

# Spiderman and the Panty Raid

By David Hood

When I was a high school student in central Texas, my hobby was spelunking on the weekends and during the summer. That's how I learned about the gregarious habits of arachnids and later almost got kicked out of Sunday school camp. But I'm getting way ahead in my story.

As I said, I enjoyed caving in my spare time and had amassed a lot of equipment. I had an old army helmet liner I had painted bright red with a carbide lamp attached to the front and held in place by a big rubber band made from a cut up inner tube. I owned a pair of blue coveralls with a National Speleological Society patch on each shoulder and an expensive pair of climbing boots. I was the proud possessor of 200 feet of goldline rope for pit work, and I had a nifty rappelling rig made from carbiners, brake bars and a parachute harness for descending. I even had a fancy set of Jumar Ascenders for getting back up the rope. In short, I fancied myself a well equipped and intrepid cave explorer and figured I was pretty hot stuff for a teenager.

My friend Butch Sellers called me up one summer morning and told me he had heard about a new lead in a small cavern out north of town near an abandoned miniature golf course called TINYTOWN. We decided to go and check it out. He came and picked me up around noon in his old green Ford, and we headed north. By the time we found the cave, it must have been about three o'clock in the afternoon.

Now it gets hot in Texas in the summer, and this day was a scorcher. The temperature plays an important part in this story. Everyone has seen movies where the hero is wandering around in the desert dying of thirst under a broiling sun when all of a sudden he stumbles across a vicious rattlesnake coiled to strike. Now that is Hollywood nonsense. Snakes have too much sense to kill themselves in the hot sun and prefer to hide under rocks where it's dark and cool. Needless to say, we were careful around cave entrances because we didn't want to disturb any of the local gentry, especially if they had fangs.

This cave entrance was a low crawl around three feet high and four feet wide. We lit our carbide lamps and I went in first, keeping an eye peeled for slithery buddies. There were no snakes. Around eight feet in, the passage widened a bit, and I guess my eyes had grown a little more acclimated to the darkness because I noticed that there was something very unusual about the ceiling. It was moving. I stopped crawling and looked up. Above me were about a hundred thousand daddy longlegs. Or maybe there were a million. They were packed so tight it was unbelievable and looked like an ominous, pulsating six-by-six foot black carpet on the ceiling. I was directly underneath them. I realized they had all congregated here to escape the heat, and I had a foreboding of what was going to happen next.

“Why yuh stopped?” hollered Butch.

I didn't get a chance to answer. Maybe it was the sound of Butch's voice or maybe it was the heat rising from my carbide lamp, but the spiders all decided to drop -- at once. Suddenly there were spiders covering my face and in my ears. Spiders were frying to death in my carbide lamp and seeking safety down my neck under the collar of my coveralls. It would have been a great shot for a horror movie. Spiders were everywhere.

I crawled forward rapidly, and a little farther on the ceiling rose enough so I could stand and brush myself off. Around a minute later Butch joined me.

“Danged if I've ever seen anything like that,” said Butch.

“Yeah,” I answered. “Wonder if they'll be waiting on the ceiling again when we go out later?”

They were.

And the rumor about a new passage to be explored in the cave was BS. Oh well, some days are like that. But this leads me to the second half of the story about how I almost got thrown out of church camp nearly a year later.

It was all Chuck's fault. At least that's the way I explained it to my mom later on. I never would have gotten in trouble at the Sunday School Retreat if he hadn't slipped in the shower and busted up his knee. At any rate, that's what started the chain of events.

The retreat was at a church camp in the hill country of Central Texas in a canyon along the Llano River, and it was beautiful. Just upriver from the camp, the Lone Star Brewery had filmed a beer commercial. Their first

choice for a site had been on the camp's section of the river, but the church turned them down. There was a dam across the river below the camp cafeteria, and the water was deep and a cold heartbreak blue. It was July and I really needed to get in that water and cool off, but I couldn't because of Chuck and his busted up knee.

What was preventing me from swimming was the camp rule about the buddy system. When Chaplain Frazier blew his whistle, everyone swimming was supposed to find his buddy and hold up his hand. This was supposed to keep any of us from drowning. Chuck was my assigned "buddy," and since Chuck was laid up, I couldn't swim. It was unfair; it was awful, but there was no help for it. So I went sulking down river below the dam feeling sorry for myself. I wanted to get away to where I wouldn't have to listen to other people enjoying themselves.

Now, down river around the bend there was a huge flat boulder on the shore which projected out over the water. I sat on the rock and tossed pebbles into the river for awhile, and then for some unexplainable reason I looked under the rock. There in the deep shade just a foot-and-a-half above the cool water was, you guessed it, daddy longlegs heaven. The entire underside of the rock was packed tight with them. And while I squatted there looking at the spiders, an inspiration bubbled up in me that must have had an infernal source since it certainly didn't come from Sunday school lessons.

