

## House of Snakes

It was supposed to be their dream home.

Jake and Allison Wilkes lived in a small apartment. They lived there for the first few years after they were married. They hoped someday to move to a bigger place.

“We knew what we wanted,” said Jake. “We wanted to be away from town. We wanted a large yard. We wanted lots of space to play. We planned to have three kids. So we needed three bedrooms for them. We wanted a guest room. Allison’s parents sometimes come to visit. We wanted a house with two stories. We wanted a newer house that didn’t need repairs.”

In February, Allison saw a listing for a house. It had just been put on the market. “I just knew this was it,” she said.

The house was large, more than 3000 square feet. It had five bedrooms and an office. It had a large porch and a huge yard.

“There were lots of trees, lots of space,” said Jake.

“I could imagine sitting on that porch on a summer evening. We’d be drinking lemonade. We’d just enjoy the view,” said Allison.

The house was in foreclosure. The previous owners had stopped making payments on it. The house was owned by the bank.

“We were told that the previous owners had moved out last summer. The house had been empty. The bank took it over. Then the bank put it up for sale.”

Before they bought the house, the Wilkes had an inspection done. The inspection showed that the house was in good shape. It was dusty. But there were no big problems.

“We moved in on a Saturday in May. Then I heard Allison scream,” said Jake.

“I was carrying a box up the stairs,” Allison said. “A snake darted in front of me across the step. It went under the porch. I hate snakes. I was a little freaked out.”

Later, Jake saw another snake near the back door. A friend saw a snake in the front yard.

“We figured that some snakes had made a home under the porch. They wanted to keep warm over the winter. I thought we could get rid of them,” said Jake.

The snakes were garter snakes. Garter snakes are harmless to people. Most often will try to hide when people are around. They grow to a little more than two feet long. They are often brown or greenish gray in color.



Summer began. The days got warmer. Jake and Allison started seeing snakes more often. Soon the snakes showed up inside the house.

“We never saw snakes upstairs. So that’s basically where I lived,” said Allison. “I would run down the stairs to get something out of the fridge. Then I’d run right back upstairs again.”

“I kept a shovel in the house to kill the snakes. Then I’d use the shovel to throw the dead snake

out into the yard,” explained Jake. “The most I killed in one day was 43 snakes.”

About three weeks after they moved in, everything changed.

“I stepped out on the front porch one morning,” recalled Jake. “I was going to get the newspaper. It looked like the grass was moving. It was like flowing waves of green.” Looking closer, Jake realized he was seeing snakes moving through the grass. There were hundreds of snakes. “I knew then that we had a big problem.”

Jake told Allison. Together they went to look in the crawl space under the house. “There’s a trap door in the floor of the closet,” said Allison. “It leads to an open space under the house. We’d never looked down there. The guy who did our house inspection should have checked it.” What they saw shocked them. The crawl space was filled with garter snakes. They were crawling over and under each other. There were thousands of snakes.

“We moved into a hotel that afternoon. I was not staying in that house anymore,” said Allison.

Snake expert David Clapper later checked the house. He said that the house was probably built over a snake den. “Snakes hibernate in the winter. Then come out when the weather gets warmer. The Wilkes first saw the house in February. They didn’t see any snakes because the snakes were hibernating. Now it’s getting hot outside. The snakes are out looking for food. They’re getting warm in the sunshine.”

No one has been able to offer the Wilkes a solution for getting rid of the snakes. “If they burned the house down,” said David Clapper, “there would be snakes that survived in their den. They’d come right back.”

The Wilkes want the bank to buy the house back from them. “The inspector didn’t do his job,” said Jake. “He should have checked the crawl space. He would have seen the snakes. We would never have bought the house.”

For now Jake and Allison are back in an apartment. “We can’t afford to buy another house. We need to get the money back from the first one,” explained Jake. “I don’t know what’s going to happen. Hopefully we’ll work something out soon.”