

This anecdote was first written as a submission for a writing contest conducted in N E Oklahoma by The Pryor, Oklahoma local newspaper. The piece won the contest and appeared in several newspapers under the column heading 'Suppertime' a reminiscence series I wrote for years between 1990 – 1999

### **Snake In The Hen House**

Mama said there was a snake in the hen house. Mama sent one of us girls down to gather eggs and there were only a few. And that was four days in a row that there were not many eggs. So, Mama knew a snake was getting her eggs.

Mama knew what to do. She sent Patty and Anne down to wait in the hen house. No darned old snake was going to steal Mama's eggs for long. Mama said the girls were to watch the hen box. If a snake came, Mama told Patty and Anne one sister was to come to the house to get Mama and me. The other sister was to sit still and keep her eyes fixed on that snake.

Mama had shovels and hoes ready by the screen porch back door. No snake was going to get away with stealing those eggs for long. And, Mama said, if we did not stop him right here and now, well then he just might set his sights on one of the new baby rabbits our does were going to be producing in just a few days. It was the time for action. We had to get that snake. Not too much time passed and flying along the path from the chicken yard here came a breathless, wide eyed Anne.

Blasting through the screen door across the porch and into the kitchen came sister Anne. "The snake is in the chicken house!" screeched my wrought up sibling. The snake is in the chicken house; that was our signal for action. Through

the kitchen door we three tore, without stopping we hit that screen door and right on through. Mama, Anne and I each grabbed a garden tool and away we went at a trot. Patty was sitting beside the chicken roost, and staring goggle eyed at the snake. By now Mr. or Mrs. Snake had ensconced itself nice and comfortable in the hay filled box and was quiet, unsuspecting, just doing his job waiting for lunch. Pretty smart snake, he did not bother downing the glass eggs Mama put in the boxes.

Our steps were filled with enormous stealth. Mama, Patty, Anne and I crept up to the row of little boxes daddy had carefully constructed along the north west side of the hen house. We held our tools of destruction at the ready. The quiet snake appeared to be dozing.

Patty, Anne and I each raised our hoe, shovel or big stick. We were ready. We girls knew what must be done. Mama gave a tiny nod of her head. Down came the barrage of implements. The astounded snake awoke with a start and began a most valiant effort to rid himself of the struggling determined lunatics now pinning him down.

Following a bit of gritted teeth struggle a sizeable portion of the reptile came lurching over the side of the shelf Daddy had built in front of the nest box. There the poor fellow dangled. His head was pinned in the hen box with one implement, his tail was attached to the shelf with another and his middle worked to flee. Poor snake he really wanted to be anywhere but in that hen house. We held fast; he wriggled with great vigor.

Her face flushed, hair askew, Mama was holding the reptile's head in place with her shovel. Patty and Anne gave the snake a good looking over, flung their tools into the air and with one voice shrieked "**rattle snake.**"

They were gone in a flash. All Mama and I saw was two frantic little girls bounding away. Daddy's sturdy gate was ignored. The girls cleared that eight foot fence surrounding the chicken yard in two mighty leaps. Before Mama and I realized what they were doing, Patty and Anne were down the other side of that enclosure and were galloping along the path toward the house. Mama's disbelieving shouts to come back and help were not heeded at all.

How that woman managed to shout in quiet, refined tones I shall never know. But she did.

My sisters were nothing more than two pairs of unfettered skinny windmill arms, unrestrained churning bare legs and feet, and wild terror filled eyes disappearing into the screen porch. Pigtails flapped like banners on a staff from the sides of their heads. The noise coming from their mouths was a cross between a stuck siren and a banshee with a toothache. Squawking terrorized chickens ran for their lives all over the chicken yard. Rabbits fled to the safety of their sleeping boxes.

The dog dozing on the back step leaped to his feet. He didn't know why his girls were yelling but by golly he was there to help. The barking made by the crazed dog streaking for the girls sent the cats into a frenzy. Under the house they went and up into the screen porch.

Mama remained right there faithful to her post. Perspiration dripped from the end of her nose. The snake continued doing his utmost to get away. He wriggled and jiggled and with only Mama's garden tool now pinning him to the shelf he had begun, scale by scale, inch by inch to win his war.

The just past course of action of my younger sisters had triggered within me helpless, mindless mirth. I lay in absolute hysteria upon the earthen floor of the chicken house. I rolled back and forth, I kicked my feet, I pounded my fists, bellowing with laughter unmindful of the snake, the

dirt, the mud or worse scattered on the surface I could no more have stopped laughing if my life had depended on it. Once again squawking hens, chicks and the rooster fled to the furthest corner of the yard. There the anxiety-ridden flock stood huddled together clucking anxious little fretful clucks. They peered toward the guffawing mad child laying on the chicken house floor.

Mama with her shovel still in place continued to shout at my long gone sisters to come back and help. Her anguished shouts at the girls were interspersed with dire muttered threats of just exactly what she planned to do with me if I didn't get up off that ground and help her get that snake.

Poor old Snakey did at last manage to get himself extricated from Mama's shovel. He slithered away from the hen box, over the shelf and dropped down to the ground. Despite Mama's best efforts I continued roaring with glee and Snakey slowly began limping his bruised and battered body past my head through the hen house door and over to the fence. Up over the redwood plank at the base of the fence and through one of the openings in the chicken wire fence the poor old fellow tottered. He dropped into the bamboo on the other side and slithered away.

At last I managed to get myself dusted off and with most snickers repressed did help Mama carry the garden implements back to Daddy's tool shed. Mama was a bit nonplussed to find the back screen porch door locked. We knocked. We called the girls' names. No answer, no one came. Nothing. We walked around the house to the front door. It was locked. Mama and I went from window to window until she finally found one unlocked. We removed the screen, slid the window open and I clamored inside. The house was very quiet.

Mama and I searched room to room for my sisters. We called their names. Silence. Mama let the dog in the house.

He shot for the big bedroom we girls shared. At last Mama and I found the pair of them in the 'girls' bedroom. There were Patty and Anne cowering under their beds.

Mama was disgusted with all three of her daughters that day. We never saw the poor old snake again dead or alive. I think the poor old fellow must have sought a quieter more congenial eating establishment than the one he had just vacated.

My sisters still just insist all these years later that that little egg nabbing garter snake we tried to drive from the hen house was **the biggest rattlesnake they ever saw.**