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## Boazilla and St. Charles

by Carol Lloyd



I was just weeding, for Pete's sake. I didn't expect to see a glistening brown and yellow coil pulsing in the lily patch. I actually did a double take, the kind seen on cartoons. My toes curled and I ran, wobbly, back into the house. My neighbors said later they heard a weird moaning coming from our yard.

Fourteen-year-old Ben was thrilled to hear my news. "It must be a boa constrictor, mom," he said, running to take a look. The kid would do anything for a science project.

It's hard to run with toes curled. It's harder still to find someone to come take away a huge snake. With growing impatience, I tried the SPCA - no luck, the zoo - sorry, ma'am, and finally my brother-in-law who knows everything.

"Try Critter Control," he told me.

Bless him. Bless Critter Control. Bless Charles Holt, a.k.a. St. Charles, patron saint of terrified homeowners. The company's head technician, Charles calmed me down on the phone and then, two days later, marched into the lily patch to grab the megamonster.

Not that he wouldn't have come that day, but by the time Ben and I ran back to make sure Boazilla was still there, the patch was deserted. Charles said that the snake would probably return, and when he/she/it did, I should call back and he would come.

Of course, in the meantime, I was alone in the house. By



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myself. And Boazilla knew where I lived.

I took up my station the next morning, armed with a lead pipe (Well, what would you choose?) and a portable phone. I waited. No sign.

I began doubting my sanity. Ben was at camp and no one could verify the sighting. Had I unknowingly eaten magic mushrooms or other hallucinatory substances? On the second day, when my husband Al and Chris, our other son, returned from a trip, I asked hesitantly if they wanted to see where the thing was. They nodded politely. Sure, let's go see where the big snake was supposed to be. We walked back and - there it was!

Charles told us to stay there and watch where it went if it moved before he could arrive. By the time he came, the only remaining sign of Boazilla was an inch or two of his tail, as he was slithering into the woods. Our specimen turned out to be over 11 feet and more than 100 pounds.

The neighbors came, telling each other, "The Lloyds have a boa constrictor in their backyard!" One woman, 90-year-old Lucille, removed her oxygen connection so she could get in on the action.

Charles held the monstrous snake as it flailed and fought desperately to coil. He told us he would worry about an 8-year-old child with this predator around. Charles marveled at Boazilla's size, his coloring, he showed us the teeth. He called for back up help (Don't look at me!).

The TV camera came and we had our 15 seconds of fame. Friends and associates are still telling me they saw me on the news. Others say, "That was YOU who had that huge snake!!"

No one called to claim the thing: letting a deadly animal escape is against the law. Charles said that Boazilla escaped twice from the lidded aquarium tank in which he was kept at Critter Control's Kentucky office before finally dying.

For his part, Charles says Boazilla was the thrill of a lifetime. "I'll probably never catch another animal that good," he told me wistfully the other day. A photo of the two of them adorns Charles' mantel.

Me, I don't take weeding lightly any more. It's not a task for wimps.

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