

You're All Wrong (the Bittler Blog)

Notes on Life, Faith & My Stupid Job



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Get the Net

Posted on [June 23, 2011](#) by [cjb](#)

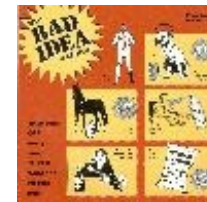
Friend, novelist and sometime Driftless Area resident Dean Bakopoulos recently did an [audio essay](#) for Wisconsin Public Radio's Morning Edition. The subject is one that is near yet definitely not dear to my heart: Bats.

Seems Bakopoulos has parted with a smidgeon of the no-doubt copious royalties from his entertaining new book, [My American Unhappiness](#), to summer with his family in a chiroptera-infested cabin on the outskirts of Mineral Point. He reports that the critters can be heard skittering inside one of the walls, where they no doubt have a nest. One night he encountered one of the bats flitting about in the kitchen and it scared him so much he spent the rest of the night sleeping

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with a butterfly net.

I would normally jump at the chance to ridicule Bakopoulos. I have known him on and off for four years and found him to be a great guy, a terrific writer and a fantastic workshop leader. In short, he is too perfect for my taste; exactly the kind of person I enjoy taking down a peg with a bit of ribbing, good-natured or otherwise. But in this case I can only commiserate.

I too am afraid of bats. And even though I haven't encountered one indoors for three years I still sleep with a butterfly net close at hand.

In October 2007 I moved into my house just up the road from Mineral Point, Wis. Soon thereafter I heard the same kind of scratching in my walls that Bakopoulos later reported. I assumed it was squirrels. I am not afraid of squirrels and, since I am renting, thought nothing more of it until 3 a.m. on a Thursday the following June when I was roused from sleep by an odd peeping sound. I turned on the light to find a small black thing zipping erratically around the room. After uttering several oaths in a voice two octaves higher than I have been capable of since puberty I threw on some pants and ran out of the house.

My dog, after determining she wasn't being treated to a midnight walk, went back to bed.

About an hour later, I crept back into the house, keeping my head low and wielding a copy of *Christianity Today Books & Culture*. The bat had disappeared, most likely through a hole in the ceiling tile. Dawn arrived a few hours later to find me lying on the floor with a blanket over my head. What became of that *Books & Culture* I may never know, which is too bad because it had a fascinating essay about Flannery O'Connor and raising peacocks.

Bats are interesting creatures. North American varieties are mostly harmless and very beneficial, feeding on mosquitoes and other annoying bugs. They rarely bite and you have to travel to Brazil to find one that sucks blood. They can see, but also employ echolocation by means of emitting a

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sound that, indoors, is quite distinctive. If a bat shows up in your house it will typically be just before dawn, which is when it heads back to its nest, which is almost assuredly in your house. In other words, if a bat shows up in your house it is because you are roommates.

Generally bats are tiny and harmless.

And creepy.

After my encounter, I bought a few cans of that expanding foam used to fill holes and crevices and used it a bit too liberally. It did little to improve the decor and nothing to keep out the bats.

When the second one made its unwelcome appearance in August I showed a bit more courage. A friend had told me the way to get a bat to leave is to open the door and turn on the porch light. Bats are attracted to light, the theory goes, and will eventually get the idea and make an exit.

This almost worked. With the porch light on and both doors open (house and porch), I waited at the farthest corner of the enclosed porch for the bat to come out of the house. Unfortunately, when it did it hung a sharp left and flew straight at me. I fended it off with a plastic rake and it flew back into the house.

That's when I got my landlord to get rid of the nest. I also ordered a butterfly net from American Science & Surplus and it stays by my bed with my other defensive weapon, a rusty nine iron.

Bats are, as I said, undeniably creepy. But my fear of them borders on a phobia. Perhaps that border was crossed long ago. It is a good rule of thumb that if something scares you beyond all reason there is a reason that goes beyond that something. The root cause of a phobia is rarely the object of said phobia. But I do not currently have a health care plan adequate to exploring such deep-seated psychological issues.

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Late one night this past January, safe from warm weather concerns of bats, I was awakened by a loud slamming. There was a blizzard outside, but I knew it was not a tree branch slapping the wall or a screen door blowing open. I knew it was someone entering my house. I rarely lock the door; there is rarely a reason.

I put on my jeans, picked up my golf club and wandered downstairs. A gruff, bearded young man was sitting on the steps, smoking a cigarette. Damp snow lay atop his head like a woolen beanie.

I pushed open the door and said, “Can I help you?”

He stood up clumsily. “Sorry,” he mumbled. “I have the wrong house.” Then he tottered away down the street, obviously drunk.

I went straight back to bed, not even bothering to lock the door.

A few days later I tried to determine why a harmless 8 oz. flying creature scares me out of my wits while 200-lb. intruder hardly causes me to lose a minute’s sleep. That’s when I came up with the psychology theory.

Or it could simply be that the drunk guy didn’t peep at me.

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2 Responses to *Get the Net*



Bob D. *says:*

June 23, 2011 at 2:02 pm

If you confront your fear, a cape and cowl may be in your future along with a utility belt full of B&C back issues. You might even be mistaken for Adam West.



Bob D. *says:*

June 23, 2011 at 2:04 pm

I never realized that when I provided you with that subscription that it might place a harmless, beneficial flying mammal at risk.

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