



Tales from a  
**Sisters Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**Give snakes a break**

It may come as a surprise, but there are NO “poisonous” snakes in the U.S. Plants contain poison; animals carry venom. Will we ever get that right...?

I’m 87 years old, been an active naturalist for most of my life — and still plodding along — and I can count the times I’ve met up personally with a venomous reptile on my two hands.

At the moment my wife Sue and I are helping to conduct a state-wide golden eagle survey that takes us about 20,000 miles a season in our Toyota 4Runner, searching for eagle nests in an area about the size of Rhode Island. Once a season we see a rattlesnake and there’s tens of thousands of them in the area we drive and hike.

Come on people, give us old-timers a break, will ya’? My counterparts out here in the West are probably laughing up their sleeve at AARP’s approach to coming off with the same old nonsense about how dangerous snakes are, you’d better watch out for ’em and have your cell phone in your hand to call 911 when you’re bitten.

When my oldest son, Dean, was 3 years old back in the ’60s, he had a great attitude about snakes. He wanted to pick up every one he saw, and didn’t think any of them would bite him. At that time I was the naturalist and teacher for The Oregon Museum of Science & Industry (OMSI) frequently traveling to our Camp Hancock near the town of Fossil on the dry side of the Cascades.

Yes, there are rattlesnakes all around Camp Hancock; yes, we’d see about two a year and I’ll admit, I was worried about Dean grabbing up one in his marvelous enthusiasm to personally get to know every snake he met. One day driving to Hancock in our Ford Falcon van, a beautiful gopher snake started across the road right in front of us. It was big as a broom handle and the day was perfect for snakes. “Hey



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

**Northern Pacific Rattlesnake, not the villain many people make it out to be.**

Dean!” I said, “Do you want that gopher snake?”

Dean looked out in front and saw that beauty starting across the road and almost jumped out of his seat. “Oh, yeah, dad!” he exclaimed. I pulled over, hopped out and set him down and said, “Go get ’em Frank Buck.”

It went just as we thought it would. Without hesitation, he grabbed that big old bull snake right in the middle, and immediately that big old bull snake grabbed Dean’s hand. He yowled, but didn’t give up and used his other hand to grab the snake behind the head, hauled it off the ground, and then came running back to the van triumphantly, but with tears in his eyes, shouting, “I got him

dad, and he bites, too!”

Then we went looking for one our native rattlesnakes, but couldn’t find one, so we used pictures to teach Dean that there is ONE snake in our neck-of-the-woods he had to be more polite to, and why.

Snakes are — unfortunately — considered the bad guys of the world of nature, thanks to false advertising.

I once had a fly fisherman interrupt me during my discourse on bull snakes at a continuing ed class I was doing for Central Oregon Community College. “You have to kill every one you see!” he almost shouted; “they’ve cross bred with rattlesnakes; you can tell by the way they shake their tail.”

A lot of snakes shake their tail at you when annoyed, but that doesn’t mean they’re venomous; besides, cross-breeding gopher snakes with rattlesnakes is nuts.

Anyway, enjoy your times in the forest, field and desert, good people, and use your head. If you’re deaf as a post and wear hearing devices as I do, don’t depend on hearing a rattlesnake buzzing a warning (although I can with my devices). Just watch where you put your feet and hands, and use your eyes to watch for them. If you’re lucky and really looking, you may see one.

If you do, please take a photo and send it to me: jim@northwestnaturalist.net.

# Quilt Raffle

for

## FURRY FRIENDS FOUNDATION

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The third-annual Furry Friends quilt raffle art quilt, “No! No!,” was designed and pieced by Valerie Fercho-Tillery. The intricate detail and mischievous subjects make this a quilt you’d love to bring home.

The quilt is currently on display at The Nugget office, 442 E. Main Ave. Bring your pup by for a dog cookie and have a look!

Tickets may be purchased at The Nugget office or online at our website, [www.furryfriendsfoundation.org](http://www.furryfriendsfoundation.org).

Drawing will be held Monday, September 7, 2015.

100% of the proceeds go to Furry Friends Foundation.



“No, No!” by Valerie Fercho-Tillery | 44" x 62"



Tickets are \$1 each, six for \$5 or go for it, 25 for \$20.



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