

THERE'S A S-S-S-SNAKE IN THE WASHER

It's hard to top my friend Audrey's terrifying snake experience. She was seated on her bathroom throne when a snake tumbled out of the ceiling vent into her lap. And my maternal grandmother, a pioneer who participated in the 1889 Oklahoma Land Run, had a bone-chilling snake encounter when she cleaned a dark closet in the house built on their homestead and pulled out a fully-grown copperhead. According to my mother, Grandma Maude was not afraid of the devil himself, so my guess is that the most bone-chilling part of the encounter was experienced by the snake.

My friend Grace was once startled by a snake in her vegetable garden and was still standing there, thirsty and sunburned, when her husband returned from work. When he asked why she hadn't moved, she replied, "Because this is the only place I know the snake is not!"

My friend Jean could only scream and stomp her feet when she realized that the reason the baseboard in our hallway appeared to be moving was because Asclepius—my son Greg's 14-foot Burmese python—who was sleepily lounging against it, decided to have a little stretch. Asclepius also gave me a trilogy of frights: when I found him blowing bubbles out his nose holes while taking a little swim in the bathtub; when I exited the shower to find him barring my path; and when, while I was reading the newspaper, he slithered up the back of the couch and rested his head on my shoulder to read the comic page (I think he liked the snake in B.C.).

While I admit to having had more scary snake experiences than the average mother of sons, none was worse than the one I encountered doing the laundry. Ray and the boys were watching the Kansas City Chiefs and Oakland Raiders battle it out on TV one Sunday when I decided to wash a few clothes.

I carried the basket containing the clothes down to the basement, dumped them in the washing machine and waited for it to fill. As soon as the machine began its agitation cycle, I noticed what appeared to be a striped leather belt among the clothes. I reached into the machine to retrieve it and a snake—at least nine feet long—whipped around my wrist.

I shook my arm so violently that the snake lost its death grip on my wrist and plunged back into the suds. The roar of the TV crowd was no contest for my screams. Shoes thumping heavily down the basement stairs, my trio of men rushed to the rescue. "What's the matter?" demanded Ray, "we thought you'd been electrocuted!"

"There's a *s-s-s-snake* in the washing machine!"

Three pairs of blue eyes stared at me incredulously. "No, there's NOT," my men said in unison.

"Yes, there *is!*" I babbled hysterically, "Yes, there *is!*"

To humor me, the guys peered into the machine. Sure enough, here came the snake agitating upward in a sudsy welter of towels and jockey shorts. Ray turned off the

machine, found a stick and stuck it into the washer. The garter snake—which the hot water apparently had shrunk to a less threatening 12 inches—wrapped around the stick as frantically as he had whipped around my wrist.

I was pale with shock and shaking with fear. “Poor little thing,” Ray murmured soothingly. He was talking to the snake.