



## Charmed By Snakes

In a recent column, I mentioned my love for and attraction to unusual creatures. I say unusual in the sense that many people find it difficult to relate to the warm and fuzzy love I was referring to when I was talking about slugs.

Okay, so I was a kid. But, the truth be told, even now as an adult, I still have great love for critters that most humans would swat, squish, poison and kill. Before I get into those stories, I want to elaborate on the special ones from my childhood.

In case you missed it, in my summer tips column, I was speaking about slug control. That reminded me of my favorite slug story. I grew up here in Seattle.

My mother grew up in Berkeley, Calif. and a few times during my childhood, she, my brother and I would drive south to visit her parents. I loved my grandparents and did enjoy these trips but at that young age, I really wasn't very comfortable hanging out with adults. So, whenever possible I would sneak off for another kind of creature comfort.

That is when I discovered the banana slug family in the backyard. They were huge and a brilliant yellow in color.

I had a terrific time playing with them in the seclusion of the backyard every day. When it came time to return to Seattle, I couldn't bare to leave my slug friends and I refused to go without them. Giving up on convincing me otherwise, my mom helped me create a slug habitat and they made the trip home to Seattle with us. I don't actually remember what happened to them after our return but I believe my mom convinced me that they needed their freedom and they most likely disappeared into the yards of our neighbors. They were not the only critters to invade our neighborhood thanks to me.

My dad's brother was a career officer in the army while I was growing up and one of my favorite times was when our families would get together. As an army family, my aunt, uncle and three cousins were stationed all over the world. Sometimes we would visit them wherever they were living and sometimes they would come to Seattle to visit us in between assignments. We were so excited when they got stationed at Fort Lewis right here in Washington.

Back then there was no I-5 freeway between Seattle and Fort Lewis so going to see them was a big deal and involved a long drive to and from. Traditionally we would leave early in the morning and drive all the way down to the city of Pife to have breakfast at the Poodle Dog restaurant. Then we made the rest of the journey to Fort Lewis.

We usually stayed the night before driving

all the way back to Seattle. For some time their family lived on base and later they were able to secure off-base housing in an area called Dupont.

My brother and I got along famously with our cousins and had adventure after adventure with them whenever we got together.



## Our Animal Friends

by Martha Norwalk

The first time we visited their new home off-base, we had a particularly exciting adventure, at least it was for me.

We made the trip this time to see their new housing but we were only there for the day. Not wanting to waste any time, my cousins, brother, and I took off to explore the neighborhood. We were elated when a short distance away we found "wild country." There were huge fields of waving grass and rolling hills that appeared to go on forever.

We felt totally free and began running around in reckless abandon chasing each other and playing tag. As we finally slowed down and started exploring, I began paying attention to what was going on in the grass beneath us.

There were snakes. Not just some snakes, there were lots of snakes, everywhere we stepped. Have I told you how much I love snakes? All of a sudden, I was in heaven on earth, surrounded by what I imagined must have been billions of snake friends. I called them gardener snakes, later learning that they are really garter snakes. Truly, I didn't care what they were called, I just wanted them, all of them.

I stepped on one's tail to stop it and then picked it up by the tail and held on. It coiled up my arm. Neat! I stepped on and picked up another and then another, holding onto their tails as each coiled up my arm. I was charmed out of this world by these snakes and could not get enough of them. My brother and cousins, on the other hand, were grossed out and bored and went home. I kept collecting snakes. I continued until I had 50 of them on each arm, which was all my hands could hold! Now what? Gotta show mom.

Back to the house I went to share my new friends with my mom, who fortunately also loved animals almost as much as me. She knew I was serious when I said I would

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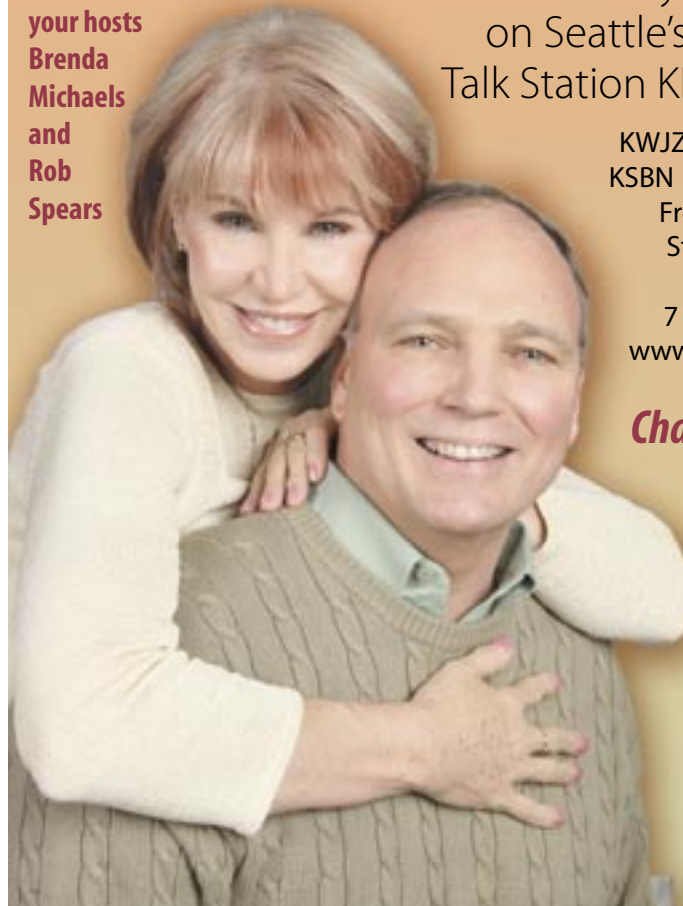
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