Since our week at camp was drawing to a close, both of the boys' cabins were planning a raid on the girls' cabin that night to liven things up. It was supposed to be harmless fun, and Chaplain Frazier was in on it. Frank was supposed to sneak up on the roof of the girls' cabin real quietly with a couple of buckets of water. Then we would all holler and beat on the sides of the cabin until the girls' counselor, Miss Stapleton, came outside. When she did, Frank would soak her. I decided then and there on a minor modification of the plan.

I walked back up river to my cabin and got my pillowcase from my bed. Then I went back to Spider Rock. Working from the edges of the daddy longlegs colony so I wouldn't disturb them too badly, I grabbed big bunches of spiders by the legs and dropped them into the pillowcase. I had to keep shaking the pillowcase to keep them from climbing out, but I managed to get around fifty or sixty bunches into the bag. Each bunch must

have had close to a hundred spiders in it. My pillowcase was only a quarter full, but it was a **big** pillowcase.

After dinner that night I sold Chaplain Frazier on my modification for the raid. I told him I had a bunch of daddy longlegs I'd collected, and that I wanted to run inside the cabin, dump the spiders on the floor, and run out again. Then Miss Stapleton, the girls' counselor, would be sure to chase me out. Chaplain Frazier bought the plan. Looking back on it now, I know he thought I had only a few dozen spiders. He never dreamed I had **thousands** secured in my pillowcase under my bunk.

When it got dark later that night, the troops gathered for the raid. Frank climbed onto the roof of the girls' cabin and we passed up to him two buckets of water. Another kid named Bert was supposed to open up the door for me. I was to rush in screaming, dump the spiders, and run out as fast as I could. The plan worked fine except for a few minor hitches that I'll get to in a minute.

On the agreed moment, Bert opened the door and everyone started hollering and beating on the sides of the building. I ran into the middle of the cabin. The girls screamed, and the ones in bed sat up and held the covers in front like a shield. Other girls bolted for the safety of the bathroom at the rear. I turned my pillowcase upside down and nothing happened. then I shook it -- once. The result was amazing. The spiders all dropped out suddenly in a dark mass the size of a flabby basketball and hit the floor with a soft plop. I was so surprised I stood looking at them for a second. I didn't know myself that there were that many daddy longlegs in the bag. Then the mass of spiders heaved and began spreading out in a crawling black tide toward the edges of the room and the bunks where the girls were hiding. The screaming increased. I rushed for the door.

It was then that the plan started going a bit awry. As I ran for the door, Mavis Whitmore, the only girl of the group with any guts, let me have it hard along the side of my head with her pillow. I bounced off the doorjamb a little dazed and ran outside. Frank on the roof forgot his instructions to let me pass safely and drenched me with the first bucket of cold water. I ran to Chaplain Frazier's side, dripping wet, clutching my empty pillowcase.

Then Miss Stapleton stormed out of the cabin. I've never seen a woman so mad in my life. She was so hot she couldn't see straight, which was probably a good thing because if she had laid eyes on me at that moment

I think she would have attempted murder. She started to yell something at us, and then Frank cooled her off with the second bucket. She stood there sputtering and fizzing for a couple of seconds, and then she stomped her right foot down hard, shook her fist at us, said a few things that I really don't want to put into print, and raged back into the cabin.

It was at this point that Chaplain Frazier realized that he had seriously underestimated the effect of my spiders. "How many spiders were in that bag, David?" he asked.

"I don't know, maybe ten thousand," I answered.

Chaplain Frazier walked up to the cabin door and looked in. When he turned back to the group of gathered boys, his face was a little pale.

He walked back to us. "David, I want you to go back to the cabin and dry off. You'd better stay up there. The rest of you are going to help me clean up the girls' cabin."

Well, I walked up to the cabin by myself. I knew things had gotten out of hand, and I was worried about getting into trouble. I watched the girls march past the cabin to the cafeteria. An hour later Chaplain Frazier and the rest of the boys came in. They had bashed spiders with rolled up newspapers in the girls' cabin for a solid hour, and they were tired. Chaplain Frazier told me everything was OK and to get a good night's sleep.

I found out later that Miss Stapleton had wanted me shipped out of the camp that very night, but that Chaplain Frazier had calmed her down and argued in my defense, saying he was really just as much at fault as I was. That wasn't exactly true, but Chaplain Frazier was always a decent man. The last day passed peacefully, and the bus ride home was uneventful.

The next spring I asked Mavis Whitmore out for a date. She laughed and told me that while she liked me as a friend, there was no way she was going anywhere with the Spiderman.