

Bonnie Davis

I have a lot of fear surrounding the bathroom. Specifically, I am afraid that there are insects hiding in the shadows, all around, waiting to enter my body. This anxiety has dissipated over the years but it still survives, under the surface.

I blame ET. There is a scene where Elliott is showing ET around his house. He gets to the bathroom and shows the extra-terrestrial the bathtub. This little hoodie-wearing bitch says “this is where we take baths. But sometimes cockroaches come out of the faucet.” Something along those lines. I watch, aghast. I didn’t know bugs were allowed to do that. The home is a safe haven and they can just *come in?*

Then images of little black buzzing beings flooded my mind. Their multiple legs and quick-paced wings. Their eyes with which they search for food, unable to differentiate between their prey and my sweet, youthful skin and blood.

So, to calm my mind, I developed a routine for going to the bathroom. As one does. I would get completely naked. (I’m not sure why this was important, sort of seems like it defeats the purpose but who am I to try and decode the logic of a child. Even if the child was myself.) Then I would need towels, many towels. I would cover the tank of the toilet, so my back wasn’t cold. Then, I would surround the bottom of the toilet bowl, so no insects could crawl upwards towards my warm flesh. Lastly, and most importantly, I would cover the point where the tank meets the bowl. I had an inkling that if an insect wanted to enter me, it would do so via my “crack.” This was my most vulnerable spot. The most obvious tactical point of entry in the bug’s mind. At least in my interpretation of “the bug’s” mind.

Side note: “The Bug”, to me, is what “The Killer” is to Wendy Williams.

This routine lasted for a while. It was tedious but it was almost compulsory in nature. Verging on superstition. If I did not do the full towel laydown, I would get swarmed.

You have to understand, my fear of bugs was not necessarily unwarranted. Being a child in Brooklyn, you see some disgusting creatures. Sure, we don’t have coyotes or bears, but everything furry is also plagued with disease. And we had bugs, super radioactive teenage mutant bugs, in fact. We had massive black beetles that could, for some god-forsaken reason, fly. We had little crawling bugs with thousands of legs. We had bugs that slept in bed with you and drank your blood.

You may be thinking, how does she not know the names of these bugs? I think doing research into them would be giving them power and I refuse to give them any more influence on myself. They have tormented my life, they will not infest my search history.

Did you know yellow jackets build their nests underground? I didn't. Not until it was too late. Turns out, yellow jackets really don't like it when you step on their home. Even if their home is in your home's backyard. Insects don't really think about things like property lines. So after innocently running barefoot around my backyard, I was assaulted by the stings of around 10-15 different buzzing beasts. That kinda pain sticks with you.

Then, and this next part is vulnerable, there came the bed bugs. To preface, I don't want you to judge my mother for how she handled this time of our lives. Bed bugs are a cruel, invasive species who enter silently and live to destroy REM. And she is a woman who thinks for far too long before acting and this behavior is what allowed them to fester exponentially.

There was a time when I was executing mass genocides every evening. Killing generations of bed bugs with no remorse. Mother, father, brother, sister, they were all merely little critters who stole my blood.

I would wake up with a back full of bites. They tormented me, I killed them. It was the way it was. I was in high school at the time and this really affected my sleep schedule. I would fall asleep in 2nd period pre-calc almost every day. Maybe that's why I'm bad at math.

The bed bug period lasted a long time but I think my mind has tried to block a lot of that period out. My mother refused to call an exterminator and eventually, through sheer will power and lots of laundry and black trash bags, we made our house bed bug-free. But the anxiety lingers. To this day, if I see a little black spot or piece of lint on my bed, I feel the fear of God in my heart for one brief moment.

So yes, I am afraid of bugs in the bathroom. But I have grown since those early days of fear. I see them as fellow living things now. I take them outside rather than killing them. They did not ask to be born an ant or a wasp. They just appeared one day, just as did I. If I am a bug in another life, I hope it is a good one.