

It had been the week from hell. All I wanted to do was go home, have a nice supper with Robyn and decompress over the weekend. The last thing I wanted on a Friday evening was a circus on my front lawn. Alas, a circus is what we got.

It started innocently enough. We had just gotten the type of storm in Tucson that only happens once every four or five years. The roads were slick, the ground was soggy and the ditches were full of run off.

I made it home safely and parked in our driveway. I walked to the curbside to retrieve the rubbish bin and out of the corner of my eye, I saw something peeking from under the culvert that made me do a double take. I returned to the garage, stood silently and thought about it.

I went inside. Robyn was at her computer madly typing away on a project.

She stopped her typing and looked up.

“I think there’s an alligator in our culvert.” I stated matter-of-factly.

She closed her laptop and said, “Don’t be absurd, David. It’s probably just a frog. There aren’t any alligators in Arizona.”

I shrugged, grimaced and said nothing else of the matter.

We ate supper. We watched the evening news. And at about half past seven, I went outside for one final check. And sure enough, it was an alligator. And not only in the water, but it was fully sprawled nearby on the lawn basking in the evening sun. I froze in my steps, turned around and gingerly stepped back to the door.

“Robyn, “ I whispered through the crack.

She looked at me quizzically.

“Come here.” I motioned for her to come outside.

She followed. I put my index finger to my lips. I held her hand. We took several steps toward the driveway. I pointed at our reptilian visitor on the lawn. She spotted it, let out a scream that curdled my spine and ran back inside.

The alligator scampered down the ditch to the safety beneath the driveway.

I followed Robyn back inside.

“What in the hell are we going to do about that?” she asked.

“I guess the water will dry, it will find another place to live. I say we just leave it alone.”

“But how did it get here, David? In the middle of the desert?”

“Not completely sure, “ I replied, “Escaped from the zoo. Maybe it was somebody’s pet and got too big to be a pet.”

“We just can’t let it stay there, “ she exclaimed. She started clicking and swiping on her phone.

And just like that-the social media news travelled faster than light.

By 8:00 pm, an uninvited crowd of neighbors were congregating in our yard. They were shining flashlights down the culvert and trying to prod the alligator with rakes, shovels and other implements of yard destruction.

And then they broke out the lawn chairs. They turned on radios. Someone even showed up with an ice chest full of beer. Another fool brought a double barrel shotgun and proceeded to pace back and forth over the width of our driveway as if protecting the neighborhood from the beast.

Everyone was arguing about the size of the alligator and what they should name it. Their kids in pajamas were peering into the darkness of the culvert saying things like “Here Gator, gator, gator...” as if there was a little lost kitten beneath the driveway.

Around 9:00 p.m. , the news vans from the local channels arrived, set up their spotlights and began broadcasting. Helicopters hovered high above in the sky. Robyn and I sat on our porch and watched the bizarre display unfold, no longer in control of the events on our own property.

A man and woman broke out from the crowd and approached us. “Hi y’all” said the lady , “I’m Wanda, and this here is my husband Roy.”

Roy tipped his Arizona Diamondback hat to me but otherwise let Wanda do the talking.

“We rescue rattlesnakes, “ said Wanda. She pulled back her shirt sleeve and showed us various tattoos of snakes on her neck and shoulders.

I nodded to acknowledge the artistry.

“I’d like to crawl in there and try to fish the little guy out. He’s probably scared as hell,” said Wanda.

“Crawl into my culvert?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“And...rescue the alligator?”

“Exactly.”

“Ever done any alligator rescues before?”

“Nope. But I suppose it can’t be too much different than rattlesnake rescue.”

Robyn and I looked at one another. I looked back at Wanda and said, “Knock yourself out.”

Wanda pumped her arm and fist together as she proudly exclaimed, “Yes!”

She carefully crawled into the water and muck filled pipe while Roy held a frozen chicken on a pole at the other end.

The crowd leaned in silently and watched. The news crews focused their camera onto Roy. Seconds passed. Seconds became minutes.

I turned to Robyn and said, “What the hell have we gotten ourselves into here?”

Before she could answer, we heard Wanda let out a single loud shriek from beneath the driveway.

Roy bent over and looked in. “Did he bite ya, Babe?”

“No,” came Wanda’s reply, “but he just fucking crawled over me.”

The crowd let out a collective, “Ooooo...ahhhh.”

“Well, see if you can push him towards me, babe.”

“God damn, Roy. I’m trying!”

And then we heard struggling, thumping and splashing mixed with more of Wanda’s screams.” But suddenly an eerie silence fell upon the darkness of the drain pipe.

“Babe, Babe, Babe...” pleaded Roy.

There was no answer.

“Babe, can you hear me?”

Finally, Wanda’s voice could be heard from beneath the driveway, “Roy, “ she said struggling for air, “I got him! I got him in a head lock!”

“Well bring him on out, Babe.”

“God damn, Roy, don’t you think I would’ve done that already if I could. I’m stuck in this shit hole down here.”

I leaned back in my chair, put my hand on Robyn’s shoulder and said, “I don’t know whether to laugh or press the panic button.”

She nodded and said, “ I think it’s panic button time.”

At that instant, the fire department showed up. They pumped the water from the ditch, tied a harness to Wanda and tried to pull her out with a winch but try as they may, they couldn’t free her.

Just around midnight, a small construction crew showed up with jackhammers, pick axes and a small bulldozer. They proceeded to tear up my driveway one chunk at a time until finally the limp figure of Wanda laying prone with her arms clinched around the alligator’s neck and legs wrapped around it’s torso and tail began to take shape beneath the Arizona harvest moon.

Roy ran to his wife and lifted her from the sludge filled trench. She stood up. They heaved the alligator onto the road. It appeared to be dead. Three dozen people took out their phones and starting flashing their cameras. The news crews shined their spotlights on the alligator.

Suddenly, the poor beast reanimated from it’s seemingly catatonic state, let out a vicious hiss that pushed back the crowd and began galloping down the road. Every single person in my yard-the onlookers, the news people, the rescue workers, Roy and Wanda took off running after the alligator.

The alligator climbed up a steep rocky embankment and disappeared into a thick grove of cypress trees. And even though they all shined their phones and lights into the woods. And even

though they called to it over and over again to come out of the woods, the alligator was never heard or seen from again. Eventually one by one, the gawkers and busybodies turned around and left the road with looks of sullen disappointment on their face.

Our yard, albeit littered, trampled and destroyed, was silent and still. It was almost one in the morning. I looked at Robyn and said, “Well, mark the score, Robyn. Alligator-one, Humanity, zero.”

“If I live another fifty years, “ she said, “I don’t think I’ll ever be that entertained again.” She let out a sigh and held my hand.

A barn owl landed on our Palo Verde tree and looked at us. She blinked her eyes, indifferent to the world, as if this madness was nothing new to her.