

# Things that scare me

By Sam Bari

This could be the shortest column ever written, because only one thing that I know of scares me to the point of unspeakable terror . . . Snakes. There — I said it, and I'm starting to sweat. I hate snakes. I do not dislike snakes. I hate them with an unreasonable passion.

I know — you don't have to tell me. My fear of snakes is without doubt or argument, irrational. Nonetheless, being anywhere in proximity to the slithery creatures causes me to hyperventilate.

Writing about them might be therapeutic and help me get over my snakaphobia, or so I thought. I was wrong. Actually, the word for people like me, who loathe snakes with a preposterous fear, is ophidiophobic. However, I think ophidiophobia is much too difficult a word to remember or pronounce, so in my book, snakaphobia will do nicely. Snakaphobia is a perfect, all-encompassing term that will work for anyone who hates snakes as much as I do.

Whether my fear of snakes is reasonable is of little consequence, it is not unfounded. I have good reason to dislike snakes. They have not treated me kindly.

People who say that poisonous snakes are more afraid of us than we are of them have not had the misfortune to inadvertently annoy a copperhead, rattlesnake or water moccasin. I assure you, if you are on the wrong side of their testy dispositions, they will make you pay.

I know this because I have



**You can't beat a system you can't understand**

By Sam Bari

been bitten by all three poisonous species. That's right — three different snakes on three different occasions have viciously attacked me for about a thousandth of a second each. That's how fast they are. It's over in a flash, and it hurts. At first, it feels as if someone punched you. But an hour later, trust me, if you are bitten, you'll hate snakes too.

The oddity here is that most people don't even know a person who has been bitten by a poisonous snake. Think about it. Ask your friends; you'll find this to be true. Nonetheless, I have been bitten three times. I am beginning to feel as if the snake community is singling me out. The odds against being bitten by a poisonous snake are enormous.

The first two experiences I will forgive because I was in their territory. The last snakebite was significant because he was on my front porch at my house in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Can you believe it? A water moccasin was stretched out in front of the door enjoying the shade on a hot summer day. I walked out the door carrying an armful of packages, didn't see him, and stepped right on him, apparently in mid-nap. He was not

happy.

I was wearing a pair of shorts and flip-flops, as many Floridians do in the middle of summer, so my legs were exposed. He bit me right on the calf. Had I not jumped away, he would have bitten me again, because he instantly coiled, ready to pounce.

When a snake bites you, the first reaction is to run. Having been bitten before, I knew not to do this, because the consequences of speeding up your heart, which has already sped up as a result of the shock, are severe.

As calmly as I possibly could, I walked to my car and drove to the nearest hospital, which was about a mile away. I walked into the emergency room, went to the window and said "snakebite." The nurse immediately took me inside. A doctor was there in an instant. I cannot deny that the service was superb.

Any stories you have ever heard about what they do to you in case of snakebite are probably not true. Snake venom is powerful stuff, so think about how strong the antivenom they inject into your unsuspecting veins with needles the diameter of the average exhaust pipe has to be to neutralize it.

According to the medical profession, "antivenom serum is the only effective treatment for envenomation after snakebite." How comforting. Unfortunately, it is so strong that "acute adverse reactions to the serum are common and may include anaphylactic shock." That's medical talk for you could


start twitching and flopping around wildly on the floor after they stab you a few hundred times with the needles containing the antidote.

After the treatment, the doctor asked a few questions, one of which was, "Do you know the species of the snake?" I told him it was a water moccasin. He then asked me how I knew. I said, "I read his identification tag." The doctor gave me one of those, "Oh, we have a wise guy here," doctor looks and then asked if I brought the snake with me.

"Of course," I replied. "He's

waiting in the car. He was kind enough to drive me over." The doctor was not amused. I have no idea why he needed this information, but he appeared to be intensely interested in my answers.

Anyway, I have written my allotted number of words for the week. You know why I hate snakes, and I know you care. So I will close with: People who keep poisonous reptiles as pets are not exactly sick, but they are definitely not well. They are just part of that system we can't understand.



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