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A Snake In The Grass: A First-Hand Encounter with Ophidiophobia

By Rebecca Dobbs

The day started like any other Western Oklahoma spring day. The wind was blowing, the sun was blazing. The temperature was unseasonably hot, almost 100 degrees. That was the day that I let my dog, Ozzy, off of his chain to get some extra exercise, since the cows that he loves to chase were at the vet.

I had decided that I needed to run errands out of town, and knew that I wouldn't return before the cows were brought back. I was chasing the mischievous, shaggy-haired, black and white dog around the yard attempting to catch him to put him back on the chain. That's when it happened. I came around the back side of my vehicle as Ozzy came around the front. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Beast, my other dog, come bouncing up to the front fence of his pen, tail wagging, ready to get in on the action of the chase with Ozzy.

Suddenly, he stopped. All four feet leaped simultaneously off the ground and he jumped straight backwards almost three feet; no easy feat when you weigh in at around 120 pounds. His fur stood up in a ridge down his back. He crouched low to the ground, nose stretched out towards the fence, a low, menacing growl coming from deep within his throat. Noticing this strange behavior from Beast, I said to him "You silly dog, what's

wrong with you?" Ozzy and I saw it at exactly the same time. Coiled in the weeds against the metal gate of Beast's pen was a rattle snake. Judging by the pile of snake, that thing had to have been at least six feet long. Time froze. Suddenly Ozzy sprang into action! His furious barking at the snake jolted Beast and me out of our frozen panic filled state. Beast, not one to be left out of the action, joined Ozzy in his frenzied barking, lunging, and snapping at the snake, who by this point was as scared as I was.

As I watched in horror, I heard the angry rattle of the snake's tail, a sound I would hear for weeks to come. I saw the trapped snake begin to lash out in fear. Twice the snake attempted to strike Beast in the face. Every strike towards my beloved dog was like a strike to my panic filled heart.

My first clear thought was "How do I get these dogs safely away from this snake." As if Ozzy had read my mind he finally listened to my command to "Stay" and allowed me to catch him and snap the chain back on his collar, keeping him a safe distance from the fence. My next prob-



lem was how to get Beast away from what he considered to be a new chew toy and safely into the barn. I ran to the door of the barn and threw open sliding door that opens into Beast's pen. My only explanation for his sudden response to my hurried call to come in the barn is that he also sensed the urgency of the situation.

Now that both dogs were safe, my next thought was to eliminate the snake; a menace to the livestock that would soon be returning. It was time to call in reinforcements. I don't own a gun so I called the first person I could think of that did. I called my Aunt Linda. One hurried conversation was all it took. As soon as she heard me say "Bring a gun, there is a huge snake in my front yard" she sprang into action. While I waited for Linda to arrive, my eyes stayed riveted on the snake.

Suddenly it was gone! In the blink of an eye the snake disappeared. In that moment I lost all of the comfort that I had previously felt in keeping my feet on the ground. I frantically began searching in circles around myself desperately trying to find the snake. He was nowhere to be found. I searched in the yard, under the propane tank, and inside of Beast's pen. I got my shovel and began beating on the pile of scrap metal that lies

against the barn right beside where the dogs found the snake. There was no snake to be found.

After what seemed like an eternity, Linda finally arrived. She quickly piloted her truck up the driveway and leaped out of her truck, barely stopping before grabbing her shotgun. It kind of reminded me of Granny from the Beverly Hillbillies. She bolted over to me and asked, "Where is the snake?"

"I don't know" I replied, "It disappeared in the blink of an eye." Linda and I again searched everywhere for the snake, looking outside and inside the barn. We even looked under Beast's enormous, ugly, plywood doghouse. We never did find that snake. After a thorough search of the property, Linda decided that the coast was clear, unloaded her shotgun and vamoosed.

Every time I venture out in to the great beyond that is my front yard, I am constantly on high alert. Every pesky grasshopper that jumps out of the wild, overgrown- gourd vines and onto my shin, every dry blade of grass that brushes against my flip flop clad foot, causes me to leap in fright. Every clink of Ozzy's chain as he scampers around the yard sounds like the menacing rattle of a snake's tail. I have discovered I obviously suffer from ophidiophobia, or the fear of snakes.