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Arkansas Gazette.

LITTLE ROCK, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 1971.

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—Staff Photo by Gene Prescott

'They Have a Tendency to Bite'

The anaconda which has just bitten its owner still has its fangs tangled in the cloth of her trousers.

Sword Swallower Claims Truckload of Snakes; One Bites Her on Thigh

By TUCKER STEINMETZ
Of the Gazette Staff

Toni Del Rio, who says she is a Sword Swallower,

Doctor Loses Another Bid To Reopen Case

Dr. Vadee Kroft of Little Rock lost what apparently was her last chance Monday in the Arkansas Supreme Court to persuade the Court to reopen the malpractice case against her.

The Supreme Court denied a motion by her attorney, Eugene B. Hale Jr., to reopen and reconsider its dismissal of her appeal of a malpractice judgment against her in Pulaski Circuit Court.

She had contended that a motion to dismiss the appeal was filed without her knowledge last year and that she had learned only this summer that the lawyer who was shown on court records as representing her had not represented her.

The lower court had awarded a judgment of \$37,000 to Wilbur H. Cox of North Little Rock, who lost the use of his left hand because of a severed nerve that resulted from a fall. The lower court had found that Dr. Kroft had not sewn up the wound properly at the Arkansas Baptist Medical Center.

Dr. Kroft and the insurance company appealed but the appeal was dismissed after a settlement was arranged. Dr. Kroft said she had not been aware of the dismissal until some weeks afterward.

In a series of motions in the Supreme Court since then, Dr. Kroft said she wanted the appeal reinstated and the record of the trial reviewed so that she could clear her reputation. She said her livelihood was at stake.

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Of the Gazette Staff

Toni Del Rio, who says she is a Spanish gypsy, a snake charmer, sword swallower and fire and light bulb eater, went to Little Rock police headquarters Monday morning to claim her abandoned truck, but she gave most of its cargo of 36 snakes to the Little Rock Zoo.

"The lieutenant told me, 'Take your snakes and take your truck' . . . he didn't finish it," Miss Del Rio recalled Monday afternoon while she massaged a snake bite on her right thigh. "I said, 'You mean get the hell out of here?' He said, 'Yes.'"

It began Thursday when a patrolman spotted a truck parked on Interstate Drive near Interstate 30 and Sixty-fifth Street. Big letters on the back said, "Alive Reptiles."

The truck still was there Friday, and Patrolman Andrew Lockhart went to investigate. Finding the inside teeming with caged snakes, he was reluctant to inventory the stock. Zoo Director Raymond Squires was called, and he counted 36 snakes — one Eastern diamondback rattler, one African viper (a very poisonous specimen), two anacondas, 13 cottonmouth moccasins, three boa constrictors (one dead) and 16 small snakes of unknown species.

Suffers Bite By Anaconda

Monday afternoon, Miss Del Rio and her assistant, Dennis Richardson, were at a service station near the freeway waiting to get a new head for the truck engine. Two boa constrictors and two South American anacondas seemed to know the short, dark-skinned woman. The serpents twined around her arms and torso. It all seemed routine until Miss Del Rio attempted to return the anacondas to their cage, whereupon one of them bit her on the right thigh. "It bit me," she calmly told Richardson, who stepped over and extracted the snake fangs from her blue stretch pants.

"Yes," Miss Del Rio explained, "anacondas have a tendency to bite often."

They're not poisonous, but, she said, "they got a juice in their mouth that makes it sting. . . . I'd show you where he bit me, but it'd be kind of embarrassing in a public place." She glanced furtively about the service station lot, then pulled her pants down on one leg to reveal a bleeding wound. "I think he

across the lot to another truck to get her sword, explaining on the way that a snarling cur chained to the truck was "half wolf, half husky."

"I like the wild," she said, patting the knot on her thigh. She sent Richardson to get some Bacine for the bite.

With a camera trained on her, she lifted the sword, stopped momentarily to ask, "Will it take very long? It's very uncomfortable," then jabbed about 15 inches of steel down her gullet for a picture.

"I'm the world's smallest lady sword swallower," she said, rubbing the bite again.

"That [the bite] don't bother me no more . . . I eat fire, walk on glass, eat light bulbs, all the stuff . . . I exhibit myself in shows . . . In the winter I do Turkish belly dancing, snake dancing—exotic dancing, you would call it. Put down that I'm 19 years old."

Miss Del Rio declined to estimate the value of the snakes she had given to the Zoo. She appreciated Squires' gesture Friday.

