

Five Stages of Grief

by Elana Cohn-Rozansky

entry in 2007 Sweeney's I Hate Moles Because...Contest

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A few years back, as new Pacific Northwesterners, we encountered the world of moles for the very first time. It happened like it does for most people: one night you say goodnight to a pristine lawn, the next morning you wake up to a landscape not unlike the surface of the moon or a scene from a horror film. Understandably, we felt many of the stages of grief--shock, denial, anger, and depression--with my husband, David, feeling the brunt of these emotions and getting painfully stuck on the latter. No matter how much he tended to the mole problem on one day, the unsightly mounds would appear the next. He was literally giving it his all, even consenting to an amateur haircut (by me) to gather (his) human hair to stick in the tunnels as he had been advised by some animal friendly web site. Once that didn't work, and his hair looked crummy, he went beyond his comfort level and set traps. It was then that his depression about the sad state of his lawn was coupled with, or possibly exceeded by, the fear of actually finding something during his daily trap inspections.

Days of fighting the good fight, turned into weeks. David would stand in front of the house, arms crossed, head slightly cocked to the side, wondering when it would all end? Sometimes he would stand there for thirty or forty minutes, hoping and wishing for something better. People we didn't know would walk or drive by, catching him at his most despondent moments, and express their sympathies. Neighbors who did not know our names would see us at the grocery store and ask how our "battle" was going. David's responses reflected his exasperation. Several suggested we see "Caddyshack" to lighten the desperation they sensed in his voice.

One summer afternoon as David repeated his ritual of clearing out the holes, redistributing the dirt, checking the traps, and pensively considering what had gone wrong, an older man, sporting a cowboy hat, drove by in a white pick-up truck. "Looks like you've got a mole problem there," he shouted with a drawl that suggested he had endured his years of varmint chasing in a place other than Oregon. "I'll tell you what ya gonna do. Got any of tho' traffic flares in your car? Put 'em in the tunnels and smoke the dang things out! Works for me ev'ry time."

Then he drove off just as quickly as he appeared, my husband looking at the horizon as if he expected him to melt into the sunset like a heroic character from some Western movie. Not being outside at the time, I wondered if David, in his mole-chasing stupor, half imagined the whole thing, but his description of the man, the hat, the drawl, and the vehicle suggested the interaction was real.

The next day, David made a stop at GI Joes on the way home from work and loaded up on flares. At first, he was hesitant. He had a fire extinguisher nearby, the hose at the ready, shovels and rocks and buckets "just in case." He cleared out the first tunnel and ignited the flare and placed it inside. Fortunately, there was no explosion; unfortunately, there was no sound of fleeing moles either. Still, with the memory of the man's instructions freshly in his mind, David became methodical in his placing the smoldering flares in the tunnels. When puffs of smoke started coming up out of the multitude of holes like a mini-Yellowstone, neighbors began to come and see. The expanding audience gave David the support he needed as he brazenly found more tunnels and inserted more flares. Young boys from several blocks away showed up on their bikes. People walking their dogs stopped for a peek. Once our two sons and I saw the growing crowd, we joined the throng of onlookers. Flares burn for a while and during that time we introduced ourselves, shook hands, gawked at the smoking lawn, heard others' mole stories, and laughed a lot. And while the flares eventually burned out and the good they did lasted less than a week, that experience with the moles led us closer to the final stage of grief: acceptance and hope...acceptance of the power of nature's creatures and the hope we felt about our new life in Oregon and the people who would grow to be our friends.

Perhaps the moles themselves sensed the good feelings of that fateful flare-filled day as it seems their numbers increase each year as does their path of destruction. I hate moles because they frustrate and irritate my husband to no end; but I loved them one day when they helped welcome our family to the neighborhood!