

To All the Bugs I've Loved Before

All of us know them. From the tiny to the large ones. We encounter them all the time, even if we do not see them. From flyers to crawlers to diggers, they are all around us, invading our space, our skins, and our fears.

Bugs have six legs, spiders have eight, pedes and pills have many more. Who remembers playing with the dinosaur-age pill bugs ('roly-polies')? Watching them roll up was amazing for young eyes.

Crawlers are often the worst. The ever-present, perennial cockroach is the most prolific invader. The multibillion-dollar industry of sprays, traps, and swatters, are the effects of this six-legged, sometimes flying pest. Other insect crawlers do not spread half the fear. Ants can come close because of their numbers and stings.

As a boy, I always had a magnifying glass close by. In the empty dirt lots in Roswell, the big, flat red ant beds were ever-present. Long lines of large red ants carry bounty back to the nest and encounter the outgoing marching workers, rubbing antennae for communication. These lines offer a prime hunting ground for the magnifying glass.

Focusing the small, white-hot bead of light from the sun through the glass and holding it on an ant for a few seconds, sets the ant's body of formaldehyde on fire. All that I destroyed did not make a dent in the population. The horned toads I placed near the marching lines feasted unabashedly.

Part 2 - Episodes and Memories



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Crawlers are tiny to large. Think about chiggers, jiggers (sand fleas), ticks, fleas, earwigs, and bedbugs. I remember covering my legs with sulfur powder when cleaning out the weeds along the fence lines in Comfort TX. I seldom had ticks or fleas but neglecting the chemical covering was chigger misery.

Bigger arachnid crawlers include scorpions, tarantulas, and other spiders. Having encountered the red hourglass lovingly called a widow and the brown recluse spider, I have never suffered their venom. A goal I never dared fulfilling was to hold a hairy monster tarantula.



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The most frightening experience of my young life was coming face to face with a vinegarroon while looking under a sofa. There, staring at me, was the most ferocious creature I had ever seen!



It still is not comforting to know that they are harmless.

Another activity of fun with bugs was flying the big colorful June beetles. These creatures loved the figs ripening on the bush. After capturing the beetle munching on a juicy fig, I tied the end of a strong thread to a hind leg and threw it up in the air to fly like a tethered helicopter around in circles.



The green June beetle on a fig leaf.

Photo by J. R. Baker

Part 2 - Episodes and Memories

I managed to avoid scorpion stings until about the age of 35. The water meter cylinder needed cleaning. Without using gloves, I reached and gathered a bunch of leaves and debris. I felt a sharp sting. I saw the small scorpion and wondered if I would survive. Remembering that ice is the first pain reliever, I packed a few cubes on the sting. It took a few minutes for the pain to go away. The thought of finding the stinging, ugly arachnids in bedding, shoes, cups, etc. has imprinted fear in many brains, including mine when I moved to Texas. Searching with a blacklight flashlight for the glowing exoskeleton is a fun hunting game.



Centipedes, millipedes, and silverfish are many-footed creatures we all know. Centipedes can hurt and are very scary looking; millipedes not so. Silverfish in bookshelves can devour volumes.

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And lastly, how can we miss the flying pests? The wasps, dirt dobbers, bees, gnats, and dastardly disease-carrying mosquitoes that buzz, sting, and bite all around us. We attempt to kill them in all kinds of ways; physically swatting, stamping, beating them to death, or poisoning ourselves with sprays, liquids, and roach tablets. When it comes to what she wants us to endure,

'Mutha' Nature is not our friend.