

## Bad guys don't always wear black

by  
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When my brother-in-law Dick was 7 years old, his older brother Bob took him to a Saturday afternoon cowboy movie. But Bob vowed never to take his sibling to another after Dick stood up in his seat and yelled at the top of his lungs, "Watch out, Roy, that dirty & \$#\*%@%\* is sneaking up behind you!"

Even at his tender age, Dick could tell that Roy Rogers was a good guy. How? Because he wore a white hat. And the bad guys' hats, of course, were black. Everyone knows that! But wouldn't it be nice if the good guys wore white hats in real life . . . or, more importantly, if the bad guys were required to wear black ones? No more guessing games. Easy as pie to know who not to trust.

My "good guy" male loved-ones aside, I've known other men besides Roy whom I believe were born wearing white hats: these are guys of all colors, sizes and occupations, who innately know the right thing to do and then actually do it, like my banker friend Joe, my labor union buddy Dwayne, my engineer pal George and two others—an attorney friend/confidant and an editor friend/mentor—who have exchanged their white hats for halos. Still, it takes years for me to feel assured that a good guy is as good as I think he is.

And it's not any easier to tell whether women are good or bad. Although good gal Dale Evans wore a white one, hat color as a method of differentiating good gals from bad never really caught on. However, little Opie Taylor—who grew up to be Ron Howard—expressed his opinion in the movie version of "The Courtship of Eddie's Father" that one could always tell bad women because they had "big bosoms and skinny eyes." I'm not guaranteeing the accuracy of that theory, but if I run into a woman with a Dolly Parton bosom and Pat Schroeder eyes, I won't be sharing any of my secrets with her.

There's not even a sure-fire way of telling if dogs are good or bad. My friend Estel and I have had two canine encounters on our daily walks. Both dogs were in violation of the leash law, but the Rottweiler worried us a whole lot more than the cute little terrier. While we gave it a really good try, I don't know if we could have outrun the Rottweiler, who was growling, baring big scary teeth and gaining on us at warp speed. I've always wondered whether he stopped chasing us because Estel paused to pick up a dirt clod to throw at him or because we had cleared out of his perceived territory.

The little terrier approached us with a smile on his face and his whole backside wagging in a friendly fashion. But it was just a cruel ruse. As soon as he tricked us into letting him get close, he turned into Kujo. And he targeted me. I kept jumping behind Estel, keeping her between me and the dog. Had I possessed cheer-leading experience, I would have climbed up on her shoulders. She finally delivered a kick to his nose and he yipped and ran off. (Animal rights activists will please note that this was another clear case of self-defense.)

Cats, too, can be good guys and bad guys. Sometimes the same cat can be both. My friend Betty once owned a Siamese cat whom she lovingly called "Dorf." I referred to him as "Ghengis Cat" and deservedly so. But Betty never had any trouble with him until he collared a skunk, got sprayed and had to be doused with tomato juice and taken into the shower with her. She told me that cats look real skinny when they're wet, but their paws look HUGE. However, although Dorf/Ghengis kept raising his paw at her in a threatening manner, he never raked her with his claws. Good thing, too, for he could have done serious damage to unclothed body parts.

It's probably for the best that we don't have a way to instantly tell whether people or animals are good or bad. It forces us to give each of them the benefit of a doubt. But I'll give only one benefit of a doubt per customer because I subscribe to the ancient Chinese proverb that "dog bite once, dog's fault—dog bite twice, my fault."

Neither dog nor man will get a second chance to bite me. And that goes for cats and women too!