

Opinion

The bug with no soul

It's get-ting scair-reecy. I've been around this town for a year now. My natural inclination is to melt into the background, observe, objectively report, and move on. I don't like being recognized.

It cramps my style as a morose, depressive loner to cheerily wave to the half of Milton which doesn't leave for Toronto before 8 a.m. five days a week. I like wandering the cold and lonely streets with my head down, watching only the sidewalk immediately before me, while I think. I've been doing it successfully for years.

Maybe Steven King's next 500 pages of trash will feature a crazed local newspaper writer who stalks the mean streets of a small town which has a deep, dark, horrible secret that is somehow bound up in his bloodthirsty quest for peace and quiet.

What's at the bottom of the Mill Pond? What secrets are hidden in the woods outside of town? What ghostly presence haunts the Champion offices?

Last summer, during one of the many nights I worked into the pre-dawn hours (a subtle attempt to ingratiate myself with management), I heard a strange noise in the newsroom. A dull thud in the office behind me. I whirled, and seeing movement I lunged. But further inspection turned up nothing.

I went back to work, and again the noise came. This time I spun around in time to come face to face with a big bug.

The bug was repeatedly smashing into the motion detector and making strange and other-worldly sounds. I quickly scooped a newspaper, and without thought for my personal safety, mashed the offending insect into a fine paste. I then danced maniacally over its remains. Beelzebub was its name-o.

The ghost of that big bug haunts the building. Little bits of ectoplasm turn up every now and again soon after echoes of a strangely distant buzzing filter through my office. The pandemonium of devils can be heard from the nether regions of that big bug's soul, as it



Reaume With a View

with BRAD REAUME

floats, never to find a resting place, through the newsroom.

Others say they can't hear it. But they can't deny the presence of ectoplasm, though some have called it the remains of pizza. I wonder if they are hiding anything?

Everybody has their secrets. Every building has its secrets. Every town has its secrets. Hey, that's a lot of secrets! What is this, the CIA or something? No wonder Steven King can make even the most mundane things seem cloaked in mystery.

What's at the bottom of the Mill Pond? Mud, I suspect. And probably, a few shopping carts.

Last year the woods outside of town held the secret of a crashed airplane. For years remains of an Indian village lay buried near Crawford Lake. What other secrets do the woods hold?

Ancient trees cling to the escarpment. Almost all the forest you see in and near Milton, in fact the forest all over southern Ontario, is second growth. Our ancestors came and hacked down the virgin stands in an effort to keep warm, build homes and clear the land for farming.

A few trees that clung to the sides of the escarpment weren't chopped, partly because they weren't easy to get at and because they were small, gnarled and not much use for anything pioneerish.

Some smart guy from the University of Guelph discovered their age and now they're a big deal. There's always something new under the sun. (How's that for insight?)

What I want to see is the Mill Pond drained and cleaned out. Maybe late one night, as I wander the cold and lonely streets... I find the plug.

Alone, in Wild Kingdom

I'm a zookeeper this week. Our neighbours flew to Newfoundland for a family wedding so I'm looking after their pets; one dog, one chinchilla, one canary, two hamsters and three budgies.

No one ever asks me to babysit their kids. Do I have 'incompetent' stamped across my forehead? And never has anyone asked me to care for their animals. Except my neighbour. Was it an act of desperation on her part or an act of faith?

Whatever the reason, she may subsequently question the wisdom of her choice. For starters, Swifty the hamster didn't even make it through the second night. He's buried among the flowers in their garden.

Then there's Ruffles the dog. He's a rotund, 100-pounder who charges the front door, growling and barking, whenever I dare knock on it. And that's when the family is home. What was in store for me, I wondered, when I entered his domain during the family's absence?

I figured it might be a good idea, a few days before their departure, to make myself more acceptable in Ruffles' eyes. So every time 5 p.m. rolled around, I marched across the street and boldly walked into his house. I made small talk with Ruffles as I prepared his meal. I scooped out some dry food and added a few tablespoons of wet food, a meal that looked about as appetizing as those I serve my family.

Later I would enjoy a leisurely evening stroll with my canine companion, who watered every lamp post, stop sign, fire hydrant, shrub and blade of grass in the neighbourhood.

Then early one morning the family left.

"Let him out twice a day," my neighbour had instructed, so that first morning I turned the key in the lock. Not a sound could be heard. No barking. Nervously, I pushed open



On the Home Front

with ESTHER CALDWELL

the door, fearing an ambush. There he was, looking up at me accusingly.

