

Adventures in McCloudland

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Chapter 13

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It was late summer, the project had been stalled for over nine months and I was living in three small dirty rooms in a huge dark, nearly gutted hotel. Lee was still working in San Francisco, living in Oakland, and commuting to McCloud for weekends. Things had not gone well.

A friend spotted the hose coming out of my car's exhaust stretched across the back yard and couldn't see where it ended. She called, full of concern to ask if I was okay. She encouraged me to "Hang in there," and "don't give up now."

I assured her I did not have a death wish for myself and explained it was only the latest battle in "The War of the Moles." Why Hollywood hasn't produced a horror movie about these indestructible little devils, I don't know. But I'll start at the beginning.

When I moved here almost a year ago, I was prepared to take on whatever was in store for us. I figured the garden would present new challenges called snow, ice, and different critters than we had in the Bay Area. But I had a flat piece of land, no clay, no tree roots, lots of sun. What could be more perfect? It was like an empty canvas just waiting for wonderful things to grow.

What I didn't know is that someone else had already staked a claim. Several interesting mounds dotted our proposed garden. Some people said it was gophers. others..."Moles. You know, those little blind things. You'll need to get rid of them."

Okay. I can do this. Maybe I'll put a hose down several opened mounds and flood them out. I gathered up several hoses, and pushed them into the freshest mounds of dirt, turned on the water and waited about an hour. (I tried not to think about some little body floating away.)

The next morning ...two new mounds. Hmmmmm. How did they do that?

Like any avid gardener, I receive lots of garden catalogs. One had an ad for a "guaranteed deterrent for moles that will keep them off your property for good." I sent away for three battery operated plastic units that stick in the ground and "emits a piercing sound that the moles hate." I was making a sizable investment at \$35 each, but it had to be done. They arrived a few weeks later, and I anxiously placed them in

strategic spots in the back area and waited. They made a low hum during the night that I could hear when it was quiet, but I got used to it after a few nights. So did the moles. The devices had absolutely no effect except local dogs would come around and mark the unusual protrusion to claim it as their own.

A few folks suggested traps. Undaunted and determined, I set out to buy traps. I found the kind that had a metal loop that when touched would spring shut around the little furry body. Jeff and I dug some holes into the most promising looking mounds and set the traps. The next morning, we had sprung, empty traps. For over two weeks, we have set traps at least once a day. Nothing.

Then a neighbor said we were using the wrong traps. He showed me what he had used successfully. It had a spring hinge with deadly looking 6" tines poised to skewer the mole. We finally found a couple of the special traps after a tiresome search and a lot more of advice. Once again, with high expectations, I set the new guaranteed lethal traps and blocked out my troubled vision of what I would pull out of the hole the next day. I needn't have worried. The traps were empty. This was one smart little critter. And I think he is watching me from somewhere ...laughing a sinister little chuckle at my feeble efforts.

We dig. We make new mounds, and a mess of the yard as we relocate the traps to a new, more promising spot. Something is wrong with the picture of grown adults making such a mess trying to outsmart some dumb little creatures acting only on instinct. Meanwhile, our yard is beginning to look like something out of God's Little Acre, where the family was convinced there was gold on their land, they had only to dig enough holes to find it.

(Someone else drove by slowly and noticed the hose from the exhaust pipe of the car. They looked concerned.)

Plan C. The hardware store and more expert advice. "Smoke him out with these little smoke bombs." Clearly this was war ...bombs and all. So once again we opened up more holes, got some friends, bombed the place, and waited.

Next day ...More new mounds. "You'll need to get stronger, bigger stuff." I'm now convinced that we have the Mole From Hell and will need the National Guard before long.

"The marine smoke flares are what you need" was the next bit of advice. Only later did I begin to wonder about all this advice from folks who all had mole mounds in their own yards. Marine smoke flares were not an easy find in the mountains. But 10 calls and \$50 later we held the ultimate weapon. These babies were about 8 inches long and 2 inches in diameter. This stuff belonged in a serious arsenal.

Jeff called some fiends to help and each of us commanded a mound. In military precision, we opened our mounds, exposed a run, lit the bombs and, on the count of three, flung them into the hole with great gusto. We then covered the holes with plywood and watched. Orange, foul smelling smoke seeped into our pristine air. I wondered if we were violating some EPA regulation. But at last it would be over.

The next morning we lifted one of the plywood pieces, and red toxic dirt was freshly pushed up to where the wood had been. This guy had continued to work in the midst of polluted air so toxic I had locked our cat away and was concerned about the health of our neighbors. The Mole From Hell had been busy as usual.

(The cat is actually a different issue. We got her to hunt mice and moles. Several months ago she actually got a mole and dropped it ceremoniously at the front desk. I was a bit skeptical about encouraging a cat to deliver her prey at the front desk each morning where we would have sleepy guests coming from their rooms for breakfast. So I'm afraid I yelled at her. She hasn't caught anything since. We used to call her Killer, to boost her ego. Now we call her Useless.)

But the mole lives on. This is the stuff that separates the men from the boys. Jeff claims we have lost the war of the moles and is ready to quit. But I will never give up. It has gone beyond instinct. It's outsmarting me at every turn. Surely I am smarter than a mole.

I know, assisted suicide. I'll do my own impression of Dr. Death and gas 'em. I unfastened the hose from the building, wrapped towel around the other end and inserted it in the exhaust of my car. I made sure it was a nice tight fit, then stuck the hose into a fresh tunnel. I started the car and let the motor idle. Nothing was going to happen right away, so I went inside.

After about 20 minutes I glanced out the window to see if the car was still running. I realized then that the passers-by weren't concerned about who we might be gassing after all, but rather that a huge cloud of steam was rising from the car hood. It has overheated and is at a fast rolling boil.

When Lee came up that weekend, he shook his head at me and said, "I hope you didn't crack the block."

"Crack the what?"

Why don't we breed these seemingly harmless furry little things and ship them off to our enemies?

A friend of Jeff's just dropped by and says he has a snake that will take care of the moles and will bring it over next week.