

Sniffing Spiders

By Cohen 'Watusi' 'Ozzie' Oswald

It was the summer of 1982 and the troop was at summer camp. It was dusk and just as he had done for the last eight years the Scoutmaster was taking his troop spider sniffing. The first year campers, as always, stood close to the SM in the gathering dark. The older, more experienced scouts stood back from the group waiting for the fun to begin.

The Scoutmaster explained that spiders emitted an odor that would travel up a flashlight beam if the flashlight was held in a certain way and that if one followed the odor as it became stronger he could walk right up to a spider. With that he put the base of his flashlight under his nose and making a big show of sniffing loudly he slowly turned, playing the flashlight beam on the base of the trees 50 feet away.



Suddenly he stopped and announced that he had just smelled a spider at the base of the large oak tree across the road. Slowly he advanced on the tree, sniffing as he walked. The little boys crowded in close. The older boys hung back. Even those that had never figured out how the SM did it hung back less they be teased by those who had caught on. You see, that was part of the fun. The SM never told anyone the secret and urged those who did figure out what he was doing to keep the secret. This applied to the adults also and, surprisingly, some of them never caught on. One even talked knowingly of how the odor was able to travel up the flashlight beam. The SM made a mental note to be in another state when this father finally caught on.

Walking up to the oak tree, all the while sniffing loudly, the SM pointed to a spider. The boys were impressed and wanted to know what the spiders smelled like. Different things to different people the SM replied. Cheeseburgers, cucumbers, whatever popped into his head. The boys spread out around the field yelling loudly at each other to be quiet as they tried to sniff a spider. Several boys thought they smelled a spider including one who was standing too close to a scout with a serious case of flatulence but no one found a spider that night.

The SM is no longer a SM but he still takes scouts and his older grandsons spider sniffing on warm summer nights. To this day it remains his favorite fun thing he learned in scouting as a boy. Why is this story appropriate for the KKK newsletter? In 1951 the SM of this story was a staffer at Kia Kima. A SM brought his troop up to camp but had to go back to Memphis the next day. The almost-17 year old staffer was selected to be provisional SM for a week. The night before the man went back to Memphis, he walked around camp with the staffer and told him things he needed to know about the scouts being left in his charge. As they walked and talked, the SM almost casually showed the 17 year old how to sniff spiders. *Many* of the people who will read this story loved that Scoutmaster and still do. He was *Buddy Irwin, Scoutmaster of Ole 97.*