

WHY I'VE LATCHED ONTO TICKS...

Because they were latching onto me!

By Babe Winkelman

For more than three decades I was a spokesman for S.C. Johnson's insect control division. As a result, I often was in some peculiar situations. Once, I found myself sitting in a screened-in tent that was 5 ½ feet tall to the ceiling (I'm 6' 3") sitting in a chair at RiverFest in St. Paul, Minnesota with 60,000 mosquitoes and 80,000 blackflies. Thousands of folks walked by, some laughing and pointing, others walking over for a close-up view and to talk. They were all in a festive mood.... I wasn't. It was 96 degrees that day, and sweat was running off me as I watched balls of hundreds of blackflies trying to devour one another since the repellent was protecting me. Still, I had nightmares about it for months.

Then, about 30 years ago, they asked me if I would help them spread the word to America about a new vector-borne disease caused by ticks called Lyme disease. I said yes, but realized that I needed to get as much education on Lyme as possible, because the press would be grilling me and I better have the right answers for them. I learned everything I could about Lyme disease, but for four years nobody paid much attention.

You see, back then, there really had never been that big of a problem with ticks before, other than ticks being a creepy nuisance. Everyone would just pull them off and burn them or throw them away. Where I grew up on a farm, in what I now know to be prime tick habitat, I hardly remember seeing any. Apparently, neither did most folks. But now, that's all changing.

These days, ticks and the diseases they can cause are much more than a nuisance; ticks have become serious stuff, and the diseases they bring sometimes even are life-threatening.

Thankfully, I learned enough about ticks to realize that I need to know more. Not just for my own good health, but for my daughters, my hunting and fishing friends, and well, everybody. I've learned that more than 350,000 Americans contract a new case of Lyme disease every year. I've learned that different types of ticks carry different disease germs, so it's super important to know for sure what type of tick you've encountered. Also, some of the other tick-borne diseases like Babesiosis (not named after me), Anaplasmosis and Powassan virus can kill you.

THE YEAR I STARTED TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT TICKS

Some of you know that I've been blessed with five daughters, four of whom will go to hell and back with me hunting and never complain. They all love spring turkey hunting as much as I do. One year my daughter Jasmine was with me. While we were looking for a tree to set against overlooking a clearing, I noticed a prime spot with a big pile of leaves stacked in front of it. I kicked at the clump of leaves and to my surprise, it came totally alive; there seemed to be

thousands of ticks huddled together there and a couple dozen were now crawling on my shoe about as fast as I've ever seen anything that little move. I tried to scrape them all off and we found another area to sit, but did so very carefully. Unfortunately, it seems we didn't get them all. Later, we both found ticks attached, and we had nasty looking rashes, too. Whether it was Lyme or not, I'm not really sure, but when we came back, I vowed to never let that happen again.

When we got home, I started digging into everything I could find on the subject of ticks and tick diseases, and I found out that there's a lot more information now than there had been before. I found that it can be hard to get an accurate disease diagnosis and that lots of folks were being misdiagnosed. But I also found that it's important to identify your tick correctly since only blacklegged ticks seem to transmit the Lyme disease germ (there's two different types of blacklegged ticks in North America—one mostly east of the Mississippi River commonly called deer ticks, and one on the west coast, too). And I learned about two new tick protection products that I never knew existed, permethrin and picaridin. I was excited to try them on our next turkey hunting outing. When we headed out again, I loaded four of my daughters into the truck and this time went to Missouri. We sprayed ourselves down with the new products but returned back after that first night with ticks crawling all over us. Jasmine had 12 ticks embedded into her and Karlee and I both had some, too. We thought we had the right products and some good tick information but maybe we didn't. Or maybe we just didn't use our products and information effectively. If we were missing something, what was it? That's when I decided it was time to call in the big guns—folks who really know about ticks!

TICK-BORNE ILLNESS INFORMATION CENTER

To get TickSmart, I was guided by a consortium of 10 different TICK-BORNE DISEASE EXPERTS including: Dr. Tom Mather, they call him the TickGuy, and he is founder and director of [TickEncounter](#) at the University of Rhode Island; [TickReport](#) (from The University of Massachusetts) is the number one tick testing center; [Coppe Health Care Solutions](#) for diagnostic testing; and 7 other companies that make TickSmart certified products. When I saw the level of expertise among this group, I realized what I needed to do; I needed to create a clearinghouse with the best of their information and link it to best practices and products so that everyone could select and use the most effective tools for preventing tick-borne disease. I wanted it to follow a simple, easy-to-learn-from format that would give all Americans everything they need to keep themselves and their families safe from these debilitating and sometimes deadly diseases. The formula was KISS (keep it simple silly), and the format clearly highlights the Problems, Symptoms, Culprits, and Solutions. Each section is backed up by extensive research and testing.

