

The vegetation stood still for a few seconds, but just as I was about to resume clearing, I saw the head of what appeared to be a large snake. Emmanuel was about five yards away. Despite being older, he was much more frightened of snakes, and he was already angry with me for raising too many false alarms that sent him running away unnecessarily, thus putting his life at risk. I wanted to be absolutely sure before alerting him.

“Run!” I screamed, sprinting as if shot from a cannon. A giant black cobra was flipping its tongue about wildly under the brush.

“What is it?” Emmanuel asked as we tore out of there.

“A giant black cobra!” I yelled.

After we had both reached a safe distance, we brainstormed ways to kill it. Leaving it alone was not an option. We would have to abandon that entire section of the farm for months on the chance that it still lurked out there. Whenever we saw a snake on the farm, we did whatever we could to kill it. Our father had returned to the hut to fix his machete, having minutes earlier struck a large rock and damaged the blade.

“We need long, solid branches,” I said.

“You know where it is so you’re going to have to take the lead,” Emmanuel suggested. He was embarrassed to admit being afraid to confront the snake.

“Don’t worry about that. Just get a branch and let’s go,” I yelled.

We ripped out two large branches from a nearby oak tree and crept cautiously toward the area where I had seen the snake. We spoke in hushed tones to avoid alerting it to our advance. Because it might have moved, the danger zone had broadened considerably. We stood silently, about three yards away from the spot, and watched for any sign of movement. Within seconds, I saw the vibrations again, meaning that it hadn’t moved. Our branches were about five feet long.

“I’m going to move a little closer and strike it,” I told Emmanuel.

“Okay, I’ll be on the other side to corner it in case it tries to get away,” he offered. He shifted to a spot diagonal to me.

*Bam!* I made the first strike.

“Watch out! It’s moving toward us!” Emmanuel screamed as he started to run away.

“Come back, we need to finish it!” I commanded, striking again.

The cobra was now flipping around dangerously as if on the attack. Understanding the urgency of the moment, Emmanuel sprinted toward the cobra, coming at it from an opposite angle. We both struck it repeatedly with our branches before subduing it and ultimately finishing it off. By the time we finished the job, we were breathing heavily.

We learned early on that in that environment it was either kill or be killed.