



Photo courtesy Jim Egan

# SCARY POOL STORIES

By the PHTA Recreational Water Quality Committee

**EVERY POOL SERVICE** professional has stories of horrific pools. Given the Halloween season, we asked for some scary pool maintenance stories from our Committee members. While the Committee is represented by chemical and equipment manufacturers, retail sales and water-testing specialists, a few of our members have significant service and inspection experience. Check out these pools that were so bad they frightened even the hardened pool service veterans of the Committee.

## THE CREEPY POOL ON HALLOWEEN

By Terry Arko

This story literally happened on Halloween. I had a route in Southern California, and we had just been hit with heavy Santa Ana winds. The pools on my route were a mess with a ton of debris. I had one pool that was way out in a rural area and way off the beaten path. It was a very old rundown house where I never saw the owner. It was a creepy place even on a normal day. I always tried to

get the pool cleaned and get out of there fast. On this day, the yard and pool were a complete mess of tree limbs, patio furniture and leaves...tons of leaves. The pool was almost half-way full of leaves and debris. I knew there would be no way I could vacuum. I began to manually remove leaves with my net until I could see beneath the surface. Then I relied on my trusty leaf-jet vac to start removing the rest from the pool. It was a long arduous process but after about an hour, the pool was clean enough to where I could now check the pump and skimmer baskets.

The filter equipment was far from the pool and in a very dark, dilapidated shed with plenty of spider webs. I always felt itchy as if things were crawling on me whenever I went in there. I stepped in the dark room and cleared a spider web away from my head. Then I opened the pump and emptied the basket of debris, put the pump lid on and went back to clear the skimmer before starting the system up. The skimmer basket was jammed full of leaves, I couldn't even get to the basket without digging out

Does anyone want to go for a swim? This is an example of how a scary pool can happen when clear well water with a high iron content fills the pool and is shocked with chlorine.

leaves, bugs and worms. I put my hand in and started clearing out the gunk. One last time I reached my hand in the skimmer and grabbed for the debris. All at once I felt something big and slimy and wiggling in my hand. Goosebumps spread like wildfire down my spine, and I jumped back. I had no idea what alien creature I had just contacted. To put it mildly, I was fairly freaked out. Then there was a swishing sound and gurgling and bubbles. I watched wide eyed as the biggest toad I have ever seen shot through the mouth of the skimmer and down to the floor of the pool.

## ONE SCARY ABANDONED POOL STORY

By Roy Vore

When the call comes in for service, some pools can quickly present more than a few challenges. This scary pool was in an older and heavily wooded, wealthy neighborhood. The elderly owner decided to sell the house and one item on his list was returning the pool to operating condition. According to the

This pool had been under a mesh cover for years. After the cover was pulled back in mid-summer, it was revealed as a home to thousands of tadpoles and many other natural organisms.

owner, the pool had been operated in the previous season. The call for service came in late June after the daytime temperature had been in the low 90s for several weeks.

Upon arrival the mesh cover was halfway covered in several inches of leaves, pine needles and sticks. Several rips in the cover permitted many pounds of leaves and debris to enter the pool. There was a considerable amount of organic material in the water. After several minutes of raking the heavy debris, it was finally possible to remove the cover. The coffee-colored water was teeming with thousands and thousands of tadpoles, some several inches long and already sprouting short legs. The tadpoles were probably why this pool was not swarming with mosquito larvae.

A close examination of the pool revealed the hillside had shifted and both skimmers were badly cracked at least halfway around. The pool had shifted so much that one skimmer was approximately two inches higher than the other. The pool was so turbid the second step was barely visible. Considering it was built before hydrostatic relief valves were routinely installed, a decision was made not to do a complete drain. When the equipment was examined, all but one of the pump and heater plugs were missing. Once the new plugs were installed, the pump refused to start. Eventually, after an hour of persuasion, it did — only to rapidly starve for water due to air from the one skimmer being above the water level.

After both skimmers were repaired, it was possible to raise the water level and begin filtration. Water analysis showed the chemistry was roughly that of rainwater. Based on the chlorine demand of >300 ppm, it became obvious the cover had been in place for several years, and the rainwater had gradually replaced all of the balanced water. The only saving grace for this pool was that both overflow outlets had continued to function. Repeated vacuuming, shocking and gradual water replacement were used to return the pool to service. Hopefully, the next owner will take better care and eventually re-plaster this classic 35-year-old beauty. ~



Photo courtesy Roy Vore

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