Today, we live in a “more ticks in more places world” and there are more people being diagnosed with Lyme on a daily basis than there are women learning they have breast cancer. The disease incidence increases as these ticks keep expanding their range and their populations into suburban, and even urban landscapes. Blacklegged tick reproduction depends on deer, and deer have spread from the deep forests into backyards, even city parks. After engorging on the blood of a deer for 5-7 days, an adult female blacklegged tick (aka deer tick) lays 1500 to 3000 eggs.

When those eggs hatch, billions and trillions of larvae are ready to start the next generation of ticks usually by feeding on small rodents, and that's where they pick up most of the germs that cause tick-borne diseases. Blood for tick reproduction from deer, but disease germs from mice and chipmunks. One estimate from counting adult ticks feeding on hunter-killed deer in Rhode Island suggests that annually, one deer feeds enough adult ticks to make a half-million new ticks. That's crazy!

MORE THAN LYME

There are more than a dozen tick-borne illnesses, of which about half can be fatal to humans. And I read just last week that in some locations, a high proportion of ticks could be carrying around more than one type of infection. A friend of mine's husband was bitten by a deer tick last year and contracted Lyme, Anaplasmosis and Babesiosis from a single bite. My brother just about died from Ehrlichiosis a couple years ago, and a good friend was in intensive care for three weeks last summer with Powassan. All of those can be fatal.

SOLUTIONS

We're entering an era where all families MUST become TickSmart, and that's not something you're born with. I've learned that sometimes you have to throw out what you think you know in order to make room for the real story.

Even Mark Twain wrote that it isn't that people know too little but that they know too much that ain't so.

That's precisely why I built the Tick-Borne Illness Information Center that lives on our website at <http://winkelman.com/>. All the information is there and its FREE. Study it all with your family, get some Permethrin for your clothing and Picaridin for your skin. Clothing must be sprayed completely inside and out with Permethrin, and dried completely before worn. That's probably what the girls and I did wrong on that Missouri turkey hunt. Wearing tick repellent clothes can be even more cost-effective if you purchase commercially-treated clothes or have your own clothes treated. And the protection lasts through 70 laundry cycles when done by our partners at [InsectShield](#). Permethrin sprays are not meant to be applied to skin, just fabric. Once the permethrin dries, properly treated clothes can be worn safely. Since ticks usually latch on low and crawl up, that means you'll get the best protection if you start with your socks, and pants,

Tick-borne Illness Information Center

Consortium Members

[TickEncounter Resource Center](#) (University of Rhode Island) Digital tools and content for tick bite protection and prevention.

[TickReport](#) (University of Massachusetts) Accurate and fast tick testing service.

[Coppe Health Care Solutions](#) Convenient collection kits and Lyme disease diagnostic testing.

[InsectShield](#) Pre-treated permethrin apparel and self applying spray for effective personal tick prevention.

[TickEase](#) Stainless steel 2-sided tick removal device for people and pets.

[Thermacell](#) Tick tubes for residential use. Controls ticks on mice in their nests.

[Bayer Animal Health \(Soresto Collars\)](#) Tick repellent collars for your pets.

[Spectrum Brands](#) Personal picaridin insect and tick repellent.

[Gamehide ElimiTick](#) Premier tick repelling hunting apparel.

and tuck your shirts in to keep ticks from crawling up under. While turkey hunting, I even put on a base layer of a permethrin-treated light performance fabric, then pull the socks over the top and still treat my next layer of shirt and pants just like they are the only thing I'm wearing. I now spray the outside of my boots too. I don't want to give ticks a chance. When a tick walks across the treated fabric, number one it won't bite you, number two it will fall off and die. Sometimes not right away, but it is a death sentence for ticks. If you find an embedded tick, our friends at [TickEase](#) have a really good tick removal device for people and pets.

But that still leaves your hands, neck and head and that's where Picaridin comes in, it's meant for skin. I cover my neck, hair line, face and hands. I should mention that both of these products will also repel biting insects like mosquitoes, gnats and blackflies.

We've had Lyme five times in our dogs and all the best products you need to protect your pets and for lowering the population of ticks in your own backyard also can be found on our site. While we may not be able to stop the growth and spread of the tick population everywhere, I sincerely encourage everyone to get educated and be vigilant in protecting against tick bites. As the TickGuy Dr. Mather often says,

You won't get a tick-borne disease if you're not bitten, so just don't get bitten!

I'm very happy to tell you that last year, three of my daughters and I went back to Kansas for another Spring turkey hunt, but this time we were prepared properly. After four days of sitting in the same tick infested habitats as before, not one of us had a single tick. Zero is the number you want and it's easy to achieve as long as you learn how to do right things right.