

A MAN WITH A PAST

The Rev. Dana Prom Smith, S.T.D., Ph.D. (6/21/2014)

Jeff Grayson, the general manager of Bed, Bath, and Beyond, is a man with a past, particularly some ancestors who moved from west Texas to Fort Verde, Arizona, after a shootout over a dispute over fencing range land. In the latter part of the 19th century, one of the three Casner brothers shot a man in self-defense, and after the incident the brothers thought their futures might be brighter in Arizona than Deaf Smith County, Texas. Eventually, they left their names imprinted on the Arizona map with Casner Mountain near Sedona.

Grayson, a member of the Casner clan, is a more peaceable man, having given up the family tradition of shootouts, herding cattle, grazing sheep, and railroading for merchandizing. His mother is an engineer on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, based out of Winslow and the designer of the landscaping at the Sedona airport, as well.

Of course, Jeff is built for the rugged life, a footballer, tall, strongly built, dark skinned with curly black hair with an open, cheery face and smile. At first glance, he's a little intimidating, but at second glance, warm and friendly, the kind of man a person would want on his side. And his

backyard is the kind of place needing a man strongly built and one with a cheery disposition.

Over several years using native, volcanic rock he patiently built a three-tiered, cascading water fall just off his back deck. From the pictures it was a thing of beauty, assuaging the human spirit with the sound of falling and babbling water.

However, he discovered that his backyard was overrun with moles rather than cattle and sheep, leaving piles of scat here and there in tunnels throughout his waterfalls. He had built the whole affair without benefit of mortar after the fashion of the Anasazi, leaving ample space for the moles to travel. For fear of the Hantavirus which had already gotten a foothold in Coconino County he knew that he had to get rid of the moles and their scat. That meant dismantling his water falls.

Apparently, his moles are not unique to his backyard, several of his neighbors having reported moles in their backyards. Grayson's problem is that he likes to garden. His backyard sports a large vegetable bed with tomatoes, broccoli, lettuce, string beans, zucchini, peppers, and chilies. A native Arizonan, he's particularly fond of his Anaheim chilies. Moles favor some of his vegetables, the water, and bird seed he had hung from feeders

through his yard. He particularly feared for the welfare of his beloved golden retriever.

Some gardeners are haphazard with no apparent design to their gardens, sticking plants in the ground with whatever comes to mind at the moment. Others have a design, usually based on some central feature in the backyard. Jeff's design is built around his back deck which is covered, making it a cool place in the afternoon's heat. He likes to sit there and entertain his friends there. Extending beyond the deck are flagstones with clover between the stones. Over to one side of the deck are a large, sophisticated grill and a smoker. Jeff favors barbequed smoked pork loin and ribs, especially for his Sunday football gatherings, starting at ten in the morning and ending at eight at night. In others words, his garden is organized around having a good time with his friends. Football and barbeque aren't all that bad as focal points for a backyard's design.

Being a native Arizonan, Grayson understands the importance of trees because in the desert there are so few of them. Trees are not only beautiful to look at and valuable because they bear fruit, but also because they offer shade. Next to the deck is an old, large ponderosa pine with gnarled roots breaking through the cracks in the flagstones. They're like

the arms of an old friend offering shade. Also, Grayson has planted several deciduous trees, also offering shade, but also a delightfully cool green, soothing the eyes and spirit.

Happily, Grayson's strength and good cheer will stand him in good stead as he rebuilds his Sunday afternoon idyll.

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