

Humorous

Serpent Scare

Within a few days I was up on crutches, and I even took my wife on a date to see a movie the next weekend, leaving at home the steel poles that chafed my armpits. By the time the flick ended, I was exhausted, pretty sore, and ready for my crutches again. Donna helped me stagger from our car to the door of our four-plex. She unlocked the door, shuffled inside, and headed down the darkened staircase without switching on the lights. My crutches were conveniently propped by the doorway, and I reached for them to relieve my knee from the pressure of walking downstairs. I had no sooner stretched out my arm to grab the crutch, when Donna turned to ask me a question. She gasped and warned me not to move a muscle. I obeyed, arm outstretched and motionless. The moonlight shone into our doorway, illuminating what looked to Donna like a snake wrapped around the top of my crutch. I slowly cranked my cranium to verify her discovery, whereupon I simultaneously yelped and hopped back on my good leg.

There are two things in this world that petrify me. One—and I know this sounds dumb—I have always been afraid of vampires, and two, snakes. I was white as a ghost. Panicked, I asked Donna to do something quick. She retorted with bewilderment, asking what she was supposed to do. The slimy green and gold reptile was coiled around the rubber armpit padding of my crutch, repeatedly shooting its tongue out at me and watching my every move. Each time the snake hissed, I almost peed my pants. Donna recommended I call the dog pound to ask them who we should call for help. Too late. I was already on the phone calling my mom. Donna wrinkled her eyebrows, asking what the heck my mom would know about snake removal. My mom asked me the same question. OK, so I wasn't thinking clearly.

I took Donna's suggestion and called the dog pound, and they gave me sound counsel. I made my way to the crutch and slowly squatted down, which usually would have sent stabbing pains shooting through my kneecap, but I was a little distracted by the situation. Fear and adrenaline had momentarily masked my physical agony. I gently but firmly grabbed hold of the bottom end of my crutch, lifting it up and away from me as I headed out the door. To my relief and surprise, the snake cooperatively stayed wound around the other end, staring at me as it came along for the ride. I hobbled down the sidewalk for the manhole cover in the street, where I planned to bonk the crutch on the pavement until the snake unwound itself and slithered down into the sewer.

Two of our pot-head neighbors, on their way into their apartment next door, approached me and asked what all the fuss was about. I scarcely began explaining when one of them interjected, "Roody, dude. How are ya, buddy?" I

couldn't believe it. They proceeded to unwrap the snake, saying, "We missed you. Where have you been? You've been gone for two weeks, man. We thought we'd never see you again." By this time, Roody was off my crutch and positioned around the neighbor's neck with his head perched peacefully on the guy's shoulder. I stood there dumbfounded. If the snake had been missing for two weeks, how long had this beast been slithering through our long, green shag carpet, thinking it was the Amazon rain forest? How many nights had the snake joined Donna and me in our bed, or my son in his crib? It was all I could do not to swing the crutch at my neighbor's head. Instead, I waved them on their way and let them rejoice over finding their long-lost pet.

Right around the five-month pregnancy mark we went on a vacation trying to take advantage of those last few opportunities alone as a couple. Our gynecologist suggested that, for medical care convenience, we didn't travel very far, so we chose a motel only a few hours from town. The motel featured beautiful hot springs nearby and an outdoor swimming pool and hot tub about fifty feet up a grassy hill right outside our door. The doctor had cautioned Donna to avoid immersing herself in hot tubs because that was a surefire way to induce contractions and premature labor. Heeding the doctor's warning, she obediently sat on the edge of the hot tub next to the pool and dangled her feet into the inviting bubbly waters. There was no one around; we had the whole pool area to ourselves. I decided to dive straight from the sweltering 105-degree hot tub into what felt like subzero degree temperatures in the swimming pool. Yes, I was showing off. I resurfaced from the dive at the other end of the pool, gasping for air and struggling to catch my breath from the shocking temperature change.

Donna smirked at me and shook her head. She was always shaking her head at me for one reason or another. Donna has said more than once that she feels sorry for most women, including herself, who suffer with an aching, sore, and stiff neck muscle ailment she termed the "housewife's neck" from continually shaking their heads at their husbands.

"Keep shaking your head, woman, because you ain't seen nothin' yet." The next thing she knew, I was tossing my bathing suit onto the ledge of the pool and dog paddling commando style. Donna's jaw dropped, and she quickly looked around to make sure we were still alone. By this time I had jumped up onto the ledge, dived into the water again, and was trying to swim the entire length of the pool underwater.

As I embarked on my endeavor, Donna's expression changed from amusement to horror. Oblivious to what was unfolding above the surface, I proudly continued my underwater mission with my goal just seconds away.

Donna's eyes were fixed on the gated entrance to the pool area. A large family was heading up the stairway to the pool. Donna tried to wave a warning to me, but to no avail. She hopped out of the hot tub and ran to the gate, where she tried to head the family off at the pass. The father barged his way to the front of the troop, wondering what in the world all the fuss was about. Donna discreetly but quickly explained the dilemma to him, and he immediately turned to stall his family for a moment while my wife ran back to get my attention. She threw my bathing suit at me, but it stayed floating in the water just above me. I swam right past my bathing suit, focused on victory. I did it! I made it to the end of the pool, submerged, without taking a breath. I swooshed up out of the water onto the ledge of the pool like a trained sea lion at Marine World.

A split second later, an expression of panic replaced my look of victory, and I momentarily froze in fear. I was in a pickle and a jam. I saw the father using his outstretched arms to herd back his family while offering some bogus excuse as to why they could not come up the stairs to the pool area. Donna motioned to my bathing suit floating at the other end of the pool, but my instincts kicked in. I chose the "flight" option of the "fight or flight" reflex. In one graceful motion I pounced to my feet and sprinted to the other side of the pool area, where I exited the scene by hopping the fence and disappearing behind the building housing the change rooms. I crept, tiptoeing and wincing, through the thorny weeds and stubble around the back of the building, where I covered my indecent exposure with my hands and inconspicuously spied on the activities of the unsuspecting family. When the father saw I had absconded, and Donna gave him the green light with a sheepish look and her thumbs up, he lowered his arms and let his agitated family bully past him. As soon as the family was at the pool and out of sight, I made a quick scan in all directions. Ascertaining the coast was clear, I did my best fifty-yard dash to our motel room door and vanished inside.