey presented a marriage certificate proving it was real.

The stunt was good for LaVey's attention-seeking career. Chronicle reporter Jonathan Root reported "the largest gathering of the press since the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge." But it was bad for the lion, who during the ceremony reportedly pawed sadly on a back screen door.

Days after the coverage went national, 125 neighbors signed a petition saying the lion roared too loudly and was a danger to the community. LaVey was charged with disturbing the peace.

The satanic priest launched a full-throated defense, calling the group that protested "a lynch mob of little old ladies." Letters to the editor supported LaVey. At a San Francisco Board of Supervisors meeting to revisit city laws on exotic pets, several women with boa constrictors showed up to support LaVey. "We will beat the case," Hallinan told the Chronicle.

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Aug. 17, 1967: Anton LaVey performed the wedding of Judy and John Raymond as a high priest of the Satanic Church of America.

Joe Rosenthal/The Chronicle

Meanwhile, LaVey announced he was founding the Church of Satan and writing "The Satanic Bible," a 1969 book that has reportedly sold a million copies and been studied long after its author's 1997 death at age 67.

But on April 1, 1966, while the lion's fate was being debated, disaster struck on California Street. The Chronicle reported that LaVey agreed to cat-sit a friend's 280-pound jaguar named Kitty, at that point about half the size of Togare.

With their cages in the back yard, stacked on top of each other like two-story San Francisco flats, Togare went wild and attempted to dig through the floor to get at his rival. When LaVey tried to move the angry lion into the house, disaster ensued.

"Among other things, the following happened," the Chronicle reported. "An SPCA man got bitten and clawed, the jaguar got hauled off to the zoo, Togare ripped up some \$800 worth of household effects, assorted neighbors who were peeved at the sorcerer anyhow got a little angrier, and LaVey decided that maybe he will de-lionize his mansion after all."

The Chronicle reported San Francisco Police Department officers and three zoo workers were also on hand. Within a week, after stated plans to sell Togare to a circus for \$5,000 fell through, the lion was donated to the San Francisco Zoo.

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April 5, 1967: Anton LaVey's lion, Togare, after the animal was moved to the San Francisco Zoo.

Art Frisch/The Chronicle

From there, LaVey's career only climbed. He appeared on national TV [including "The Joe Pyne Show,"](#) and in 1972 received one of the highest city honors: A likeness of himself — in cape with a nude woman on an altar — appeared at the San Francisco Wax Museum.

But after the move to the zoo, the Chronicle never updated readers on the status of Togare.

I sent a message to San Francisco Zoo communications director Nancy Chan this week, hoping the zoo had records of Togare's passing. She responded that Togare sired a cub named Trouble, who was a favorite of longtime lion keeper Jack Castor.

Togare, however, was renamed Neil and sold in 1972 to "N. Marshall of Saugus, Calif." That's Noel Marshall, who directed the lion movie "Roar," a notoriously disastrous production known as ["the most dangerous movie ever made."](#)

The movie featured Marshall's wife, "The Birds" star Tippi Hedren, and took 11 years to make, eventually being released in 1981. Press reports said 70 cast and crew members were injured on the set. (Although reports of "Roar," like reports of Anton LaVey, are in dispute; Hedren [told Variety in 2016](#) that the number of injured was closer to seven.)

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Actress Tippi Hedren, who became an animal rescue advocate, wrote a 1985 book called "The Cats of Shambala."

Simon & Schuster

Togare's role in "Roar" is unclear — dozens of big cats appear in the movie — but apparently he was a family favorite. The Daily Mail in 2014 published 1970s photos of Hedren's daughter, "Working Girl" actress Melanie Griffith, playing with Togare near the family's pool. (There's also a photo of a 14-year-old Griffith [relaxing in bed](#) with the lion.)

"Roar" was a commercial failure, but it changed the life of Hedren and Togare. The actress founded the Shambala Preserve in rural Los Angeles County in 1983, supported by the Roar Foundation, which "provides sanctuary to exotic felines ... so they can regain their physical and mental health and live out their lives in dignity." Hedren continues to serve as president.

It's unclear when Togare/Neil died. Inquiries to the Shambala Preserve were not immediately returned. But we know it was far from the Church of Satan and San Francisco.

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