

BATHTUB SPIDERS

by Elizabeth Gillan Muir

We lived in a large old red brick house that was covered in Virginia creeper. The vine was a lush green in the summer, and a stunning cornucopia of red, green, purple and orange in the fall. It was so thick that birds nested among its branches. It was also full of spiders, harmless spiders, but spiders by the hundreds.

I was a volunteer in the local school library. The volunteers' task was to shelve the books the children brought back, and help them find something new to take home.

One day, my daughter's kindergarten class came in with their teacher. They exchanged their books and afterwards, sat with their legs crossed in a circle on the floor. The teacher read a story. Then it was the children's turn to respond.

I beamed with pride as my tiny fair-haired daughter raised her hand. I was so pleased that she was eagerly participating in class.

"Yes, Deedee," the teacher encouraged.

"We have spiders in our bathtub and my mommy has to take them out before we can have a bath."

The teacher smiled. The young boys and girls laughed. The other mom volunteers hooted. I laughed, too, pretending to be amused, but inside, I was mortified.

'Oh my,' I thought, 'everyone will think I'm a lousy housekeeper. And what other family secrets has my daughter divulged in school?'

Much later, I looked back with genuine amusement and wondered why I was so upset. Since then, our family has met many real challenges and survived: serious illness, financial loss, physical disability. Harmless spiders in a bathtub? Insignificant.

Children grow up quickly. We have them with us for so little time. It was a lesson for me that we need to enjoy them while they're small—their delightful reactions, their innocence and naïveté. Even if we're tired and anxious. Even those moments when they're not so sweet and charming.

I also learned that I needed to gain perspective on what was really important in life, in helping children grow. It's a lesson I sometimes still forget! ②



Elizabeth and her children James & Deedee

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