

House of Snakes

It was supposed to be their dream home.

Jake and Allison Wilkes lived in a small apartment in town for the first few years after they were married, but they knew that someday they would move to a bigger place.

“We knew exactly what we wanted,” said Jake. “We wanted to be out of town a little ways, to have a large yard with lots of space to play. We planned to have three kids, so we needed bedrooms for them and a guest room for when Allison’s parents come to visit. We wanted a house with two stories that was fairly new. We didn’t want to have to make a lot of repairs and renovations.”

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

The house was large, more than 3000 square feet, with five bedrooms and an office. It had a large wrap-around porch that looked out over a three acre lot.

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

“I could just imagine sitting on that porch on a summer evening, drinking lemonade and just enjoying the view,” said Allison.

The house was in foreclosure, which meant that 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

sitting empty until the bank took it over and put it up for sale.”

The Wilkes had an inspection done on the house before they bought it, and the inspection showed that the house was in good shape. It was dusty from sitting empty for so long, but no significant problems were reported.

“We moved in on a Saturday in May. Midmorning, I heard Allison scream out on the front porch,” said Jake.

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

Later that day, Jake saw another snake near the back door, and a friend reported seeing a snake in the front yard.

“We figured that some snakes had made a home under the porch to keep warm over the winter. I didn’t think it would be a big deal to get rid of them,” said Jake.

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



But as summer began and the days got warmer, Jake and Allison started seeing snakes more and more often. Soon the snakes started showing 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 refrigerator and then run right back upstairs again.”

“I started keeping a shovel in the house to kill the snakes, then I could use the shovel to throw the dead snake out into the back yard,” explained Jake. “The most I killed in one day was 43 snakes.”

Then, one morning 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. From the porch, looking out over the yard, it looked like the grass was moving. It was like flowing waves of green.” Looking closer, Jake realized what he was seeing were snakes moving through the grass – hundreds and hundreds of snakes. “That’s when I realized we were in trouble.”

Jake told Allison, and together they went to look in the crawl space under the house. “There’s a trap door in the floor of the hall closet,” said Allison, “that leads to an open space under the house. We’d never looked down there, but the guy who did our inspection before we bought the house was supposed to have examined it, so we figured there was no need for us to go down there.” What they saw shocked them. The crawl space was literally filled with garter snakes crawling over and

under each other. There were thousands of snakes.

“We moved into a hotel that afternoon. There was no way I was staying in that house,” said Allison.

Snake expert David Clapper later examined the house and reported that the house was likely built over a snake hibernaculum or den. “Snakes hibernate in the winter and then come out when the weather gets warmer. Probably, when the Wilkes first saw the house in February, they didn’t see any snakes because the snakes were hibernating. Now that it’s getting hot outside, the snakes are out looking for food and getting warm in the sunshine.”

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

The Wilkes are trying to get the bank to buy the house back from them. “It’s obvious that the inspector didn’t do his job,” said Jake. “If he had examined the crawl space like he was supposed to, he would have seen the snakes, and we would never have bought the house.”

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