

Henry's a Presbyterian minister from Atlanta, Georgia and his oldest son collects snakes.



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

I wish our family could be normal like most other families. Don't misunderstand me. I don't mind the everyday excitements, such as my wife getting her hair frosted and then being bitten by our dog when she tried to get in the front door. These are normal occurrences.

The things that bug me are the abnormal events, which seem to be taking place with alarming regularity.

Take the other night, for instance. We haven't seen Cousin Henry and his family of seven in six years. But at 10 p.m. they dropped in to spend the night.

(Henry's oldest son collects snakes.) In fact, he had one with him that he had found just the day before. His name was Jerry and he was about four feet long—with the colorings and disposition of a copperhead. (Although Henry assured us he was a harmless corn snake.)

My wife does not like creepy things. Crickets, spiders, lizards and bugs drive her batty. The very thought of having a snake in her house almost pushed her over the brink. Fortunately, Cousin Henry ~~who is a Presbyterian minister~~ is also professor of counseling at a clinic in Atlanta. He finally smooth-talked my wife into allowing the snake to remain inside overnight, as long as he was in his bag.

All went well until the next morning when we discovered the bag was empty—and Jerry was someplace in the house. "Now don't be upset," Henry said calmly, "if we don't find him before we leave he'll eventually turn up."

"I know. I know!" my wife screamed.

We looked in all the places snakes like to hide. The only place we couldn't look was under the refrigerator. That was because my wife was on top of it.

Cousin Henry apologized for having to leave. Pulling me aside he confided there was a possibility Jerry might be pregnant, which could mean multiplications. My wife heard him and suggested (loudly) that if Henry didn't show up for another six years it would still be too soon.

For the next two days we searched everywhere, during which time I sensed my wife was approaching a total emotional collapse. Last night I was standing in the front room when I heard a blood-curdling scream from the back bedroom. Instantly, it seemed, the house reacted like it had been struck by a tornado. Children, dogs, cats, turtles were screaming and scurrying in all directions at once. I knew what had happened.

"I knew it would be me that found him," my wife screamed hysterically. "He's under Timmy's bed. Help! Help! Where's your Daddy?"

I decided the wisest thing for me to do was slip out the front door. Not that I am scared of snakes, of course. I remained outside, however, until Bonnie, age 12, crawled under the bed and pulled Jerry out. "Poor snakie, did they scare you?" she cooed, stroking his back.

When I re-entered the house my wife's face was as white as her new hair-do. "You coward. You chicken. You ran away. You . . . You . . . You snake." She threw a blunt object in my direction. I decided to leave again.

We turned Jerry loose in a vacant lot behind the Presbyterian Church (somehow that seemed ironic

justice) and I've written Cousin Henry the good news. I remember a remark Henry made when he was leaving the other morning, "At least Jerry didn't escape while we were visiting Uncle Walter and Aunt Elvira in Vero Beach." ~~So for the time being,~~ ~~Hummmmm. Well, anyway,~~ things are back to normal.