This is where things got tense. The main hallway extends straight through from the front door to the back door in the kitchen. I walked into the kitchen and opened the second door into the yard.

"Come on, Ruffles," I said, "time to go out." The dog didn't budge. A menacing expression settled on his face. We stared at each other. Ominous, gurgling throat sounds reverberated in the empty hallway. My adrenalin clicked in.

Ruffles didn't make it outside that morning, but I did. Fortunately, his supertime went more smoothly and he even agreed to a walk.

Apart from his nights alone in his own house, Ruffles has since moved over to our side of the street. He passes the days in the backyard with our children, who are always offering to take him for short walks.

Our three cats perch on the high wooden fence, hang down from the overhead trellis or peer through the fence boards at the canine intruder. Ruffles is no stranger to our cats. They already torment him on his own turf. So far this week, only one bloody nose (the dog's).

The four birds won't win any awards for good housekeeping. Feathers, seeds, you name it, end up in their water dishes or on the carpet.

The family returns tonight. Will Ruffles forget our golden moments together?



Roots and treatment of depression

It's important to understand why people get depressed. The reasons may dictate to some extent how we can most effectively deal with it.

Fortunately, research over the past 10 years has shed a great deal of light on various causes of depression. As a consequence, several new therapies have been developed that are much more brief and less expensive than those previously available.

The first and most obvious cause of depression is a loss of some kind. One can be passed over for promotion, a loved one may pass away, or a person may feel rejected by friends or family.

Unfortunately, the depression is often made worse by spending too much time thinking about the loss. By constantly attending to it, fantasizing about it, embellishing it, we may build it up into something far worse.

This isn't to say there isn't a place for mourning a loss. In fact it is probably quite healthy, perhaps even necessary, and it's hoped much can be learned during this mourning phase. But when we mourn too long it may well make the problem worse, and delay or prevent the normal course of healing.

If the depression doesn't begin to ease after an extended period, most treatment programs would include some form of distraction — carefully planning frequent enjoyable and lengthy activities. This typically would be combined with a more productive way of thinking about the loss when we do think about it (and we will), so that something constructive can be learned instead of wallowing in depression.

People often become depressed for no specific reason. There is no loss, and they can't pinpoint a specific event that precipitated their depression. They make sweeping statements, like "nothing is fun anymore," or "I can't find any meaning or importance to my life."

There are at least two well-established reasons for this kind of depression. People may get depressed when there seems to be few pleasures in their lives, when there appears to be an insufficient number of positive social contacts or relationships, or material things, or meaningful pursuits.

In such cases, the task at hand for the therapist may in part be to plan them, so the individual has things to look forward to. This, however, is more than a scheduling problem.

The individual may need social skills training, so he can initiate and maintain positive social relationships. He may need to do some



Psychology

with ARNOLD
RINCOVER

'sampling' in an attempt to discover some new, enjoyable activities. He may need some assertiveness training to learn how to ask an employer for a change or increase in responsibilities, or to learn how to say "no" when feeling taken advantage of by friends or family.

Another reason for this kind of depression is lack of control. It's not that there aren't good things happening, rather the problem is that one can't seem to earn or predict them.

If less than a best effort is applauded at work, yet one's best effort is not even commented on, the lesson learned is that it is not important to make one's best effort. Success or failure is attributed instead to good or bad luck, to things beyond the individual's control. If it happens too often, an individual will find the world to be unpredictable, with a resultant feeling of helplessness and depression.

In such cases, one goal of therapy may be to give the person some control over his or her world. This may require some social skills training, for example, so the individual learns how to behave more attractively or effectively.

Alternatively, family counselling may be helpful, so family members can become more sensitive to and supportive of each other's efforts.

An additional cause of depression needs to be noted. Sometimes people learn they can get lots of attention, comfort, and friendship when they say or do depressing things. It is human nature to comfort those in trouble, those less fortunate. It is natural and quite alright to listen, even share their grief for a while.

The problem arises when this comfort serves to increase depressive actions and statements, rather than helping to alleviate them. You may observe the individual talks more often about depressing events in his life, and over time these events seem to get more serious.

In this case, a therapist may bring in family or friends to explain how they must gush with attention and affection when the individual engages in positive statements or actions while at the same time not attending to the depressive statement, perhaps by saying "I'd like to hear about it, but I'm late for an appointment right now."



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