

Workday at the Commons

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I found ten black widow spiders. There they were, tucked in the corners of the undersides of the chairs.

It is a workday here at the Commons. There is a weather balloon in the sky that, with the sun shining directly on it, glows like one imagines a transport from outer space, bright white and obvious in the otherwise clear blue sky. But down here on the ground, people are clearing brush, weeding, painting, cleaning and my chore, which I fortunately share with another, is to look under all the outdoor chairs that we use while eating our community dinners and rid them of the black widows that hide there. The undersides of the chairs are full of cobwebs, dry leaves, and a few cobweb-bundled future dinners for my prey. These black widows are not big spiders, not like the ones I remember as a child that hid in the black shiny coal that we used to heat our house. Going down the dim stairs to the basement and filling the coal skuttle was always frightening. I was terrified when I had to do it alone. Usually, we went in twos. We had to be very careful in loading the coal as the black widows were quite large, about the size of a thumbnail, with their shiny yellow or red bellies and their bite could be very serious.

These spiders that I am finding may only be teenagers, but can still pack a serious bite. And they are fast, very fast. Once they are disturbed and realize their destiny is in peril, they bolt for it. Our plan, which worked well, was for me to find them and then my co-worker wields the clear plastic container and we both maneuver with my stick and his agility to bag the beast. Once inside the container, care has to be taken when adding another spider as those already captured are quick to see a possible escape. Dan, my co-worker is quick and able and we manage to make our captures with only minimal panic and excitement. He then takes the container with just a few spiders at a time, down to the dry arroyo and sets them free.

It may not have been the most fun chore, but accomplishing it did give me a great amount of satisfaction. I don't particularly like spiders and they certainly can make one sprint from almost any position, with speed that was heretofore unknown. But I felt more able to do that chore than some of the other chores on the list, and there wasn't a long lineup of volunteers for this job. None actually.

And then it was finished, and I walked back to my little casita spreading panic amongst the cerulean-tailed lizards that dash across the path. Later, the weather balloon shines brightly in the evening sky.