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# Nature is Evil?

by: Diane A. Vaszily

## IS IT REALLY THAT SCARY OUT THERE?

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**Harmless, but scary looking, friends of ours (l-r): Regal Horned Lizard; Tarantula; Desert Spiny Lizard**

Do you remember the last time you were afraid of going outside? What lurks behind the next tree that could attack me? Will the “big bad wolf” eat me? You probably haven’t had concerns like these for a very long time. Today, children are surrounded with fears such as these, but unlike for us, the fears don’t originate from nursery rhymes and stories. Real life stories envelop us on an almost daily basis. We are inundated with news events showing the dangers inherent in going for a stroll in the desert, woods or park or searching for “critters” in the nearest vacant lot. We fear for our children but in doing so we leave them thinking that nature is evil!

I recently took a group of nine-year olds on a field experience, walking through calf-deep water, with nets, pails and poles in hand, searching for chains in the wetland food web. Terror and anger were evident in one young boy as he slogged along, tears running down his face. “Nature is evil!” was his cry and he was seriously distressed. As I walked by his side, holding his reluctant hand, he stammered on about being attacked or falling and disappearing under the tannin-



tainted waters. Even walking through knee-high vines on a safari-like trek caused consternation on his part. He spent six hours with us that day, interacting in all sorts of activities with his classmates and the four instructor/chaperones leading the experience. By the end of the day, Tony was smiling and appeared much more at ease. I spoke with him on the bus going back to the school and asked him if he still felt the same way about “nature.” His reply was, “Nature isn’t as evil as I thought. Everything I’ve heard and seen about it has always been scary, but it really isn’t that way. In fact it is kind of beautiful, even though it smells bad!”



**DAC member Diane Vaszily with Brownie troop at Gateway Desert Awareness Park in Cave Creek**



**DAC member Abby Hemingway teaching a group of 4<sup>th</sup> graders as part of the Desert Reach program**

Tony said he would go back some day and he wouldn’t be afraid, but more importantly, he said he really changed his mind about nature. He no longer wanted to destroy all the wild things and the natural places, the position he had held before the experience began. The firsthand experience with nature changed his way of thinking about such places. Some day that experience may change his way of voting when it comes time to save a

parcel of “wild land” from the bulldozer or make a donation which helps to preserve a piece of “sensitive land.”



What can we do to be sure that we reach other youngsters like Tony to offer firsthand positive experiences in our unique and special place we call the Sonoran Desert? There are more things that can stab, stick, sting and bite you here than any other spot on the planet! What must children and newcomers to the desert think! Rather than being regarded as the “healing balm” natural places are, they are being labeled as “wild” and “unsafe” where “something may get you.”

We need passionate people who understand and love the desert and willingly share it with children and adults alike. Experiences like these promote understanding on a deeper level and that understanding promotes the desire to preserve it just the way it is.

A culture of preservation could then prevail. Wouldn't that be wonderful!

