

LOVELESS, ARNOLD LEE
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Rattlesnake Bite Is Fatal to Rome Man

CARTERSVILLE — A Rome man bitten on the jaw while handling a rattlesnake during a religious ceremony died at a hospital here.

Humana Hospital Nursing Supervisor Gail Deckard said Arnold Lee Loveless, 48, of 30 Watson Drive S.W., died at 11:20 p.m. Monday.

Loveless had been in critical condition in the intensive care unit after being bitten by a rattlesnake during a religious ceremony Sunday at the Church of Jesus Christ in Kingston.

Bartow County Sheriff Don Thurman said the snake was taken to the hospital so that doctors could determine the correct remedy, then it was taken to an animal shelter.

He said the snake was returned to the church at the request of a member of the congregation.

Sheriff's department reports said Loveless removed a copperhead from a wooden crate and began praying over it, removing a rattlesnake from the same box as he did so.

The rattler bit him on the jaw. APR 14 1990

Witnesses said Loveless began to pray and that fellow worshipers laid hands on him in an attempt to heal the bite.

The witnesses said emergency medical workers were not notified until Loveless became violently ill.

Preacher: 'Time to Go For Snakebite Victim

KINGSTON — The minister of a Pentecostal church where a parishioner died of a snakebite after a snake-handling service said it was the man's "time to go."

Arnold Lee Loveless, 48, of Rome, died last week a day after he was bitten on the jaw by a 3-foot canebrake rattlesnake during a service at the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in Kingston.

The snake's venom, which attacks all major organs, killed Loveless relatively quickly because it entered his body through the salivary glands — "the quickest way into the system" said Bill Conyers, a nursing supervisor at Humana Hospital in Cartersville, where Loveless died.

The Rev. Carl Porter, 44, who founded the independent Pentecostal church in 1971, said that "the Lord wouldn't have let it happen if it wasn't his time to go. It wasn't no judgment on him; he was a fine man."

Porter regularly leads his congregation of 50 through snake-handling service, mainly using reptiles he catches.

His church has used poisonous snakes native to the area, including rattlesnakes, copperheads and cottonmouth moccasins, and some that aren't.

"We've had a cobra and some others I didn't know what they were," Porter said.

Porter said strychnine, a deadly poison, is also available for church members to drink as a show of faith.

Porter's church and others similar to it point to the Bible — Mark 16:18 — as justification for snake-handling and poison-drinking: "... They will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all."

Loveless, a member of Porter's church for 10 years, was married and the father of two children.

Porter, who said he can't remember how many times he has been bitten by snakes and was seen through the experience by "the spirit," expressed sorrow but no regret at Loveless' death.

"No matter what happens, the Bible is still going to say what it says," he said. "People look down on us, but they just don't understand. They've got God as some little old person who can't do nothing."

Snake-handling isn't a common practice, said the Rev. David Drake of the First Baptist Church of Cartersville.

"What they are doing is almost a challenge to God," Drake said. "It's like standing in the middle of I-75 and asking God not to hit you."

Cherokee Judicial Circuit District Attorney Darrell Wilson said snake-handling and poison-drinking religious services violate no state law. Loveless chose to pick up the snake and is responsible for his own death, Wilson said.

Wilson said he believes several states have laws governing snake-handling religious ceremonies.

"If people feel this is wrong, they should take it up with their lawmakers," he said. "At this point, it would have to be a legislative matter." APR. 18 1990