



THE ANIMAL PLANET PROJECT

Overcoming Bat Phobia By Louise D. Hose

“I understand you work in caves and have a phobia of bats. Would you be interested in going through therapy to overcome the phobia while we film you?”

The strange message appeared on my internet café screen while caving in Oman. An intriguing proposal, but it would have to wait until I returned to California.

THE IDEA...

Throughout the spring of 2002, I chatted with Producer, Helga Eike, about the project. Animal Planet and National Geographic Television had contracted Arcwelder Films in Los Angeles for a 13-part series on animal phobias. They wanted me as a participant for the segment on bats. They would pay for the therapy and a trip to Mexico. If successful, I would be cured of my only phobia, one that has generated much stress in my career as a speleologist...a strong, irrational fear of bats.

I set a couple of conditions: 1. We must have a bat biologist involved with the filming in Mexico; 2. If the biologist or I felt that the crew wanted us to do something contrary to good conservation practices, we could veto the proposed scene. During the spring, I “passed” a screen test. We needed an international site to “test” my therapy, but wanted the minimum expense and time. A colleague, John Pint, suggested a cave and his nephew-in-law and former Canadian caver, Chris Lloyd, as the local “fixer” in Guadalajara.

THE PROCESS...

In late May, Allen Sargent, a Malibu-based Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) consultant, put me through about an hour-long session using Hemispheric Integration™. The lights, microphone

and camera covered every aspect of the technique, which essentially transferred the benevolent, positive, rational images of bats that I held in one hemisphere of my brain to the other, emotional side of my brain. (In most people, this would involve taking images from the left hemisphere and implanting them in the right side.) I was very skeptical.

THE FIRST TEST...

Helga arranged a small test of the therapy about two weeks later, on June 7th, at a barn in Encinitas. While we waited for dusk, Allen worked with me to ensure that the positive images had control in my brain. When several hundred Mexican Freetails began their nightly flight by swooping around the barn, I was completely calm. The anxiety and enormous energy I would have used in the past to stay in the environment were absent. A successful first test.

GUADALAJARA...

Two days later, I flew to Guadalajara with Helga and the film crew. Chris Lloyd met us and whisked us to our caver field house, the Hilton-Guadalajara. That evening, we met Yunuhen Rodreguez, a local biology student and caver who had just begun a thesis study of the bats in our target cave. She was accompanied by PPCM bat educator, Letitia Reyes. PPCM is a sister organization to Bats Conservation International.

“I was completely calm. The anxiety and enormous energy I would have used in the past to stay in the environment were absent.”



John Pint and the PCMM folks had recommended

Cueva del Chapuzon for its easy access, relatively easy-to-traverse passage (necessary, due to my recent foot surgery), and abundance of bats, particularly vampire bats. This last feature was particularly compelling. While I had feared all bats, I (and the audience) found the vampire particularly repulsive. In addition, vampire bats have thrived since the Europeans introduced cattle to the New World. Disruption to this species did not present the conservation concerns as with other types of bats. Yunuhen's good news was that 30 vampires currently resided in the cave.

Vampires do not comprise the much larger bat colony in the cave, however. The bad news was that Yunuhen had discovered two days earlier that it was a maternity colony with very young babies. Helga held true to her word and never challenged the recommendation that we not enter the passage with the large maternity colony. It meant losing the opportunity to fully test my ability to remain calm while swarmed by bats. A major disappointment for me and the crew, but the right decision for the bats.

THE SECOND TEST...

After the usual amount of production tomfoolery, including various interviews at the cave entrance, Chris, Yunuhen, PCMM Educator Patricia Ramos and I moved slowly through the relatively small cave passages while the crew shot video. Perhaps 100 meters into the cave, we reached the vampire roost.

The vampires swooped around us while the camera recorded my reaction. With seven people plus equipment filling the small, stoop-to-crawl passage, the bats were frantic - flying, crawling and hopping along the passage. When the activity calmed, Yunuhen captured the last remaining bat in the passage and held it for the camera. We touched the wings and Helga interviewed Yunuhen and me. Test two was successful. Although I was occasionally startled by the sudden appearance of a bat jumping or flying around, I never experienced any desire or need to run out of the cave as I always have before.

SUMMARY...

Arcwelder Films offered me a special opportunity to overcome a somewhat crippling phobia while, hopefully, contributing to a positive understanding of bats. To my delight, it also provided an opportunity to examine an extremely unusual cave. I also learned about the important work of the dedicated bat educators with PCMM. Now, I can only hope that the product, scheduled to show in the U.S. in late October on Animal Planet, gives the message we have tried to present.

{Louise Hose is a geology professor at Chapman University in California. Her research interests focus on caves, where she commonly has to share her natural laboratory with bats.}

“Although I was occasionally startled by the sudden appearance of a bat jumping or flying around, I never experienced any desire or need to run out of the cave as I always have



For More Information, Contact...
SUCCESS DESIGN INTERNATIONAL
(877)SDI-MIND
(949) 713-4936
mail@nlpla.com
www.nlpla.com



©2002 Louise Hose, Reprinted By Permission