

Adventure In A Crawl Space

A personal Essay

Eric Bruton
Feb. 17, 2004

May I tell you about an adventure in the crawl space under my house? It was a job that I had been putting off for months because I knew it would be dirty. I had purchased some new speakers for the stereo and wanted to run some wires from the player equipment to my study and bedroom. At last the day arrived when, under great domestic pressure from my girlfriend, I was forced to admit that there were no other chores for me to do. The dungeon was next.

Quite professionally, I gathered the drill, bit, special zip cord wire I had purchased from Lowes months ago, donned some old clothes with matching grungy jacket and started to work. Actually, I was feeling very eager as well as manly. Soon I would have music in my study, plus I would be entering a world that ladies seldom get to visit, the crawl space. I set out moving furniture (the scratches on the floor could be dealt with later) to get to the area where the holes were to be drilled. Then, so it came to pass, after drilling several unusable holes in a perfectly good hardwood floor. I was ready to push the wires into the darkness, the inner sanctum of bugs, dust and unknown earth spirits.

It was cold and rainy that day so it did not take long for me to get the crawl space access door open. Still, I hesitated at the entrance as I looked into the darkness of the great unknown. Had it not been for the cold water dripping from the eave of the roof down my jacket collar I am not sure I would have taken the plunge. Just inside the hole I paused for a moment to gaze back at the beautiful gray day, wistfully wondering if there was anyone I could hire to do this. After a quick review of my economic situation and considering the possibility of finding someone to do it as cheaply as me, I turned my eyes to the darkness.

Of course I had a flashlight with me but the batteries were weak and only projected a beam slightly farther than I could reach. I suspected that the “Ever-readies” didn’t want to be there either. I was thinking of a possible letter of complaint when I remembered that those batteries had been in there since the hurricane of 1983. So, onward I slithered.

Yes, that’s right slithered. I had about three feet of clearance in the areas where there were no air ducts. Under the ducts the clearance decreased to about a foot and a half. To get my well nourished body to the area under the study I had to slither like some kind of mammalian snake. It could not have been a pretty sight to the unknown eyes that I knew were watching me from their hiding places. It was a real pain to get around under there.

Had I not understood from the start that this was a crawl space, I would have fired off a suggestion to the American Institute of Architects that they officially change the designation to slither space.

All of this sliding, squeezing, hunching, and thrashing about caused a great cloud of dust to fill up the space. My neighbor later told me that he thought my house was on fire because of what looked like thick black smoke billowing out from the foundation vents. But, it was just a cloud of pure dirt.

I am sure that water had not been on this ground since 1961 when the house was built. It was dry. It was so dry that when the word got out about the profound dryness, NASA called to see if they could test a mars rover under there.

“Can it slither?” I asked.

They said, “No it’s on wheels.”

I, of course being concerned about wasteful tax spending, said, “no, it’s too dangerous. The poor thing can’t survive under there.” Yet, somehow I was surviving.

I grabbed the wires that hung through the hole in the study then made my way over to the bedroom area where more wires invited me to pull them into the darkness. I was cocky now and almost giddy with anticipation as I shoved the wires up through the hole in the dining room where the main equipment waited to communicate with the other rooms. Then tragedy struck. Had I not decided to move a telephone jack at that moment, it all would have ended there and I would have been out in the wet fresh air.

Perhaps it was the excitement of finishing the chore, the heavy dust that leached oxygen from the atmosphere, or perhaps it was a vision from God. For whatever the reason, I decided to move the telephone jack in the living room. I was already under there looking like a coal miner at six o'clock, anyway.

Through the dusty reduced light from the ever failing, "Ever-readies", I could see the wire running just on the other side of the "Mark V, Super Efficient, Gas Operated, Trane (it is a brand)," heating and air conditioning system. I headed over to the wire to cut it when just as I was bellying my way under the ducts, my pants were snagged by an ancient tree stump. I was stuck. No contortion, movement, or benediction would free me. I panicked and slid out of those trousers like a sweaty salamander on steroids. My sneakers tangled then fetched up at the end of my now wrong-side-out pants leg remaining behind for some future HVAC technician to retrieve. In the retelling to that tech I would not mention the part about panicking. The story would evolve into an encounter with a wild red eyed varmint and of course I'd be telling the story from outside the crawl space.

Through the dusty haze I could see the beautiful, cold, wet, gray day waiting for me just on the other side of the portal. The flashlight didn't matter, the batteries didn't matter, my pants and shoes still stuck on that stump didn't matter. I was heading back from the land of nod. The main mission was accomplished. I had slain the dragon in my soul and was

returning to the light to accept the acclamations from my adoring tribe. I was the classic hero. Back in the world of the living I turned my face to the sky to let the rain wash the dirt from my face. In stocking feet I stretched out my arms like Rocky Balboa, water drizzling over my body, rinsing the dust from my coat and then down over my..... underwear. Due to an early onset of old-timers disease plus passionate desire for freedom from the oppression of the dungeon I had completely forgotten that I had no pants on. I made a dash for the back door.

Back inside the house, she said somewhat irritatedly, "My God, you're tracking up the house, and get some pants on 'fore the neighbors start complaining."

How cool and sweet Crosby, Stills and Nash sounded in the speakers. How fleeting my moment of fame.