"They were nice enough to get them out of the sun," she said.

She rubbed her bite again—by then it had become a hard lump—and said matter of factly, "Anacondas are not very friendly."

Trial Postponed For Student, 15

A Municipal Court trial for Herman Mitchell Jr., 15, of 1010 Pulaski Street, on a charge of assault with a deadly weapon was postponed Monday until October 5.

Mitchell is accused of pulling a pistol on Robert Jenkins, an art teacher at Dunbar Junior High School, during a disciplinary dispute in class last Thurs-

said her livelihood was at stake.

Hale had filed the latest motion after receiving a letter from Steele Hays of Little Rock, who had been shown as the attorney for Dr. Kroft. Hays' letter said he had been disturbed to read in a newspaper account of Dr. Kroft's first effort to get the appeal reinstated that he had been her attorney. He said another attorney had handled the appeal after the trial and that his (Hays') only connection with the appeal was to inform the other attorney, Alston Jennings, that Dr. Kroft was opposed to a dismissal of her appeal. Jennings apparently represented the insurance company. He moved for the dismissal.

Hale had argued in his motion to reopen the case that Dr. Kroft had been denied through "collective maneuvering" her constitutional right to an attorney representing her interests.

Hale previously had indicated that he would take the case to the United States Supreme Court

285 Will Enter Training Projects

Two hundred and eighty-five jobless or underemployed persons in Arkansas will receive job training in four projects funded under the Manpower Development Training Act.

The projects will be administered by the United States Labor Department Manpower Administration and the United States Health, Education and Welfare Department office of Education.

The number of trainees, the training agency and project costs are: 150, State Department of Vocational Education at Little Rock, \$522,629; 75, Tucker-Cummins State Prison, \$180,853; 20, Arkansas State Board for Vocational Education, \$101,527, and 40, Capital City Business College, \$133,492.

All training will be in occupations in which there is a local demand. The projects are initiated by the local employment services and state vocational education agencies.

The employment services

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Thinks Viper Cave Birth

Apparently while the truck was abandoned, Miss Del Rio said, the African viper gave birth to at least four babies. She killed them because the vipers were poisonous from birth. Miss Del Rio fears that other baby vipers may be hiding in the framework of the van. When she arrives in Louisiana, she said, she will burn a sulphur candle in the truck, which will kill any living thing in it.

Miss Del Rio is with the William D. Stanley Shows of Thibodaux, La. She said the truck was being driven by a man called Little John—"They called him Little John. You don't know people's real names, you know. You pick 'em up"—and that the man, who had a wife and baby, was not making any money managing her snake exhibit. So he ditched the truck. Miss Del Rio thinks he sold some of the snakes, then ran off with another carnival.

Demonstrates Sword Swallowing

She interrupted her account about Little John to declare proudly, "I'm a sword swallower." With that she strode

them out of the sun," she said. She rubbed her bite again—by then it had become a hard lump—and said matter of factly, "Anacondas are not very friendly."

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The postponement was to give Mitchell a chance to get a lawyer.

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All training will be in occupations in which there is a local demand. The projects are initiated by the local employment services and state vocational education agencies.

The employment services refer, test and counsel applicants for training; pay training, transportation and subsistence allowances, and provide job placement assistance.

Balance Is Held Necessary In Industrial Development

Richard Preston of Boston will tell the Society of Industrial Developers of Arkansas today that industrial development in rural areas must be balanced by the retention and expansion of urban industry.

Preston, executive vice president and secretary of the American Industrial Development Council, said in an interview Monday after his arrival at Adams Field that rural industry must be developed by "providing the capital investment and the development of identified potentials in the rural areas."

Asked to comment on the drive by Senator John L. McClellan (Dem., Ark.) and others to shift industrial growth to the suburbs and the country to decentralize the population, Preston described those efforts as "the Robbing Peter to Pay Paul Syndrome."

He stressed that his organization was nonpartisan and that his ideas on the topic had nothing

to do with McClellan or anyone else touting the idea of slowing industrial expansion in the cities to shift it to rural areas.

He said it was an "idiotic concept . . . All you're doing if you do a thing like that is creating social problems."

When industries close down in urban areas, jobs are lost and urban decay is accelerated, Preston said. Industry that has potential in rural areas should be encouraged, he said, by providing expertise in industrial development to would-be entrepreneurs so that lending institutions would be more willing to venture capital.

Preston has held his present