

BY DAN DIGMANN

Becoming “The Bat Man”



It began in mid-October when my hands, chest and feet started feeling numb. The numbness, of course, was my penance for being a weekend athlete and stretching my body to the point that I had pinched a nerve. I needed to have my doctor take a look.

I came home from work to put on jeans and the Bruce Springsteen T-shirt I had bought at a concert the month earlier. After partially covering Springsteen with a red flannel shirt, I got my tennis shoes from the entryway and headed to the doctor's office.

Sitting in the exam room, I felt some crowding in my right shoe. I concluded that I hadn't put on my sock correctly and it had folded under my foot. I leaned over and removed my shoe. Then I heard an agitated kind of chirping sound from deep inside my size 8-1/2 crosstrainer.

Funny, I thought, I don't remember seeing crickets in the entryway.

I only wish I had found a cricket.

There was a bat in my shoe. A nocturnal flying mammal with membranous wings. A BEADY-EYED BAT IN MY SHOE!

How could I keep it contained? I ripped off my flannel shirt and covered my shoe. I then scurried outdoors to free the bat.

I feared it would fly up into my face if I merely tapped my shoe on the parking lot curb. I figured it would be best to spike my shoe onto the pavement like a football player after scoring a touchdown.

Four times I slammed my footwear to the ground. On my fifth attempt, the bat tumbled onto the curbside. It was limp, almost lifeless. I'm sure it had one heck of a headache.

Carrying my shoe and flannel shirt, I retreated to the exam room. The doctor entered a few minutes later.

“How are you doing today?” he asked.

“I have to tell you something,” I said with a twinge of panic in my voice. “This is sooooo not related to why I'm here,

but ...” and I told him everything.

“There was a bat,” he clarified.

Yes.

“And it was in your shoe?”

Yes.

He asked whether the bat had bitten me. Not that I knew of, but then again, my feet were numb. He checked my foot and called his nurse to have her report the incident to the health department.

He also wanted me to have some blood drawn for testing. As he concluded the exam, the nurse knocked on the door.

“The health department would like to talk with Dan,” she said.

I got on the phone with the health department nurse, and I told her everything.

“There was a bat?”

Yes.

“And it was in your shoe?”

Yes.

“Is it still alive?” she asked.

“I don't know.”

“We need you to go out and see if it's still there, and call us back.”

The bat barely had moved from the curbside.

“Still there,” I said in my return call.

“Well, we need you to try and catch it,” she said.

And I need you to try and get real, I thought.

“I'll do what I can,” I said.

“If you catch it, we need you to bring it here so we can test it for rabies.”

I invoked my MacGyver-like instincts and corralled the bat using a plastic container and a piece of cardboard. I placed

the container in my car, and went inside to have my blood drawn.

From down the hall the laboratory technician walked toward me shouting, “Ya lookin' for a vampire?”

What?! Does news here travel that fast?

Turns out her question was just lab tech humor. She had no idea what had happened, so I told her everything.

I then drove to the health department and turned in my bat. The woman instructed me to call the next day for the test results.

I guess I figured I'd be all right as long as I didn't start foaming at the mouth.

Turns out the bat wasn't rabid. But the medicine my doctor prescribed didn't cure the numbness, and, after undergoing numerous tests, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Some pinched nerve.

Because of the medicine I'm taking to slow the disease's progression, I have to go in every three months for a blood test. The lab technician knows my name, but she still gets a kick out of calling me “the bat man.”

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