

## The Snake

The weather was perfect that summer day in 1951, with the bright sun heating my dark brown hair. Mother, Grandmother Rene, Bobbie and I had gone to the apple orchard up in Farmington for a few days.

Mother and Grandmother Rene were busy in the house, so Bobbie and I set out to explore. She and I weren't allowed to cross the irrigation ditch to the next farm, and we couldn't go back into the trees, out into the field, or into the road along the front. The barnyard was stinky. Out front, beside the house and near the ditch, grew a huge cottonwood tree. There really wasn't much to do after we looked around, so we climbed that tree. It was so tall we thought we could climb clear up to the sky.

We climbed so high that everything on the ground looked little and we sat there a long time, with our legs hanging from a branch as big around as both of us put together. We sat there singing songs we'd learned at Vacation Bible School and enjoying being up in a huge big tree on a sunny summer day. It was green and cool up in that tree. The ground was hot and hard and brown. Then I looked down on the ground and saw something move.

"Look over there," I said, pointing to something wiggly.

"What is it?" asked Bobbie.



We stopped singing and watched. We watched a yellow-brown snake slither across the yard. It wound its way, not in any hurry, just swishing from one side to the other, moving across the sunbaked yard.

I don't remember who screamed first, but in an instant we were both screaming at the tops of our healthy young lungs. We screamed long, we screamed loud, and we didn't stop. We had never screamed like that before or since, and it was fun. It was like singing really, really loud. It felt good!

We screamed so loud that Mother and Grandmother Rene flew out the door like they were shot out of a gun. They probably broke the record for the twenty-yard dash, running to that tree.

"What's wrong?!"

"There's a snake."

"Where?"

"Over there!" We waved our hands, pointing across the yard to the spot near the house where the snake was making its get-away.

Grandmother Rene ran over and looked.

"It's just a bull snake. Bull snakes aren't poisonous. They eat mice, and they're good to have around," she called back over her shoulder.

"Don't you ever scream that way again unless you're really in danger!" scolded Mother. Her voice shook, and there was no question she meant it.

"Okay!" we replied in chorus.

Mother and Grandmother Rene went back in the house. Laughing about the commotion we'd caused, we climbed down and went back in the house.

After lunch a man came to pave the front porch of the adobe house. Before he could pour the concrete, he had to move a huge pile of boulders from under the porch roof. Bobbie and I stood to the side, watching him throw those rocks in a new pile in front of the porch. Suddenly we saw a familiar wiggle.

"There's that snake again," I said, cool as a cucumber. Now I knew those snakes were our friends, and besides, I knew I'd get in trouble if I started screaming again.

“Aaaack!” That man yelled nearly as loud as we had. He jumped back toward the wall, stumbling over rocks behind him. “Where is it?”

“There.” I pointed to the rocks where the snake was wriggling from its hiding place out into the yard. I thought it was really funny that I knew better than to scream about a snake, but a grown man hollered and ran.

The man grabbed his shovel and dashed after the snake. Grandmother Rene and Mother came running out to see what the ruckus was this time. They ran up just as the man planted his shovel in the snake’s neck.

“Why did you do that?” asked Grandmother Rene, looking at the snake with dismay.

“It came crawling out of those rocks and scared the daylights out of me.”

“It’s just a bull snake. You didn’t have to kill it.”

The snake was writhing around with its head hanging by a thin flap of skin. She picked it up by the tail, swung it around her head a couple of times and hurled it off into the bushes along the ditch.

Wow, I thought. She actually picked it up. A snake. A snake with its head chopped almost off! That was so awesome! I knew I’d never forget about it, and sure enough, I never have.