



Commentary

Bats



The bats have been with us for 35 years. We look at them as renters, residing in the upstairs rafters, out of sight by day, paying their nightly dues by keeping us bug free. At least that's how we've come to terms with them. In truth, we're helpless.

Upstairs the bedrooms are open to the rafters. On selected nights they begin to swoop around, buzzing near enough so we can feel a breeze, then tipping their wings in unison, zooming up and around the room as if they are performing an airshow. The children have accepted it as part of summer life by the lake. But when they make an occasional visit to our downstairs bedroom, I hastily put down my book, turn off the light and duck under the covers. My husband, John, used to grab the fishing net and tear around, chasing them from room to room looking like something out of a *New Yorker* cartoon. Then when he captured one, he would gently disentangle it outside.

"Poor little creature, just trying to catch bugs and be helpful," he would coo.

But by the next night the bat would have wiggled itself back into the cottage through some crack. We never could locate their entry point. So they have continued on through the years with their nightly routine.

As a child in Maine I remember them hanging upside down on the toolshed shutter by day—the daytime view so different from the nighttime swooping. Their soft wings were a warm brown color with veins running through them, and they felt like old velvet. Helpless looking nighttime creatures with bat ears out-of-proportion to their bodies and ugly pointed faces. Their little claws were more like those of a canary. I never understood the fascination that mother had about them—they seemed so ugly.

One summer friends with three children from Washington, D.C. visited. They regaled us with tales of camping: adventurous trips with a bear sniffing around their tent in Yellowstone and a moose grazing right up to the tent flap. These were outdoor people we knew would love Vermont. We were delighted to have them share our favorite

spot. But the night revealed another side of them that has left me disappointed to this day.

We mentioned the bats upstairs and said good-night. They retired to freshly made beds and new fluffy towels on the racks. I assumed they went to sleep. We never heard a sound until they told their tale the next morning.

Two bats appeared from nowhere and did their stunts in all their bedrooms. Mitch, the father found a fishing net behind the clothes hamper and started after them. In a short time he managed to capture one, and then the other. He **FLUSHED BOTH DOWN THE TOILET**. He was so proud of himself for "taking care of the problem." We were horrified at his resolution. We honored bats as guests. Now new guests were "taking care" of resident guests. Something was dreadfully wrong.

During their stay, we climbed and picnicked on Mt. Philo, took them to Stowe, swam, water-skied, sailed, cooked steaks and lobsters, ate corn-on-the-cob fresh out of the fields, bright red tomatoes still warm from the vines. They got the royal treatment with all of Vermont's finest foods and activities. The weather was stellar. We made sure they had a marvelous time.

But do you know what? All that those children remembered were the bats, how brave their father was in catching them and flushing them down the toilet. I never considered those house guests with the same fondness and am still irked about the whole thing.

Just after those house guests departed, two bats crawled in and replaced their friends in the rafters. That was 15 years ago and each summer there remain a pair of bats upstairs. After all, who should rule the roost? The resident helpful guests or the interloper guests?

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This is the opinion of the author and not necessarily that of *The Charlotte News*.

