

SAM ANDERSON, ESSAYIST  
Staff Writer, *NY Times Magazine*  
Host, "Animal," *NY Times* podcast  
Author, "Boom Town"  
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Sam Anderson may have traveled deep inside the jungle of the Yucatán to a bat-infested Mayan temple for an episode of his podcast, "Animal," but the real story comes from within.

Sam describes his writing like this, "I'm coming from the personal essay. You're using yourself to illuminate this other thing, and using the other thing to illuminate yourself. You're kind of bouncing them off each other."

So here he is in the jungle, in the dark, trying not to scream. Bats are flitting above him, around him, and potentially on him when the story makes a sudden swoop and becomes all about his socks. The socks were his late father's. They spark a memory of being 5 years old in a cave when a bat flew near his face. He wasn't afraid because his dad was right there. In a fuzzy footwear way, it's almost as if his dad is comforting him still. In another episode, Sam travels to Iceland to rescue baby puffins who leave the nest and fail to properly launch. Coincidentally, his daughter, Greta, is leaving the nest for college. This makes him weep at the sight of her favorite apple sauce on the shelf at Key Food.

It's almost shocking how willing Sam is to tell us about his inner life. "I've always had deep feelings," he says. I leaned into it. These feelings apply to a surprising range of topics including Rick Steves, who encouraged millions of Americans to take a life-changing trip abroad. One of those millions... ...was Sam Anderson.

It was eye-opening.

That's when he first stood in awe in front of Michelangelo's statue of "David." Decades later it, too, became the subject of an essay with a personal connection. Turns out the masterpiece suffers from perilously weak ankles. Sam, too.

Then there's his deep and hilarious feelings about basketball star James Harden's beard. Its bounty merited several pages in his 2018 book, *Boom Town*. "I have a gut feeling when I know a story is for me and I can't fake it. Certain themes resonate. The White Sox losing [121 games]? I was like, Oh, yes!"

When his dad was sick, Sam was thinking about things coming to an end. He traveled to Kenya to profile the last two Northern White Rhinos—both girls, sadly for the species. "I spent two weeks with them in the field, writing about the most mundane things: the sound of them chewing grass, their nap routine. And then there's this giant fart that goes on and on."

Once again, a story from... within.

I was wearing my dad's socks that I inherited when he died.

We all go sprinting toward this teeny, panicking blob of feathers.

My inner troll worshiped not the David but the cracks in David's ankles. They were, as a fatal flaw, so deliciously humiliating...

...[Rick Steves] wants you to stand and make little moaning sounds on a cobblestone street the first time you taste authentic Italian gelato...

Bats are flying around like nightmare confetti.

Their lips press together in a long flat line, giving them a constant expression of slightly comic seriousness, like the classic emoji:



Over the course of the 2024 season, the White Sox have explored the full spectrum of losing the way a great actor uses every corner of the stage...

A slow-motion testosterone explosion...